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The Sucker Norm

It sucks to be a sucker. In order for one person to be a sucker, someone else must behave badly: suckers are the victims of cheaters, scoundrels, and other selfish agents. Nonetheless, as a victim, a sucker gets as much scorn as pity. This is partly because suckers are somewhat to blame, inasmuch as they were naïve or stupid enough to agree to a bad deal. Therefore, feeling suckered is unusually aversive, compounding a material loss with blame from oneself and others.

In this paper, I will review the theoretical and empirical scholarship bearing on the notion of being a sucker. I will ultimately suggest that there is a social norm against being a sucker, and that a number of experimental results could be reconsidered in light of this “sucker norm.” First, I establish, at least for the purposes of this analysis, the basic parameters of what it means to be a sucker. Second, I consider when the fear of being a sucker is helpful or normative, and when it seems to be misapplied to cases in which it might actually lead to sub-optimal outcomes. I suggest that the fear of being a sucker is especially potent because it defies a social norm. Third, I review research on situations in which people might try (and succeed) to avoid invoking the sucker norm so that they can accept a disadvantageously inequitable allocation when there is no chance for a higher payoff. I discuss how certain forms of retaliation and punishment might be explained as ways to alleviate the uncomfortable feeling of being a sucker. Finally, I offer some preliminary data on the effect of the sucker norm on behavior in an experimental game, and consider the possible implications of these results and directions for future research.

I. What Does it Mean to be a Sucker?

a. Unfair, Disadvantageous Inequity

In order to be a sucker, a person must receive a disadvantageously inequitable payoff, meaning that he must either give more than he gets or get less than he deserves. Not only must

the distribution be unfavorable, but it must also be (or be perceived as) unjust. A person who plays the lottery and does not win does not feel like a sucker; he has received less than the winner, but they each took the same gamble and pure chance favored one of them. A person who finds that he has bought a fake lottery ticket, one that cannot win, does feel like a sucker; he is now down the cost of the ticket while the seller, who has no superior claim to the money, has made a profit.

Though it is intuitively obvious that people are attuned to the fairness of any given distribution of resources, it is not always as clear how to predict whether people will judge an outcome to be fair. Fehr and Schmidt (2001) reviewed evidence from experimental economics research and identified two dominant theories of fairness. The first is the theory that people have preferences for social distribution, and that people prefer to see equitable distributions. Equity theory (Walster, Berscheid & Walster, 1973) posits that people have a taste for equity, such that the utility of an inequitable reward (either advantageous or disadvantageous) is less than the total amount of the reward, because people find the inequity itself aversive. Inequity aversion naturally produces different results depending on whether the inequity is advantageous or disadvantageous; those who are favored by an unequal distribution are more likely to be altruistic, while those who are not are more likely to be envious, and perhaps even spiteful (Rabin, 1993; Fehr & Schmidt, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, I am concerned with aversive responses to disadvantageous inequity; and I will argue that a necessary condition for being (or fearing becoming) a sucker is the perception of getting the short end of the stick. In order for one person to be a sucker, someone else must be getting more.

As Fehr and Schmidt point out, though, the disadvantageous inequity alone is not enough to make a situation unfair, or unfair enough to instantiate aversive reactions. Thus, their review

also includes models of "intention-based reciprocity." In these models, actors are not just concerned with the distribution of resources; they are also concerned with the intentions of the agent who decided on the distribution. This is true for suckers, too: in order to fear being a sucker, I must be worried that someone else is going to exploit the situation or try to free-ride. Blount (1995) presented subjects with different versions of an ultimatum game in which they might find themselves in the responder role. They were asked to indicate the minimum acceptable offer in a game in which the offer was determined randomly by a computer and in a game in which the offer amount was determined by the proposer. In the random condition, subjects behaved almost in a classic wealth-maximizing way; most indicated that they would accept any distribution. When it was the proposer who determined the offer, though, the responders were much more likely to indicate that they would not accept much less than an even split. Falk, Fehr & Fishbacher (2000) have also shown that intentions matter. They used a variant on a trust game, in which the first player's move was determined either by the player or by a randomizing device. Both sanctions and rewards were much weaker in the non-intentionality condition than in the intentionality condition.

Falk, Fehr & Fishbacher (2003) offer another interesting example to make this point. In an ultimatum game in which the proposer can choose between an (8,2) or a (5,5) distribution, most (8,2) offers are rejected. However, if the proposer's choices are only (8,2) and (2,8), the (8,2) offer is accepted more often. In the second game, there is no obvious fair or equitable solution. The proposer's choice to keep the money for himself is perhaps not preferred, but communicates little or nothing to the responder about his intentions to exploit the game for his own benefit. The responder cannot base his decision on relevant norms of fairness, because they do not apply to either of the available options. If the proposer does not perceive the payoff as

unfair, he will not feel like a sucker for consenting to the unequal distribution.

b. Consent, Trust, and Betrayal

"Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me," goes one old adage about being a sucker. This admonition would be nonsensical for a victim of a random crime, or even the recipient of a stingy payoff in a dictator game. These victims have been treated unfairly, yes, but they have not, arguably, "played the sucker" (Orbell & Dawes, 1981); the phrase itself implies some kind of participation, action, or consent on the part of the sucker. In order to be a sucker, the victim must have evinced some kind of trust for his eventual antagonist, and then had that trust betrayed.

Being a sucker implies that one is exploited by others. But in what sense is someone exploited? One dominant theme in this literature is the idea that the sucker is a kind of naive cooperator. The sucker plays nicely while others take advantage. The most potent example of this dynamic comes from literature on trust and betrayal. In the archetypal example of the con artist and the sucker, the con artist works to win the sucker's trust. The sucker then parts with his money voluntarily. ("Voluntarily" in the immediate sense; participation under false pretenses is arguably non-consensual.) The sucker behaves prosocially and permits antisocial actors to profit from his naive cooperation. Cass Sunstein (2005) has described a phenomenon he calls the "betrayal heuristic." People seem to respond more negatively, and more punitively, to harms caused by a trusted agent than identical harms not caused by a trusted agent.

Experimental evidence suggests that people fear the consequences of misplaced trust, even more than they fear the consequences of other risks with equivalent expected values. Bohnet and Zeckhauser (2004) conducted an experiment in which players had to decide between two options: a medium reward for sure (S); or a gamble yielding either a very good (G) or very

bad payoff (B). The job of the decision-maker is to decide on a minimum acceptable probability of getting G such that he would prefer to take the gamble over the sure thing. In this game, there is also a recipient. If the decision-maker receives the sure-thing, the recipient also receives S. If the decision-maker chooses to take the gamble, the recipient gets one of two payoffs, both of which are higher than the sure-thing reward. The recipient's payoff is higher, though, if the decision-maker gets B and lower if the decision-maker gets G.

Bohnet and Zeckhauser ran two versions of this game. In one, the recipient was entirely passive, and, once the decision-maker established a minimum probability of success required to accept the gamble, the outcomes of both players were determined with reference to the actual probability of the higher payoff, which was established by lottery. In the other condition, the trust condition, the recipient was not passive. If the decision-maker chose to take the gamble, the recipient (whose incentives were inverse to the decision-maker's) then chose the outcome. In the trust condition, players were told that the probability of success for the gamble would be established by the proportion of recipients in a given round who indicated that they would choose G if the decision-maker took the gamble. Subjects required about a 30% probability of high payoffs in the passive recipient version; in the trust version, though, they required a probability of over 50% that their trust would be rewarded in order to take the gamble.

The researchers conclude from these results that the payoff in the trust version is discounted by a betrayal. Another way to frame this result is to think of the trusting decision-maker as a potential sucker, who discounts the expected utility of the gamble by the risk of being exploited. When the recipient is passive, there is no fear of exploitation, and thus no additional loss of utility if the decision-maker takes the gamble and loses. This experiment suggests two more elements required for being a sucker. First, people behave differently when a human agent

is going to be responsible for the distribution. Second, they are less willing to consent to take a risk on a human agent than they are when the risk is equivalent but there is no other agent.

c. Aversive Emotional Response to Being Suckered

Each sucker has to some extent contributed to his own state. The sucker who believes a slick salesman, only to read the fine print later, has literally bought into his own downfall. In a social dilemma, you cannot be a sucker without cooperating first. In each case, it is possible to avoid being a sucker. For this reason, the emotional experience of being a sucker is especially aversive, because it involves self-blame. Vohs, Baumeister and Chin (2007) have very recently tried to review the emotional and motivational aspects of feeling duped. They conclude that feeling suckered is a highly self-conscious emotion, like embarrassment or shame. In some sense, each sucker takes a risk of being duped or shortchanged when he trusts or cooperates. When he is ultimately suckered, his aversive response is not only anger at the perpetrator, but also a feeling of humiliation for having engaged in this relationship or transaction in the first place. Thus, one hallmark of being a sucker is a feeling of humiliation or shame.

Another important emotional dimension of being duped is the feeling of regret. Vohs, Baumeister and Chin (2007) note that part of being a sucker is wishing that things would have turned out differently. This certainly seems true, but I would add that the feeling of regret in this case is particularly acute because of the availability of the counterfactual scenario. Norm theory (Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Miller and McFarland, 1986) suggests that people have stronger cognitive and affective responses to negative outcomes when the counterfactual scenario is easy to call to mind. One explanation for the mechanism driving this increased response is the availability bias; if I miss my plane by five minutes, it is simply easier to call up all of the ways in which I might have saved five minutes and made it there on time than it would be if I missed

my plane by an hour. In the case of being suckered, the sucker's own participation in his duping is very salient and therefore very available--even if there is no objective reason to think that he could have or should have known not to trust or not to cooperate ex ante. If regret is an important part of feeling duped, then it also seems safe to assume that the anticipation of this feeling will have a strong motivational effect.

d. Fear of Exploitation as Motivation

This review deals with three somewhat distinct psychological states: the fear of being a sucker, the experience of being a sucker, and the behavioral responses to feeling like a sucker. So far, I have been referring to these interchangeably, but it may be useful here to explicitly review the case that people fear playing the sucker.

In many social situations, non-cooperation can be explained by two possible motives: greed and fear. When people are greedy, they decide not to cooperate (to defect) because they hope to get the benefit of the group effort without paying the price of individual contribution. In order for greed to be a motivating factor, people must believe that others will not be greedy; that is, they must think that others will cooperate or contribute. In this paper, I am concerned primarily with how people behave when they expect the opposite, that others are greedy and will try to free-ride. Orbell and Dawes (1981) proposed that people find it aversive to play the sucker, enough so that the fear of others free-riding on one's own contributions may result in reduced contributions. When people believe that others will fail to cooperate, they can be motivated by the fear of being a sucker, and it is this fear of defection that in turn causes their own defection. Multiple studies comparing the relative strength of the greed and fear motivations in social dilemmas have found a stronger role for greed than for fear of playing the sucker (Dawes, Orbell, Simmons & van de Kragt, 1986; Rapaport & Eshed-Levy, 1989). Nonetheless, studies have

found that fear of being a sucker plays a significant role in social dilemmas (Rapaport & Eshed-Levy, 1989; Bruins, Liebrand & Wilke, 1989), and this fear may be even clearer in cases like the ultimatum game, in which greed and fear would arguably lead to divergent behaviors.

Depending on the structure of the dilemma, the fear of exploitation will result in different types of responses, from a game theoretic perspective. The dominant response in a Prisoner's Dilemma is to defect, since that response is better no matter what the other party is doing. Fear of being a sucker will reinforce this response. The normative response in an Ultimatum Game, though, is to accept any offer. Fear of being a sucker dictates against this response, though, so those who fear being a sucker will play out of equilibrium. For the purposes of this initial review, I will mainly address the psychological similarities among different forms of social dilemmas, with a focus on the effect of unequal outcomes among different participants in a given situation or game.

II. Why Is It So Aversive To Be A Sucker?

a. Regret and Learning

The experience of being a sucker is aversive; in fact, it is so aversive that people will exert a lot of effort to avoid being a sucker or to alleviate the pain of exploitation. But what, exactly, is so unpleasant about being a sucker? Why does it feel worse to accept an unfair outcome that provides a small payoff than it does to avoid the situation and get no payoff at all? As a first pass, we should ask what function the humiliation of being a sucker might serve. At least one explanation is that it is adaptive to feel bad after being exploited or victimized or treated unfairly: these are situations that one should avoid in the future, and the aversive response can help instantiate learning. In this way, the unpleasant feeling of regret may simply be a mechanism to facilitate learning. This is particularly true when being a sucker is associated with a lack of

sophistication, or a kind of stupidity or short-sightedness, on the part of the sucker. Thus, in an extreme case, if I am tricked into buying beachfront property in Omaha, it makes sense for me to feel stupid and embarrassed. I should learn to be less trusting and more discerning in my business deals. This is true even in a more ambiguous case like a social dilemma game. People may consider their contribution to be a kind of investment in the group enterprise. If I contribute in early rounds and see that my “investment” has not paid off because others have not contributed, I should stop contributing. If I feel like a sucker for having been cooperative when others were selfish, I might learn this lesson more quickly and thus increase my total payoff.

It seems clear that there are many cases in which there are justifications for feeling bad in response to being ripped off. However, I also note that this itself can be a heuristic that leads to counterproductive results in certain circumstances. Thaler (1985) identified the phenomenon of reference price effects. In a series of experiments, he showed that subjects were willing to pay more for identical goods when they expected them to cost more (e.g., a beer from a bodega vs. a beer from a resort hotel), even if all other considerations (e.g., need for the good, quality of the good) were held constant. The general rule is that a sucker pays too much for a good. But if the good is only available from one vendor at a price that is otherwise worth it, the person who tries to avoid being a sucker winds up having to forgo the good altogether because they ask themselves what the price "should" be. In this case, there is no clear learning benefit to the sucker aversion, and it may in fact lead people to sub-optimal outcomes.

b. The Norm of Self-Interest

I have posited above that one of the principal emotions associated with being a sucker is humiliation. But why should it feel so bad to get \$2 out of a possible \$10 in an ultimatum game? Why is it less painful to be a lazy member of a failed group than the only hard-working member

of a more successful group? Here, I want to argue that the reason that it is embarrassing to be a sucker is that being a sucker violates a social norm of self-interest. Miller (1999) has argued that self-interest is not only a powerful motive in the descriptive sense, but that it is actually a prescriptive social norm: “The fear that deviating from one's material self-interest will provoke dismay, suspicion, or derogation can be as powerful a deterrent as the fear that it will prove futile or render one vulnerable to economic exploitation.” Miller cites interesting examples of how this norm functions. For example, Americans appear to be more comfortable describing pro-social behavior in terms of selfish motives, even when the behavior looks entirely altruistic (Holmes, Miller & Lerner, 2002). Ratner and Miller (2001) have argued that the norm of self-interest helps to explain experimental results showing that decisions made by groups are more self-interested than decisions made by individuals. One of the important components of self-interest as a social norm is that it changes peoples' expectations. As long as I think that everyone else is going to behave in a self-interested way, it is then doubly bad for me to behave altruistically; it is counter to the social norm and it is counter to my own material well-being (since if I know others will not cooperate, my own cooperation is futile).

I want to suggest that part of the norm of self-interest is a norm against being a sucker. A sucker's behavior goes against the norm of self-interest insofar as the sucker behaves prosocially himself (e.g., by cooperating) and acts as though others will also follow a norm of prosocial behavior (e.g., by trusting). Vohs, Baumeister and Chin (2007) point out that one way people respond to having been played for a sucker is that they lie about it to others. Being a sucker is not just about the feeling of being treated unfairly; there is also a distinctly social component to the shame or humiliation. I want to argue that the norm against being a sucker (which I will call the “sucker norm”) explains some of the power of the threat of being duped, the aversiveness of the

experience of being suckered, and the retaliatory impulses in response to exploitation.

c. Sucker Norm in Social Dilemmas

As I have discussed, there are two primary motivations for lack of cooperation in social dilemmas. The first is a basic greed motive; defecting in a situation in which others cooperate provides the highest payoff at the lowest cost. The second motive is the one we are interested in here, and that is the desire not to be exploited by others in the group. And, indeed, if when this motive is especially strong, it may appear as though people are greedier or more selfish than they actually want to be. In other words, people may have the impulse to cooperate but then choose defection out of fear of being a sucker.

In the context of a social dilemma, being exploited means allowing non-contributors or defectors to benefit from one's own high level of contribution. So, in a group project, group members who work long hours to finish the project might be exploited by another group member who slacks off but receives equal credit for the end product. In a social dilemma game, being exploited means contributing and allowing others who do not contribute to receive the same payoff without the cost of contribution. Kerr (1983) found that subjects reduce their effort in a group setting when the other member of the group attempts to free-ride. Interestingly, this is true only as long as the partner is capable of contribution.

In a basic social dilemma game, participants are endowed with a certain amount of money. They are permitted to contribute any amount to the group, with the understanding that the total contribution will be multiplied by some amount and then divided equally among the players (regardless of contributions). In this kind of game, everyone is better off by contributing the maximum amount as long as everyone follows this same rule. Numerous studies have demonstrated that when groups play over multiple rounds, contributions decrease over time. In

some ways, this result is to be expected. After all, it is in each person's best interest to withhold contribution and receive the group payoff, e.g., to free ride. Thus, group members could reasonably expect others to try to free-ride, causing lower contributions. Even if group members are unsure whether to expect other players to defect, they are better off defecting when others cooperate than cooperating when others defect. There are many situations, like the Prisoner's Dilemma, in which the penalty for mistaken cooperation is high, and the reward for mistaken defection (in the PD, of course, there is actually a reward for unilateral defection, so defecting when you mistakenly expect your partner to defect is rewarded) is greater than the reward for mutual cooperation. In those cases, it is worse, in terms of actual payoffs, to be a sucker than it is to be selfish. Thus, the norm against being a sucker may actually provide a useful heuristic, in the sense that it is in line with the dominant response.

In some cases, however, fear of playing the sucker makes parties less likely to choose the wealth-maximizing strategy. In the Minimal Effort game, mistaken defection is not rewarded, but the results are the same (Van Huyck et al., 1990). The structure of a minimal-effort game is as follows: each player contributes some amount of an initial endowment. Players' returns are determined by the lowest-contributing member (with decreasing payoffs as the lowest contribution decreases). However, although all players receive a lower payoff when the lowest contribution is low, those payoffs are also dependent on the contribution of the individual. Thus, the range of payoffs in a round is determined by the lowest contributor. Within that range, the lowest contributor actually receives the highest amount, and the highest contributor receives the lowest. In that game, mutual cooperation is better than mistaken defection. Cooperation means choosing the highest level of contribution (the level that also has the highest net payoff); to defect is to choose a lower level. In this game, no one benefits from defection in the first round.

A player who defects when others cooperate receives a lower payoff in that round than he would have had he contributed (unlike in an investment game). There is no good reason, in that game, to think that mistaken defection is better than mistaken cooperation, at least in the very early rounds. (It is true that the payoffs make the penalty for mistaken cooperation higher than the penalties for mistaken defection, but if the player cooperates, he also has a chance of getting the highest payoff from mutual cooperation.) And, in fact, the stronger the norm against being a sucker, the less likely the group is to get the payoffs of mutual cooperation. I think that what happens here is that players begin to focus on the comparative payoffs rather than the absolute payoffs. Fear of getting less than others (thus being a sucker) becomes focal, rather than the desire to get the maximum possible.

How does the norm of self-interest matter in a social dilemma? Researchers have found that the salience of a group norm of cooperation or self-interest affects players' contributions. Mulder et al. (2005a) found that when the group was made aware of a norm of non-cooperation, players were less likely to cooperate. Participants were shown bogus comments from other players indicating that the other players intended to make self-interested decisions. This case provides an interesting example of how the norm of self-interest might affect rational calculations. In a social dilemma game in which players learn of a group norm of self-interest, cooperation is futile. A social norm is one way of setting up expectations, and if a player expects others to defect, his best choice is also defection.

Indirect evidence suggests that the social norm is even more powerful than expectation-setting, though. Numerous researchers have found that sanctioning systems in social dilemmas seem to change the nature of the game or the situation, instantiating a shift from a moral or interpersonal dilemma to an economic calculation. In most cases, of course, a sanction has the

expected effect of increasing cooperation (Fehr & Gächter, 2002; Yamagishi, 1986). However, in at least two interesting cases, sanctions do not increase cooperation.

If players are exposed to a game with sanctions and then the sanctions are removed, the players who first saw the game with sanctions are less likely to cooperate than those who did not see the game with sanctions (Mulder, van Dijk, De Cremer & Wilke, 2005a). And, sanctions do not increase cooperation when players have an alternative option for defection (Mulder, van Dijk, De Cremer & Wilke, 2006). In these two cases, the sanctions do not directly affect the rational calculus of the target dilemma, so it is not so surprising that the sanctions fail to increase cooperation. What is potentially surprising is that the exposure to sanctions actually decreases cooperation as compared to a control group who played the game with no sanctions. The shift that so many researchers have observed when sanctions are introduced, from a moral dilemma to an economic calculation, may be partly explained by the power of the sanction to introduce a social norm. After all, if the norm of cooperation was strong enough, there would be no need for a sanction.

Even though it is in each individual's interest to defect in a prisoner's dilemma or an investment game, players are surely capable of reasoning that this kind of logic will usually lead to a third-best payoff--if everyone expects everyone else to defect, there is no reason to think that defection will yield the highest payoff. Thus, there is at least an argument that it is unclear what the norm of self-interest would dictate--cooperate and get the second-best payoff, or defect and almost certainly get a third-best payoff? This is where a norm of self-interest might be broadened to include the idea of the sucker norm. In many cases, it is unclear what, exactly, is in a person's self-interest. One way to think of the sucker norm is as a kind of heuristic for how to figure out what is in one's own best interest. The basic rule is to look at the people around you and try not

to end up with less than what they are getting. And it seems possible that this is often a useful rule--one way to figure out how much you should get is to look around and see what everyone else is getting, and to insist on an equitable outcome. In the context of a social dilemma, though, this might take the focus off how to achieve the highest payoff and turn it to a question of how to avoid receiving a lesser payoff.

If the dominant social norm prescribes self-interest, this should affect cooperation and other kinds of prosocial behavior. The desire not to be a sucker motivates people not to help in situations in which the cost of helping is low and the payoff is high. I would like to suggest that we might be able to explain the bystander effect via the non-sucker heuristic, and this is also a case in which I think it is non- normative. It is confusing, when we consider the bystander effect (Darley & Latane, 1968), that people would prefer to risk the least desirable outcome (someone is in need and no help is on they way) for fear of being unnecessarily unselfish. First, though, what does it mean to be a sucker in this context? We might think, here, about some of the original Darley & Latane experiments, in which subjects in a testing room heard someone outside fall off of a ladder. My suggestion is that the sucker is the one person among others who goes outside to look and finds out that nothing is wrong or that his help is for some other reason unwelcome (say, the injured person's wife is already there).

If the bystander is alone, there is no reason to compare his cost/payoff with anyone else's, so the non-sucker norm is not activated. But if he is with others, he does not want to be the one to risk being a sucker. I will assume here that there is a payoff, knowing the victim is being helped, and a cost, helping. Being a sucker means either helping and getting no payoff, because it turns out that nothing is wrong, or it means being the only bystander to help, such that the other bystanders get the payoff without helping. My contention is that in the bystander experiments,

people in groups do not help, even though the expected utility of helping may be positive for each person. And, in fact, people who did not help are likely to feel very guilty afterward. The sucker norm temporarily distorts preferences, making the comparative nature of the payoffs more salient than it should be given that the cost of helping remains very small and the potential payoff very large.

III. Avoiding the Sucker Norm

I have just argued that part of the cognitive, emotional, and motivational power of being a sucker can be explained by a social norm that dictates against it. In this section, I will consider when this norm is invoked, and when it can be avoided. In many situations, people do accept a disadvantageous inequality. Anecdotally, this is obviously the case; we do not, after all, live in a socialist society. Here, I will review situations in which people are able to avoid invoking the norm against playing the sucker. My claim is that when the sucker norm would require forgoing a material benefit, people may be motivated to re-frame the situation in order to avoid the sucker norm and take the better payoff.

a. Avoiding the Sucker Norm by Justifying the Distribution

The first and most obvious point is that people are responsive to distributional rules and norms. This observation is closely tied to the notion of fairness that I proposed at the beginning: by deciding that a distribution is fair, the person with the lesser payoff can avoid the sucker norm. Distributional rules might also be thought of as social norms that provide heuristics for establishing whether or not a distribution is fair. For example, it is acceptable to me that my boss makes more money than I do; she has more responsibilities and more seniority. The rule of wages is that many factors affect individual pay levels, so those who make less money do not (usually) feel suckered by the higher wage earners. This principle also works in a controlled

game theoretical setting. In most ultimatum games, proposers offer at least 30% and usually 50% of the initial endowment, and responders reject offers lower than 30-40% (Kahneman, Knetsch & Thaler, 1986). However, Hoffman et al. (1994) demonstrated a manipulation in which proposers would offer less and responders would accept. In this game, participants learned that the roles, proposer and responder, would be allocated based on the results of an earlier auction in which one party had "earned" the right to be the proposer. When proposers are offered a small amount, they normally have only two choices: accept the small amount and play the sucker, or reject the small amount and get no money at all. But in this game, a third option becomes available: decide the small offer is justified (fair) such that the sucker norm does not apply and take the money.

In order for one person to be a sucker, someone else must be a free-rider. If there is good reason to think that the beneficiary party is not free-riding, there is no reason to fear being a sucker. This is important for questions of when the sucker norm is invoked. Thus, if I work in a company in which my boss has more experience and works longer hours than I do, the fact that she gets paid more than I do is not particularly galling. She is not free-riding, insofar as we have made some kind of determination that contributions by people like her deserve greater rewards. Even more interesting, perhaps, is that in order to be a true free-rider, there must be an element of agency or intentionality to the non-cooperation. In Kerr's (1983) studies of the sucker effect in group motivation, he found that subjects did not decrease their own effort in response to a partner who was performing poorly as long as there was indication that the partner's poor performance was the result of incapacity rather than laziness. This presents a more complicated case; in Kerr's studies, the underperforming partner is arguably still receiving a benefit (lower contribution, equal share of credit) than the potential sucker, but nonetheless the sucker norm

does not seem to change the subject's behavior. It is pointless, as a matter of deterrence, to try to punish someone who is incapable of changing his behavior. But the partner's lack of skill may also be serve as a justification for the inequitable contributions, making it easier for the contributing partner to choose the higher-payoff outcome without feeling like a sucker.

b. Re-Framing to Avoid the Sucker Norm

There are many good justifications for accepting the idea of equitable distribution (in which resources are allocated according to various rules of fairness) rather than equal distribution. By instituting a distributional rule that favors those who contribute more (effort, money, etc.), for example, a society might encourage greater production. The subjects in a game like that described by Hoffman et al. may be justified in attributing the inequality to the results of a previous competition. In other situations, though, the difference between invoking the sucker norm and avoiding it is simply a matter of framing. Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1986) showed subjects two possible scenarios. In one, a company decides to cut wages in response to a market slow-down. In another, the company decides not to raise wages to keep pace with inflation in response to a market slow-down. Subjects were asked how likely they would be to quit if they were working at this company. Those who read about the wage decrease were more likely to say they would quit than those who read the inflation scenario. In this case, the researchers explain their results as an effect of gain/loss framing; in one case, workers must accept a loss from the status quo, and in the other, they must forgo a gain.

c. Using Situational Ambiguity to Avoid Sucker Norm

Another explanation might be that the inflation scenario introduces some ambiguities into the dilemma. What are the norms for wages in times of rapid inflation? How, exactly, does inflation work? When there are economic incentives for avoiding the sucker norm, people may

ask themselves, "Must I believe this?" (Gilovich, 1991) in a case like this, subjects may reason that the scenario is confusing or ambiguous enough that they need not forgo the job in order to preserve their non-sucker status. In a more literal demonstration of the effect of ambiguity, Guth and Huck (1999) have shown another manipulation that seems to help avoid the sucker norm. In their ultimatum game, players were informed that there were two possible endowments that a proposer could receive, 38 or 16 units of money; responders would not learn a given proposer's endowment. In this game, the modal offer was 8, or half of the smaller amount. Responders accepted this amount, and were more likely to accept 8 than 9. As long as the endowment amount was plausibly ambiguous, responders would take the payoff rather than suspect the proposer. Once it was clear that the endowment was large, proposers could no longer proudly accept an offer as low as 9—less than 25% of the endowment.

Bicchieri and colleagues (2007) have also found effects of ambiguity in the ultimatum game. In these experiments, ambiguity is introduced by way of a coin flip. In this game, both proposers and responders know that there are three possible offers: The proposer an offer an even split (five dollars for each player), an advantageous split (eight for the proposer, two for the responder), or a coin flip. In the coin-flip option, the proposer agrees to let the experimenter randomly determine which distribution (5,5 or 8,2) will apply. Though responders will routinely reject an 8,2 distribution if the proposer simply chooses that as his offer, they will accept it if it is the result of the coin flip. This is potentially a strange result. On the one hand, there seems to be an element of randomness in this case that could negate the human agency requirement for sucker effects; in the most immediate sense, it is the coin, not the proposer, who has determined the allocation. On the other hand, though, the proposer has chosen to put the responder at risk for a low payoff even though he could have just chosen the certain even split. The expected value of

the coin flip to the responder is only 3.5; this is surely low enough that many people would reject it if it were offered as a certain payoff. Therefore, they should rationally reject the coin flip.

Now, it seems reasonable that people will eschew this logic if the coin flip yields an even split (since they do not have to actually accept a disadvantageous payoff in that case), but when the flip does not go their way, they are accepting a low, disadvantageous payoff from a human agent who has chosen to offer a disadvantageous payoff.

Blount (1995) simply re-framed the ultimatum game to look as if there was an added level of ambiguity about the human agency involved in generating the offers, and found that this framing increased subjects' willingness to accept low offers. She elicited from potential responders the range of offers that they would be willing to accept. In one condition, they chose from among all possible offers, and very few subjects were willing to accept the smallest offer possible. In another condition, subjects saw the actual distribution of the offers of the proposers with whom they could be paired. Subjects were informed that their offer would be drawn randomly from the distribution. In this case, more subjects indicated that they would be willing to accept the smallest amount.

One reason that subjects may be able to accept a low offer in the case of a coin flip or a "randomly selected" offer from among a pool of offers is that these cases literally introduce some ambiguity into the offer. Who decided on this low offer, the proposer or the random draw? What were the proposer's intentions? Even more simply, the coin flip or the random draw may re-frame the immediate game as one of chance, allowing players to tell themselves that it is the coin, not the proposer, that has decided the distribution. As in every ultimatum game, there is a financial incentive for players to avoid the sucker norm; accepting the money and not feeling like a sucker (via avoiding the sucker norm) is a higher payoff than rejecting the money and not

feeling like a sucker (via retaliation).

d. Avoiding the Sucker Norm in Second-Order Dilemmas

The sucker norm may also help explain the differences in cooperation in first- and second-order social dilemmas. As we have discussed, it is very difficult to maintain cooperation in social dilemmas, especially when sanctions are absent or inadequate. However, even when people do not choose to voluntarily cooperate, they will often vote to in favor of mandatory cooperation. A social smoker may be unwilling to unilaterally refrain from smoking in bars but nonetheless be in favor of a city-wide ban on smoking in public places. Eichenberger & Oberholzer-Gee (1998) have shown that people will vote for a fairer division of payoffs than they will choose on their own.

This has been explained in various ways. First of all, there may simply be less cost or risk involved in voting for cooperation than there is in cooperating when cooperation is not externally enforced. In an investment game, it seems reasonable that many players would prefer that contribution be mandatory. Though mandatory contribution negates the possibility of free-riding and getting the highest possible payoff, players should intuit that, if they are tempted to under-contribute, many of their cohort will be similarly motivated, in turn driving down the possible payoff. One way to frame this is that a second-order dilemma gives players a chance to choose the second-best payoff--all cooperate--in order to avoid the near-certainty of getting the third-best payoff--all defect. Though they give up the chance of the best payoff (defect while others cooperate), they eliminate the risk of the worst payoff (cooperate while others defect).

In a first-order social dilemma, the sucker norm dictates that parties should protect themselves against exploitation, and this will almost always mean choosing the short-sightedly self-interested option (say, defection in a Prisoner's Dilemma). In a second-order dilemma,

though, players can choose the option that will, in fact, have the best outcome for the group (e.g., all cooperate) without having to worry about reduced comparative payoffs. If people are greedy, they might choose defection in both cases, hoping to get lucky and have an exploitable partner. But if people are fearful of being a sucker, they should choose to defect in the first-order dilemma but to cooperate in the second-order dilemma, since cooperation in the second-order dilemma reduces the opportunity to be greedy but does not reduce the player's own comparative payoff.

Samuelson, Messick, Rutte & Wilke (1984) had subjects play a sort of tragedy of the commons game. In this game, each subject saw a screen showing a pool of resources. In a given round, each subject could take up to 30 units, and at the end of the round the pool would be replenished at a variable rate, but usually around 30 units total. Subjects were told to both try to get as many units for themselves as possible and to try to keep the game going (e.g., to keep some resources in the pool) for as long as possible. Subjects saw a screen showing how much each player was removing (in fact, the screen was controlled by the experimenter). In this game, subjects were more likely to endorse a leader who would enforce cooperative levels of resource-removal when the group had quickly used up all the resources.

Another possibility is a bandwagon effect, in which people are more cooperative when they expect others to be more cooperative (Tyran, 2004). People may be willing to vote for mandatory cooperation even in situations in which they would not choose to cooperate because in a world of mandatory cooperation, it is much more difficult to free-ride. In turn, when there are no free-riders, there are no suckers. In some cases, this might permit subjects to express their true preferences for equity without having to risk being a sucker. In other cases, players may simply find that this is the best way to ensure the highest realistic payoff.

IV. Responding to Being Suckered

If most people find it aversive to play the sucker role, then it makes sense that people would be willing to impose sanctions on others who attempt exploitation. One traditional method of punishment might be achieved through litigation or even criminal prosecution in cases of fraud. Or, in a more everyday sense, we might get angry with a free rider or try to shame him into cooperation. In these examples, we might think that the punisher, the potential sucker, is actually using the sanction or threat of sanction to change his or her own outcome. That is, if I feel I am being ripped off by my contractor, I sue him in order to get my money back. In this case, there is a direct relationship between my punishing behavior and my own payoff. Evolutionary accounts of this kind of behavior refer to direct reciprocity and reputation formation. For the purposes of this paper, this kind of response is pretty uncontroversial, and not very psychologically interesting, insofar as it is a rational wealth-maximizing approach to the situation. However, evidence exists to suggest that people punish exploiters or free riders even when punishment is costly, and, even more perplexing, even when punishment is arguably pointless in terms of the punisher's payoffs or the future behavior of the exploiter.

a. Altruistic Punishment of Exploiters

Fehr and Gächter (2002) introduced the notion of altruistic punishment by demonstrating that players in a one-shot social dilemma game were more likely to contribute at higher levels when the game allowed for sanctions of under-contributors. In this game, in the punishment condition, players made their contribution decisions simultaneously. After the contributions had been made and payoffs determined, subjects were informed of others' contributions and permitted to impose a fine on other players (the fine had a multiplier such that contributing one dollar for punishment yielded a three dollar fine on the defector). Fehr and Gächter argue that

this behavior cannot be explained by direct reciprocity or reputation effects. First of all, this punishment was costly. At the time that players made the decision to punish, they had already received the payoff from that round of play. Contributing part of that payoff in order to punish other players constituted a loss. And, because no players met one another twice, it was not possible for a punisher to directly influence his own payoff on the next round via a harsh punishment on the current round. Nonetheless, the introduction of a punishment mechanism into the game increased payoffs overall by encouraging cooperation. In this second-order sense, then, punishment yielded increased payoffs for the punishers, even though it decreased payoffs in the short-term.

However, as the name of the phenomenon suggests, it does not seem accurate to think of this punishment as purely wealth-maximizing behavior. A player who contributes his own money to punish in an early round runs the risk that the benefit of his action will be enjoyed by another group, while he might get stuck in a new group with a defector who went unpunished in an earlier round. Here, I think it is helpful to reframe the game in terms of the exploiter and the sucker. The exploiter is the free rider or the under-contributor. The sucker is any player who has more or less cooperated under the norms of the group or the game. The cooperator is a sucker because he has accepted a disadvantageous inequality: his payoffs are lower than the exploiter's payoffs because of their different respective contributions. At this point, the sucker has a choice: accept his lower payoff, or pay to even the score. If he pays to even the score--if he punishes--he gets an immediate benefit in the form of no longer playing the sucker. (There is, of course, the possibility of being a second-order sucker: if I am the only player to punish and all the other cooperators get to enjoy the benefits of my punishing without having to sacrifice any money themselves, then I am again in the position of paying more for a benefit everyone enjoys equally.

My sense is that most people do not experience this as aversive in the same way because they are focused on the inequality between themselves and the defector. This may also relate to my argument, below, that punishers are, almost by definition, not suckers.) Thus, a sucker can, by punishing, refuse to be exploited by, paradoxically, giving up even more of his payoff in order to ensure that a defector's payoff is lower than his own. My argument is that there are multiple factors potentially contributing to the decision to altruistically punish. First, is a potentially successful group strategy in the sense that it yields higher payoffs for all. Second, it may also offer individual rewards to the punisher in terms of redefining his role as a punisher rather than a sucker.

b. Punishing in order to Stop Feeling Like a Sucker

As I have hinted, I would like to argue that punishers are, descriptively speaking, not suckers. A sucker is someone who accepts a disadvantageous inequality, or someone who lies down and takes it. A punisher refuses to take the raw deal, even when it means an even worse outcome--no deal at all. Some of the best evidence for this might be research on pointless punishment. Pointless punishment describes cases in which the punishment cannot enrich the victim (in this case, the sucker), and either will not change the behavior of the exploiter, or will have a net negative effect on society as a whole. Baron and Ritov (1993) demonstrated people's willingness to impose punishment on tortfeasors irrespective of the secondary effects of that punishment in terms of its ability to deter wrongdoing or yield net benefits for society. Rather, it seemed that subjects' punishment responses were focused solely on the nature and extent of the misdeed. By reducing the payoffs of the exploiter--here, the tortfeasor, who has presumably enjoyed the benefit of his negligence without heretofore sharing the cost--subjects, as members of society, can reduce the risk or extent of exploitation. Of course, given that I have stipulated

that the punishment has no actual deterrent effects on the exploiter, this is true only in a narrow sense: the punisher, focusing on his relative payoffs to the exploiter, can reduce or eliminate the other's payoff, thus reducing the inequality, and the degree of exploitation.

Finally, I want to suggest that any punishment can play an important role in alleviating the discomfort of being a sucker. As I have discussed, most players in a given ultimatum game will reject an offer below 30 to 40 percent. Xiao and Houser (2005) recently suggested that one reason for this rejection is that it was the only response that would indicate dissatisfaction with the low offer. When they permitted responders to write a message to proposers, responders who received low offers were more likely to write an angry message and accept the offer than responders who did not have the option of writing a message. The authors framed their findings in terms of emotion expression, but I think a similar argument could be made for the note as a form of interpersonal sanction (however pointless). Or, at an even more basic level, when the responder is able to accept the offer but feel that he is not passively accepting a raw deal, he will do so.

d. Punishing Betrayals

There may be an important role here for a norm against being a sucker. Koehler and Gershoff (2003) asked two groups of subjects to assign punishments for five different crimes; in both cases, subjects were shown information about the professions of the respective perpetrators. In one condition, the perpetrators were randomly assigned to the crimes; in the other, each crime was committed by someone who would normally be entrusted to prevent just such an occurrence (e.g., a bank robbery committed by a security guard). Subjects were more punitive when the perpetrator was an otherwise trusted agent. This might be a good heuristic. As Sunstein (2005) points out, a betrayal causes not only the harm of the crime itself, but also a disruption to the

victim's propensity to be trusting in the future. However, Koehler and Gershoff also demonstrated betrayal aversion in cases in which it was arguably non-normative. In their studies, subjects preferred inferior products—products that were actually less safe—to superior products that had a small risk of betrayal (e.g., a car with no airbag and a higher risk of death in a collision vs. a car with a lower overall risk of death but with an air bag that causes death or injury in a small number of cases).

Shinada, Yamagishi and Ohmura (2004) have shown a similar effect in an investment game. They find that cooperative players are more punitive toward non-cooperative in-group members than they are toward non-cooperative out-group members. This study suggests one basic function of trust for the sucker heuristic: trust frames the relevant comparison group and makes it especially salient. In order to be a sucker, a person must accept a disadvantageous inequality of some kind. If someone steals my wallet, I am aggrieved and angry, and it may even make sense to think of me as receiving the lower payoff as between myself and the thief. But if my babysitter steals my wallet, I am now part of a dyad in which I have cooperated and my partner has defected, and it seems clear that I am playing the sucker role in this relationship.

V. Sucker Norm: Policy Implications and Directions for Future Research

a. Social Welfare Policy

People are highly attuned to issues of distributive justice, or, in the case of welfare policy, redistributive justice. For this reason, there are a number of cases in which a majority of people choose a costly, inefficient solution over a lower-cost solution that appears to distribute the burdens unevenly over a population. One example from a recent New Yorker article (Gladwell, 2006) is the case of the alcoholic, chronically homeless population in many American cities. The chronically homeless cost the government enormous amounts of money in emergency health

care. It costs much, much less to simply provide them with housing up front, thus preventing the kinds of medical complications that arise from living outside. Nonetheless, many people are reluctant to adopt a policy that pays for unemployed addicts to get free housing. One possibility is that this kind of situation raises the specter that the rest of the hard-working population will be taken for suckers, while the homeless addicts are permitted to free-ride. In this case, it may be that people are not simply greedy and not simply showing a preference for fairness, but rather that they fear being taken advantage of.

b. Victims of Sucker Crimes

A social norm against being a sucker may inhibit a society's ability to deal with certain kinds of crimes, particularly crimes against suckers. I would include in this category any kind of crime that requires an initial act of trust by the eventual victim; fraud and date rape are two that come easily to mind. Victims of these kinds of crimes have violated a norm by playing the sucker. This violation may make it easier to blame the victims or to assume that they consented to some portion of the harm, even in cases in which the victim's trust for the perpetrator was not unwarranted or in cases in which the trust is irrelevant to the definition of the crime.

The sucker norm may also inhibit the reporting of these kinds of crimes. Reporting that one has been a victim of fraud means telling other people that you were a sucker. On top of whatever self-blame might play a role here, revealing to other people that one has violated a shared norm is an added harm that victims may choose to avoid.

c. Sucker Norm and Violence

The United States has a very high rate of gun crimes, but many people remain opposed to gun control legislation. One traditional justification for keeping weapons unregulated is that regulations will decrease the ability of law-abiding citizens to access the kinds weapons that

criminals are able to procure illegally. Part of the issue is surely greed; some people like guns and want to be allowed to keep them. But fear of being a sucker may also keep people from supporting these kinds of laws. Even though we can be fairly sure that strong gun laws will reduce the overall incidence of gun violence, people seem to be fearful of upsetting the balance of power in favor of criminals, some of society's free-riders. This fear is admittedly different than the fear of being a sucker in a social dilemma game, but nonetheless parallel: fear of being at a disadvantage seems to push people to choose the worse outcome (more people with guns) even given the chance of a better outcome (fewer people with guns).

Support for this notion might be drawn from Nisbett and Cohen's (1994) discussion of a culture of honor in the southern U.S. states. Nisbett and Cohen cite evidence that southerners adhere to a strict social norm of protecting honor, which means protecting oneself, one's family, and one's property from harm—including the harm of insult. The authors argue that this culture explains the high rates of violence in the South, as well as the endorsement of violence. Southerners are more likely to own guns, be against gun laws, and believe that victims, potential victims, and law enforcement agents should be able to retaliate with gun violence in a broad range of situations. I would argue that there are strong parallels between the notion of the sucker norm and the culture of honor. When this kind of social norm is particularly salient, people may be willing to sacrifice social utility (in the form of less violence overall) in order to preserve the individual's ability to respond to exploitation or insult.

d. Gender Differences

It is quite reasonable to expect that there are individual differences in how responsive people are to the sucker norm. One difference that may be especially interesting is the difference between men and women. In Kerr's (1983) studies of the sucker effect in social loafing

experiments, he found much less evidence of fear of being a sucker in his female subjects. In his studies, he paired subjects with a partner who was failing to contribute to a group task either because the partner was lazy or incapable. For men, this distinction was important, and male subjects responded to the lazy partner by exerting very little effort themselves, though they worked quite hard when their undercontributing partner was apparently not capable of succeeding at the task. For women, on the other hand, the difference between these conditions was not significant—even though women were as likely as men to show a decrement in effort (free-ride) when paired with a hard-working partner. Eckel and Grossman (2001) have also found that women are less likely than men to altruistically punish. If, indeed, there are gender differences in the sucker norm, it may be that the sucker norm is more salient for men because it affirms typically male traits like dominance and agency (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). It could also be the case that women are equally responsive to the norm but simply have a higher threshold for perceiving unfairness—women may be more acclimated than men to receiving a smaller portion of the pie. Future research might investigate the nature and mechanisms of gender differences in this area.

V. Pilot Study

In light of these ideas, I conducted a small preliminary study to see if I could influence subjects' responses to a standard experimental task like the Ultimatum game. I predicted that subjects who were more worried about being a sucker would be less likely to accept a disadvantageously inequitable division of goods. In order to prime subjects with the fear of being a sucker, I asked the experimental group to read a story about a guy who gets duped in front of his friends. I was concerned that I might see some differences between the control and experimental group that were based on the fear of being a victim in general, not just a sucker. In

order to avoid this, I had the control group read a story about a man whose wallet is stolen, even though he took reasonable measures to secure it. My hypothesis was that a reminder of the sucker norm would push subjects to be more wary of inequity in tasks like the Ultimatum game.

a. Method

83 subjects responded to a web-based questionnaire. All subjects read a story about a crime or fraud, and then answered questions about how they would behave in a hypothetical ultimatum game. We used a 2 x 2 design, manipulating the prime as well as the order of tasks. Subjects were randomly assigned to the sucker prime condition or the control condition. 40 subjects read a story about a sucker:

"Jason and his friends were walking along the street when they were approached by a young man who introduced himself as Tyler. Tyler apologized for stopping them, but told them he needed help to get back to his car. His car had been towed the night before, and in it were his wallet and phone. The towing yard was across town, and the taxi would cost \$10. Jason's friends looked skeptical, but Jason felt sorry for Tyler. Jason gave Tyler \$10. Tyler thanked him and they parted ways. Two hours later, Jason and his friends were sitting in a coffeeshop when they saw Tyler again. They could see Tyler outside, obviously telling a young woman on the street an identical story to the one he had told Jason. Jason realized he had been swindled, but before he could get out to confront Tyler, Tyler had disappeared."

I asked these subjects to answer four yes/no questions, including whether they thought Jason would feel embarrassed and whether he would feel like a sucker.

43 subjects read a control story, in which Jason is the victim of a crime and loses \$10, but is not a sucker.

"Jason went to his gym to run on the treadmill. He put his clothes in a locker and locked it with a padlock. When he came back, he saw that the locker room had been robbed. Someone had used bolt cutters to snip the padlocks off of a whole row of lockers. Jason's wallet was still in the locker, but the contents were dumped out, and the \$10 he had in cash was gone. Nothing else had been stolen."

Subjects who saw this story answered four follow-up yes/no questions, including whether Jason was the victim of bad luck and whether he would feel embarrassed.

Subjects were also divided into two groups based on the order of tasks. We asked subjects to consider two hypothetical games: an Ultimatum game and a Prisoner's Dilemma. 36 subjects answered the Ultimatum game questions directly after seeing the prime, and then did the Prisoner's Dilemma. 47 subjects answered the Prisoner's Dilemma first, then the Ultimatum game.

For the Ultimatum game task, subjects read a description of a task we called "The Offer Game." It was explained that one player was the Proposer, and that the Proposer was given ten one-dollar bills and told to make an offer to the Responder. If the Responder accepts, both would keep their allotment. If the Responder rejects, neither keeps any money. I asked subjects to imagine that they had been assigned the role of Responder in an Ultimatum game, and that the Proposer had offered \$2. I then asked subjects if they would accept or reject this offer, and also to indicate the lowest offer that they would accept.

In the Prisoner's Dilemma task, subjects read a description of a standard prisoner's dilemma, and then indicated, on a scale from 1 (definitely defect) to 4 (definitely cooperate), how likely they would be to cooperate or defect, given no knowledge of the other player's choice.

b. Results

Our results suggest that there is an effect of the sucker prime, but that the effect is subtle and short-lived. Subjects who completed the Ultimatum game questionnaire directly after the sucker prime required a higher offer than subjects who read the control scenario. Most subjects answered that they would reject the \$2 offer, and there were no significant differences between the sucker group and the control group for this question. However, the sucker group demanded an average offer of \$3.94 in order to ensure acceptance, whereas the average willingness-to-

accept figure for the control group was \$2.44 ($t=2.443$, $df=33.148$, $p=.0201$). For subjects who saw the Ultimatum game question last, there was no significant difference between the sucker group and the control group ($t=-1.150$, $df=44.823$, $p=.256$).¹

The Prisoner's Dilemma task yielded no significant results. For subjects who completed the task immediately after the prime, the trend was in the predicted direction (the sucker group being more likely to defect), but it was not significant ($t=.775$, $df=40.465$, $p=.4429$). The difference was even smaller in the group who completed the task last.

c. Discussion

The main result of this study is that subjects primed with a story about the humiliation of being a sucker are more likely to demand equity in an ultimatum game than those who are primed with a story about being a victim. The effect of the sucker prime seems to be fairly subtle, but it is robust enough that we got similar, significant results when we ran a replication study. Interestingly, we also replicated the effect of timing, finding again that an intervening task erased the effect of the prime on the Ultimatum game. This data is only suggestive, I think, but I hope it will help to motivate further studies with more sensitive dependent measures, including experimental games using real money and real-time player interaction.

VII. Conclusion

I have argued that being a sucker is not only aversive because of the material loss and the aversive feeling of self-blame, but also because it violates a social norm. The sucker norm probably reinforces some useful heuristics—don't accept less than you deserve, punish free-riders, etc.—but it also serves to re-frame some situations such that the focus turns from the overall utility of a choice to the narrower question of comparative advantage. The sucker norm

will not explain every case of defection in social dilemmas or retaliation in experimental games, but it may nonetheless offer some explanatory power for the results reviewed here.

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