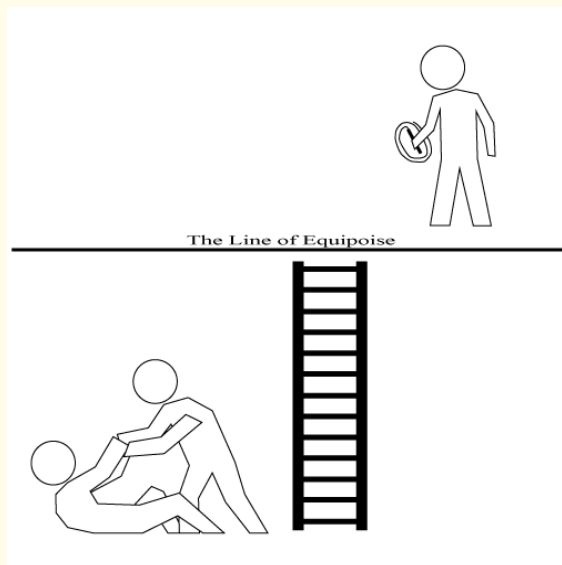# Help-Hurt Relationship Theory

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One question that has been asked over the years is "Who was responsible for the deportation of African slaves to the New World?" This controversial issue has sparked many debates. One perspective is that the Europeans were completely responsible for capturing and transporting slaves for trade. A substantial amount of evidence indicates that African tribes kidnapped people from other tribes and herded them to the European slave traders. Many Africans believed that other Africans belonged in lives of servitude and did not deserve freedom. Historical records show that Europeans needed assistance from Africans because they did not know the terrain and the task of rounding up slaves required additional hands (Conniff & Davis, 1994; Jackson, 1996). There were three main reasons these African tribes were interested in helping the European traders. One, the Europeans had resources they lacked such as medicine, guns, gunpowder, iron, textiles, and brandy. Secondly, if they were agents in the trade they were less likely to become goods to be sold to the highest bidder. The third reason is that Africans were not a unified nation. Rather, they were warring tribes with different languages, traditions, and beliefs. These cultural differences made it easy to lure neighboring tribes for there was no remorse in selling those who were not your relatives or friends (Genovese, 1974 Gates, 1987; Chaliad & Rageau, 1995; Jackson, 1996; Levine, 2007). This problem persists in the African American community even today as Blacks inflict harm on other Blacks. This disharmony in the Black community does nothing to better their situation. Early African intertribal conflict may have left an epigenetic mark. This may account for many observable Black on Black injustices seen today. A significant setback for the Black community has been the so-called "crab mentality." This colloquial term explains how a person would sacrifice their own success in order to destroy someone else. If they were to cooperate and work together they could escape but instead they pull each other down as each one tries to save themselves from the boiling pot. The attitude of "If I cannot have it, neither will you" ultimately causes all the crabs to boil to death in the pot. There is a tendency for people in the Black community to sabotage others when they are on their way to success. The help-hurt theory is another way to explain the Black community's internal and ultimately external conflict. This homeostatic mechanism ensures that people do not rise or fall. When an individual in a social group stumbles or falls upon hard times the other group members help them. The group members are kind, charitable, and empathetic toward the struggling individual. Conversely, when a member of the group starts to excel and rise above the rest, the community tends to hurt them. The behavior of the group members is then motivated by anger, bitterness, revenge, and jealousy. Any given person in the group can be observed either helping or hurting depending on the situation. Adjustments will always be made when an individual veers away from the norm. Homeostasis is essential for an organism's survival because it maintains stability in its systems. For example, when the human body gets too cold certain mechanisms are triggered to elevate its temperature, such as shivering. When the body gets too hot another set of mechanisms are employed to lower the body's temperature, such as perspiring. When homeostasis is applied to social systems positive change is precluded. A social group neither advances nor declines. The status quo is maintained. Often, if a person in the Black community receives too much attention or notoriety; other Blacks go into "hurt" mode. The other Blacks may call them names, spread hurtful rumors, or try to ruin their reputation in some way. The image of the targeted individual is tarnished and they no longer stand above the rest. Alternately, if an individual is depressed, unemployed, grieving, homeless, or being bullied the group springs into "help" mode, giving them support in various ways, but not enough to tip the scale. If the person who has been helped becomes too confident or acts superior the group is quick to revert to the "hurt" mode, putting them back in their place. The Help-Hurt mechanism prevents social groups from advancing and reaching their full potential. One can see how this works in the example of the schoolmates Jason and Paul. Jason and Paul were from the same hometown and had aspirations to work in politics. Both worked diligently in school and were granted scholarships to

attend Alabama A&M University. At A&M, both were successful students, Jason was elected class president and Paul became captain of the debate team. After graduation, Paul was offered an internship at the White House, but Jason had to move home to care for his ailing mother and got a menial job at a factory. Jason envied Paul's position and resented being trapped in his hometown. Jason, in "hurt" mode, posted photos on the Internet of Paul smoking marijuana as a teenager. Paul's supervisor caught a glimpse of the photos online and immediately dismissed Paul from his internship. Ashamed, Paul returned home to live with his parents. Jason, feeling pity, was able to talk his employer into hiring Paul as a janitor at the factory. Jason exhibited "help" and "hurt" behaviors in this scenario in order to keep his friend in check. Another example in which one can see the Help-Hurt mechanism at work is the story of Sarah and Jocelyn. They were two friends who met regularly at the local beauty parlor. Sarah got married to a wealthy entrepreneur while Jocelyn stayed single. Jocelyn was envious of Sarah's good fortune and began to spread rumors among their friends at the beauty parlor. Jocelyn told the other ladies that Sarah had a man on the side and that Sarah thought she was better than the other women. When Sarah would come into the beauty parlor, the women started to ignore her and whisper behind her back. One day she finally stopped going. A year later Sarah's husband died suddenly in a car crash. She discovered that his estate was worth nothing and she had to use all of her money to pay off his debt. The news got back to Jocelyn and she visited Sarah's home to comfort her with a casserole. The women at the beauty parlor took turns bringing meals to Sarah. They encouraged her to return to the beauty parlor where they welcomed her with open arms. Sarah, Jocelyn, and the women socialized the way they did before Sarah got married. In the story, Jocelyn's behaviors can be characterized as hurting and helping. Her actions were motivated by the drive to keep Sarah on the same level as everyone else. These two scenarios show how Help-Hurt dynamics play out in the African American community. There is no clear explanation for why Blacks often direct animosity toward each other. It is possible that during slavery fair-skinned Blacks were favored over dark-skinned Blacks. Dark-skinned Blacks were given grueling work like picking cotton in the fields while fair-skinned Blacks were allowed to live and work in the master's quarters. More tension was built in the Black community when educated individuals left to make better lives for themselves while uneducated Blacks were left behind with few options. As mentioned earlier, in Africa Blacks were from different tribes with different cultures, but when they were exported to the New World, they were forced to become one culture, one tribe, and one community. I would submit that the Black community has been oppressed for many years which could have led to the crab mentality discussed earlier where individuals believe that others should not succeed if they cannot. Ultimately, this keeps the community from improving and moving forward. The Black community must reprioritize and create a sound structure that allows all individuals to progress, and there are several areas in the community that need work. The following tables are key levels, components and examples that make up the Help-Hurt Theory (Tables 1, 2, 3, and Figures 1 and 2).

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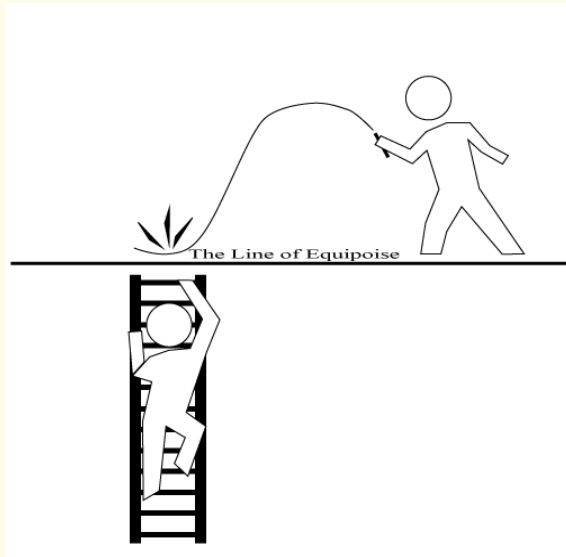
(The "Help" relationship theory is used to assist individuals who are in need. However, there are limitations to the amount of help that is offered. The emotional stability of the person determines the frequency of helping behaviors).

Levels of Help	Emotional Stability	Description of Help
No Help	The person has grown stronger than the community members and the people who once helped them. The person considers herself or himself as a leader. They are very confident and have extremely high self-esteem.	**False Help:** The Helper's intent is to help himself or herself, while pretending to help the emotionally stable person. The Helper is considering using the" hurt" technique and may even begin planning ways to sabotage the strong individual.
Minimal Help	The person functions very well without assistance. He or she is becoming more independent. The person feels equal to other members of the Black community.	**Help with Caution:** The Helper will decrease aid because he or she sees significant improvement. There is no hurt inflicted but the individual begins to wonder if it may be needed in the future.
Moderate Help	The person is improving mentally, emotionally and physically.	**Help with Observation:** The Helper continues to assist the struggling person but not as much as before. The Helper is now observing the behavior and stability of the person in need. There are no "Hurt" behaviors used at this time.
Unlimited Help	The person is impoverished and has hit rock bottom. They are in need of assistance and moral support.	**Unconditional Help:** The Helper provides a significant amount of support to the person in need. They use no "hurt" behaviors at this time. If a person were to use the hurt technique, he or she would be judged unfavorably by the community. It would be seen as a "kicking someone when they are down" scenario.

(The "Hurt" Relationship Theory is used to bring harm towards a successful person through relational, physical, or verbal attacks.)

Levels of Hurt	Aggressive Behaviors	Description of Hurt
Unlimited Amount of Hurt	These behaviors consist of verbal, relational and physical attacks. These behaviors are extreme in nature and can cause the person receiving them severe pain. Physical harm comes from the combination of extreme verbal hurt and extreme relational hurt.	Individuals will frequently inflict verbal, relational and physical harm. The pain caused by such individuals is unrelenting and extreme.
Limited Amount of Hurt	These consist of only verbal and relational attacks.	Individuals will occasionally and more subtlety implements verbal and relational harm. The insults and attacks will cease once the person is put back in their place.

3 primary behaviors found within the "Hurt" component of the Help-Hurt Relationship Theory. Examples below provide a simplistic vignette that examines the "hurt" behaviors a person might face when encounter a group of people or a particular individual.

Aggressive Behaviors	Examples of Behaviors
Verbal Hurt Verbal hurt is the disparaging things said about a person. Insults may be said directly to one's face, behind their backs or in front of an attentive group.	**The Person Inflicting Hurt:** "You think you're all of that! I remember when you did not have anything." "Stop acting like you are so smart! The only reason you got into college was because you copied off of me."
Relational Hurt Relational hurt is the discrediting of a person before a large group of people. Usually, the person being harmed is acquainted with the group. This is extremely painful for the harmed person because they are punished by a larger number of people.	**The Person Inflicting Hurt:** "Did you guys know he use to do drugs back in the day? I was not going to say anything, but he thinks we forgot about that." **The Group**: "Yeah, we remember when he used to do drugs! I cannot believe he thinks he is better than us." The group may continue to spread such gossip making individuals outside the group aware of the person's past problems.
Physical Hurt (EV+ER = PH) Physical hurt or corporeal harm is the most drastic measure taken. It is usually the last major effort to knock the person back down and sabotage their success. Extreme verbal and extreme relational attacks lead to such physical hurt. The hurting person incites conflict by convincing the group that the individual deserves punishing. They manipulate the group so that they are compelled to gang up on the person and inflict physical harm.	**The Person Inflicting Hurt:** "You know he said that he is better than you guys and he said that anyone that does not like it can come see him." **The Group**: "What? He said that! Let's go see this brother." **The Hurt Person**: "I did not say that!" **The PIH & Group**: "So you are calling us liars!!" The argument will continue until a physical encounter take place between the person inflicting hurt, someone in the group and the "hurt" person

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