

## ARTICLE

# Sacrifice in close relationships: Motives, emotions, and relationship outcomes

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**Abstract**

Romantic partners often face situations in which their preferences, interests and goals are not well aligned—what is good for one partner is not good for the other. In these situations, people need to make a decision between pursuing their own self-interest and sacrificing for their partner or the relationship. In this work, we discuss antecedents and consequences of sacrifice in close relationships. Specifically, we address when people are more likely to sacrifice, what are the motivations driving a sacrifice, and what are the affective consequences of this behavior for the person who makes the sacrifice (i.e., the actor), for the person who receives the sacrifice (i.e., the recipient), and for the relationship. We conclude by discussing important directions for future research on the implications of sacrifice for the well-being of individuals and their relationships.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

*When any two people are interacting together and each is capable of making plans, a prospect arises of their sharing a common goal and a common plan. When they do so, the interaction resulting takes on new properties ... The new style of interaction is best spoken of as a partnership. By sharing a common set-goal and participating in a joint plan to achieve it, partners have a rewarding sense of common purpose; and they are likely able to identify with one another ... Nevertheless, partnership is bought at a price. Since each partner has his own personal set-goals to attain, collaboration between them is possible only so long as one is prepared, when necessary, to relinquish, or at least adjust, his own set goals to suit the others.*

~ John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss

It's Friday evening, and after a long week in the office, Mark has been looking forward to curling up on the sofa with his partner Linda and watching a movie. Linda has something else in mind, as she has just received an invitation to go on a double date with her best friends (who Mark finds quite annoying) at a local sushi restaurant. What are Mark and Linda going to do? This is just one of countless examples of situations in which romantic partners experience conflicting or diverging interests. For example, partners do not always have the same preferences about what to do in their free time, what to have for dinner, or even larger things, such as in which city or country they wish to live.

While situations of conflicting interests give couples an opportunity to grow and create a partnership, as Bowlby indicated, these situations also represent a stressor in romantic life. Research has shown that partners experience greater stress, negative affect, and lower relationship satisfaction when they encounter situations in which their interests diverge than when these situations do not occur (Righetti, Gere, Hofmann, Visserman, & Van Lange, 2016).

One way to solve these situations that enables couples to stay together is for one or both partners to sacrifice their own interests to accommodate the other's preferences. For example, if Linda wants to spend the evening with Mark, she can turn down her friends' request to have dinner and spend the evening with him watching a movie. In the literature, sacrifice is defined as foregoing self-interest to promote the well-being of a partner or a relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997) and is typically measured either as willingness to sacrifice (i.e., the intention to sacrifice; Van Lange et al., 1997) or as actual behavior that has occurred in the relationship (Impett et al., 2012; Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Righetti, Balliet, Visserman, & Hofmann, 2015a). Most of the sacrifices that partners make for each other are fairly routine and mundane, such as coordinating daily activities, choosing what to do in free time, or doing small favors on a partner's behalf (Impett et al., 2005). Other times, relationship life demands that people make larger sacrifices, such as moving to another city to promote a partner's career or giving up an important hobby because it is incompatible with a partner's preferences or habits (Gere & Impett, in press).

In the present article, we review the factors that promote sacrifice in romantic relationships, examine the reasons why people choose to sacrifice for a partner, and review the impact of the willingness to sacrifice and the different aspects of the enacted sacrifices on both personal and relational well-being. We conclude our review by discussing what we see as interesting but currently unanswered questions as well as promising directions for future research on sacrifice.

## 2 | WHEN WILL PEOPLE BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE?

Although sacrifice is a necessary ingredient for relationships to thrive and survive, not everyone is willing to sacrifice all the time (nor should they!). When people experience conflicting interests in their relationship, they sometimes wish that their partner would be the one to give up their preference, and other times, they may be content to go different, albeit separate, ways. What predicts whether people will forego their own self-interest for the partner and the relationship? We focus our review on three factors that have been linked with sacrifice, including commitment, power dynamics between partners, and self-control.

### 2.1 | Commitment

Not surprisingly, commitment—defined as the intent to persist in one's relationship (e.g., Rusbult, 1983)—has been shown to be a robust predictor of sacrifice (e.g., Etcheverry & Le, 2005; Powell & Van Vugt, 2003; Van Lange et al., 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). If people want to preserve their relationship in the long-term, they are more willing to sacrifice direct self-interest to favor the interest of the relationship. Furthermore, because committed individuals anticipate future interactions with their partner, they may decide to sacrifice at one point in time, anticipating reciprocation from their partner in the future. Similarly, people who highly trust their partner—that is people who believe that their partner is dependable and cares for them (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985)—are also more accommodating when asked to sacrifice (Shallcross & Simpson, 2012), presumably because they expect their partner to show a similar concern for their needs in the future.

### 2.2 | Power

Recent work has shown that power dynamics also affect the tendency to sacrifice (Righetti, Balliet, et al., 2015a; Righetti, Luchies, Van Gils, Slotter, Witcher, & Kumashiro, 2015b). Power has been defined as the capacity to influence another person's outcomes or behavior in a social context (for a review, see Simpson, Farrell, Orina, &

Rothman, 2015). From a theoretical and empirical perspective, power could affect sacrifice in close relationships in at least two different ways. On the one hand, since high power individuals are less affected by other people's actions, they do not need to have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of others (Ebenbach & Keltner, 1998; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010). Thus, they may not sacrifice because they fail to recognize that their partner has a different preference than their own. Furthermore, power increases emotional and psychological distance to others (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012), and therefore, even if they do notice that their interests conflict with their partner's interests, powerholders may simply decide to prioritize their own interests over their partner's interests. On the other hand, other research has shown that when individuals care about and feel responsible for others—which is typically the case in close relationships—they can become even more generous and prosocial when they have high, rather than low, power (e.g., Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Karremans & Smith, 2010). Righetti, Balliet, et al., (2015a), Righetti, Luchies, et al., (2015b) tested these two opposing perspectives in five studies by assessing whether relative power (i.e., the extent to which one partner possesses greater power relative to the other) was associated with willingness to sacrifice and with past actual sacrifices. Results were consistent with the idea that power in the relationship reduces, rather than increases, the tendency to sacrifice.

### 2.3 | Self-control

Another interesting question to which researchers have recently devoted attention is whether self-control (i.e., the ability to change automatic responses to align them with long-term goals; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994) is required to enact a sacrifice or whether sacrifices can be an automatic behavior in the context of a close relationship. In other words, do people have to make a conscious effort to prioritize a partner's interests over their own, or might this decision be more automatic in nature? Researchers have found that in established long-term relationships, characterized by high communal orientation—defined as the tendency to be responsive to others' needs without expectations for direct reciprocation (see review by Clark & Jordan, 2002)—low self-control (i.e., deciding impulsively) increased tendencies to engage in small sacrifices (Kammrath et al., 2015; Righetti, Finkenauer, & Finkel, 2013). However, when the sacrifices are large and costly (Findley, Carvallo, & Bartak, 2014; Pronk & Karremans, 2014), or when partners have only recently started to date (and possibly are not in a communal relationship yet), self-control is instead needed to sacrifice (Kammrath et al., 2015).

## 3 | WHY DO PEOPLE SACRIFICE?

Given that sacrifices involve inherent costs, even if they are small, it is important to understand why romantic partners choose to make sacrifices for one another. There are a variety of motivations that can influence people's decisions to forego their own self-interest for their partner or relationship. For example, people might be afraid to lose the relationship if they do not sacrifice, they may want to avoid a conflict, or they may sincerely wish to see their partner happy. It is important to understand the reasons why people sacrifice because they can have significant implications for the way people feel about their sacrifices.

### 3.1 | Approach-avoidance motives

One central framework that distinguishes between different types of goals for sacrifice is based on approach-avoidance motivational theory (see Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000). According to this framework which has been applied to sacrifice (Impett et al., 2005), when people sacrifice for *approach motives*, they focus on obtaining rewards such as what the relationship can gain in the long-term, how much their partner will benefit, or how positively they will feel about themselves after giving to their partner. In contrast, when people sacrifice for *avoidance motives*, they focus on avoiding negative outcomes such as conflict with their partner, the potential loss of the relationship, or anticipated guilt from having decided to pursue their own interests at the expense of their partner's interests.

The goals people pursue when making a sacrifice can have a profound impact on how they feel about the sacrifice and their relationship. Several studies have shown that people experience positive intrapersonal (i.e., higher positive affect) and interpersonal (i.e., higher relationship satisfaction) outcomes when they sacrifice for approach motives, that is, when they focus on obtaining some anticipated reward. In contrast, people experience negative intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes when they sacrifice for avoidance motives, that is, when they focus on negative outcomes that they want to avoid (Impett et al., 2005; Impett, Gere, Kogan, Gordon, & Keltner, 2014). These effects are largely accounted by differences in authenticity that people experience when they sacrifice for approach versus avoidance goals (Impett, Javam, Le, Asyabi-Eshghi, & Kogan, 2013a). The motives that people pursue when making a sacrifice also impact the partner who receives (or perceives their partner make) the sacrifice. When people perceive that their partner make a sacrifice for approach motives, they experience personal and relationship benefits, whereas when people perceive that their partner sacrifice for avoidance motives, they experience poorer personal well-being and relationship quality (Impett et al., 2005, 2014).

It is important to note that there are caveats to these general findings, as research has shown that people who construe the self as highly interconnected with close others—those with an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991)—do not experience decreased authenticity when they sacrifice to pursue avoidance motives such as preventing their partner's disappointment or warding off conflict in their relationship (Impett, Le, Asyabi-Eshghi, Day, & Kogan, 2013b). People with an interdependent self-construal are also buffered against drops in emotional well-being and relationship quality when they sacrifice for avoidance motives. It is possible that sacrificing for avoidance goals is not costly for highly interdependent people since doing so allows them to maintain the harmony in social interactions that they so highly value (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldo, 2001). Future research is needed to identify other boundary conditions of the effects of approach and avoidance sacrifice motives on personal and interpersonal outcomes.

### 3.2 | Self-, partner-, and relationship-focused motives

In addition to distinguishing between motives that are approach or avoidance in nature, Visserman, Righetti, Impett, Keltner, & Van Lange, 2017a recently developed a more fine-grained typology that crosses the approach-avoidance distinction with another motivational distinction—whether people sacrifice to benefit themselves, their partner, or the relationship (see also Fitzsimons, Finkel, & vanDellen, 2015). Specifically, according to this typology, people can sacrifice in pursuit of six different types of motives. Three of them are approach-oriented and are focused on pursuing positive outcomes for the partner (i.e., *partner-focused approach motives*; e.g., making the partner happy), for the relationship (i.e., *relationship-focused approach motives*, e.g., boosting interpersonal intimacy), or for oneself (i.e., *self-focused approach motives*; e.g., feeling good about being a generous person). The other three are avoidance-oriented and are focused on avoiding negative outcomes for the partner (i.e., *partner-focused avoidance motives*; e.g., avoiding the partner being upset), for the relationship (i.e., *relationship-focused avoidance motives*; e.g., avoiding ending the relationship), or for oneself (*self-focused avoidance motives*; e.g., avoiding feeling guilty). This typology has been used, for example, to understand when recipients feel grateful about a sacrifice. In two studies combining daily experience and dyadic in-lab interaction methods, Visserman, Righetti, Impett, et al. (2017a) showed that gratitude emerges only when people think that their partner sacrificed for partner-focused approach motives (e.g., to make them happy), presumably because these types of motives suggest that the partner had authentic altruistic intentions. If recipients think that their partner's sacrifice was tainted by self-interest, they did not feel grateful. Interestingly, they did not feel grateful even if they thought that their partner was following the relationship interest. Relationship motives may not be perceived entirely selfless since the person who performs the sacrifice receive many (short-term and long-term) benefits from being in a well-functioning relationship. Thus, relationship-focused motives may also—to some extent—be perceived as tainted by self-interest, as by benefitting the relationship, people benefit themselves too. In sum, understanding the focal target of one's sacrifice and the more general approach or avoidance mindset with which people face the sacrifice provides a more complete understanding of this phenomenon and of its implications.

## 4 | WHEN IS SACRIFICE BENEFICIAL OR DETRIMENTAL TO PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL WELL-BEING?

In the past, psychologists have assumed that sacrifice is good for the relationship in that it creates a “climate” of trust and cooperation within dyads (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997). Supporting this idea, several studies have found that people who are more willing to sacrifice for their romantic partner also report greater relationship satisfaction and personal well-being (Van Lange et al., 1997; Wieselquist et al., 1999). However, much of this work was hypothetical in nature and examined positive intentions to sacrifice, rather than what occurs when people make real sacrifices. Very little research has been conducted on whether enacted sacrifices, per se, are linked with increased relationship well-being. One study that we are aware of showed that the more daily “changes” people made to their interests or preferences for their partner, the more satisfied they felt with their relationship (Ruppel & Curran, 2012). Yet in another recent investigation of 130 romantic couples, there was no link between engaging in sacrifice and self-report measures of either relationship satisfaction or personal well-being (Righetti, Hofmann, Pronk, & Van Lange, 2017). However, the authors found that after sacrificing an important preference for their partner, participants reported less positive implicit partner evaluations (i.e., the automatic affective reaction toward the partner) than participants who did not sacrifice. Thus, after having made an important sacrifice, participants developed some latent negative affect toward their partner that was only detectable via implicit measures and not by the explicit (i.e., self-report) ones. One reason why people might not have reported a change in affect toward their partner at the explicit level is because they wanted to justify (to themselves and to others) their behavior. After having foregone an important personal preference for the sake of the partner, people may realize the personal costs that the sacrifice has entailed, but may complement these costs with positive, reaffirming appraisals (e.g., “I sacrificed for my partner, thus I must love him/her very much”) to preserve the need for personal consistency (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). This process may then result in unaffected (or similar) explicit partner evaluations.

Although, to date, there is not a clear and consistent answer to the question of whether sacrifice, on average, benefits or harms individual and relationship well-being, research has revealed several critical factors that can influence this relationship. These factors are people's dispositional approach toward sacrifice (e.g., whether they have a communal orientation), and the way they regulate their emotions (e.g., whether they suppress their emotions).

### 4.1 | Communal orientation

People who are communally oriented—that is, those who have a strong motivation to meet their partners' needs and do so without expectation for reciprocation (e.g., Clark & Jordan, 2002; Clark & Mills, 2011)—are especially likely to benefit from sacrifice. Highly communal people experience greater positive emotions on days when they make sacrifices for their romantic partner, as compared to less communal people (Kogan et al., 2010). Communal people do not just give to their partner begrudgingly; instead, they experience sacrifice as highly rewarding because they feel more authentic when they sacrifice to please their partner, as compared to those who are less communal (Kogan et al., 2010). Other research on parenting in the early childhood years—a time period when sacrifice is imbalanced in nature—also suggests that highly communal parents experience caregiving as more intrinsically satisfying than parents who are less communal in nature (Le & Impett, 2015).

### 4.2 | Emotional suppression

Not all sacrifices are inherently joyful to provide, and sometimes people experience negative emotions such as irritation, resentment, or anger when they sacrifice for their partner. In some ways, the decision to suppress or conceal these negative emotions could be seen as an intuitive way to manage situations of conflicting interests in relationships. However, several studies have shown that suppressing one's genuine feelings when making a sacrifice is typically costly for both partners in relationships. In one study, increased suppression was associated with decreased

authenticity, and in turn with poorer intrapersonal and interpersonal well-being as reported by both partners in the relationship (Impett et al., 2012). Increased suppression during daily sacrifice was also associated with more frequent thoughts about ending the relationship 3 months later, suggesting that suppression is also related to relationship instability. In another daily experience study of romantic couples, emotional suppression when making a sacrifice led to lower satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice, in turn, detracting from overall relationship satisfaction (Righetti, Balliet, et al., 2015a; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015b). Suppression is not uniformly costly, however, as one study showed that people with an interdependent self-construal actually felt more authentic and greater relationship quality when they suppressed their emotions, possibly because doing so enabled them to maintain interpersonal harmony (Le & Impett, 2013). More research is needed to understand the circumstances under which suppressing emotions during sacrifice helps versus harms relationships.

## 5 | POTENTIAL COSTS AND BENEFITS OF GIVING AND RECEIVING SACRIFICES

Our review of the literature on sacrifice suggests that the impact of sacrifice on relationship well-being depends on a variety of factors such as people's motivations and emotion regulation. However, given the lack of a definitive answer on whether sacrifice, on average, is associated with personal and relationship well-being, future research would benefit from using a meta-analytical approach to test these effects. Do people experience good or bad outcomes when they sacrifice? And is there a difference in people's outcomes if they are the actor (i.e., the person who enacts the sacrifice) or the recipient of the sacrifice?

These questions are not trivial as there are good reasons to suspect that sacrifice could be either beneficial or harmful for individual and relationship well-being. From an actor's perspective, there are many positive aspects related to sacrifice. Being in a situation of divergence of interest with one's partner is a stressful situation (Righetti et al., 2016) as people experience goal conflict between personal and relational goals (Emmons & King, 1988; Gere, Schimmack, Pinkus, & Lockwood, 2011). Through an act of sacrifice, people can find a resolution to the tension created by this goal conflict dilemma. Furthermore, by sacrificing, the individual enacts a relationship-oriented solution in which partners can continue to stay together and pursue shared activities. In fact, if neither partner steps up and is willing to sacrifice, they will have to go their separate ways and each of them would have to pursue their preference on their own. And when one person sacrifices this time, the partner may feel the need to reciprocate next time, initiating a positive cycle of pro-relationship behavior that enables partner to stay together. Furthermore, as we have seen before, people have the tendency to justify their own actions and feel good about their behavior (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Therefore, after sacrificing, people may feel that their relationship was worth the effort and that their behavior was the "right" thing to do (and perhaps it was not so costly after all!). People may also experience pride from behaving in such a generous manner, and they may experience positive affect from feeling that they are a good, responsive partner. Last, but not least, people may be genuinely happy to be able to benefit their partner and to be able to fulfill their needs (Kogan et al., 2010).

Despite this long list of benefits, it is essential not to forget that foregoing self-interest for a partner is a costly behavior as people lose the opportunity to fulfill their own goals and preferences. When people cannot fulfill their own goals, they may feel that their autonomy (and achievement) needs are thwarted with detrimental consequences for their well-being (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). The partner (or relationship) is the source of goal obstruction and some negative affect toward the relationship might ensue (Fitzsimons, Finkel, & Vandellen, 2015). Even if, initially, people are not necessarily aware of this negative affect because it manifests only implicitly (Righetti et al., 2017), it is possible that, over time, implicit evaluations may surface into explicit evaluations with more serious consequences for relationship well-being (e.g., McNulty, Olson, Meltzer, & Shaffer, 2013). Furthermore, by sacrificing, people place themselves in a vulnerable position. The partner may not even recognize and appreciate the sacrifice, leaving the costs that one has incurred to go unnoticed. This is indeed an important concern as a recent investigation using a quasi-signal

detection approach has revealed that partners recognize only about half of the daily sacrifices that the other has made, and missing these sacrifices undermines feelings of gratitude (Visserman, Righetti, Kumashiro, & Van Lange, 2017b). Thus, after sacrificing, people may fear exploitation as their behavior could be never recognized, appreciated, and reciprocated.

Although sacrifice may be a mixed blessing for the person who performs the behavior, the recipient of sacrifice should have a lot to gain from it, and it may be simple to conclude that sacrifices are almost always beneficial from the recipient's perspective. Besides the tangible gains (the recipient can pursue their own goals *and* be together with their partner), perceiving the partner's sacrifice also brings some symbolic gains. The recipient realizes that their partner is committed to the relationship (Joel, Gordon, Impett, MacDonald, & Keltner, 2013; Wieselquist et al., 1999), is willing to incur some costs to be together, and has their interests at heart. All of this can make recipients of sacrifice feel loved and cared for (e.g., Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). Indeed, recent research has shown that people feel grateful when they receive a sacrifice (whether the partner actually reported making it or it was just a misperception) (Visserman, Righetti, Kumashiro, et al., 2017b).

But does receiving a sacrifice make people unequivocally feel good or is there another side of the coin? It is plausible to think that being the recipient of a sacrifice may also involve some negative aspects. For example, people may genuinely feel sorry for their partner because they empathize and understand their partner's costs. Furthermore, people may feel indebted toward their partner and obligated to reciprocate. This may create a feeling of uneasiness as, in some cases, people may have preferred a solution in which both partners could have pursued their own preferences, albeit separately. For example, if Linda decides to miss out on the double date and stay at home with Mark to watch a movie, he may feel that next time it is "his turn" to reciprocate and return the favor. Mark might even have preferred that Linda go to dinner with her friends without him, so he could have had a quiet and relaxing evening to himself. In short, sometimes people might prefer that their partner chooses not to sacrifice for them and instead, that their partners independently pursue their own interests.

## 6 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While there is some empirical research on predictors of sacrifice, very little is known about which personality traits are likely to predict whether people would sacrifice or not. As we have previously discussed, there is work suggesting that self-control (also as a trait) affects sacrifice. Furthermore, a recent investigation has tested the role of chronic self-esteem (Righetti & Visserman, 2017) and found no link between self-esteem and the propensity to sacrifice. However, this worked showed that low self-esteem individuals tended to regret their sacrifices more than high self-esteem individuals. Much more research is needed to understand what are the chronic dispositions (e.g., HEXACO; Ashton & Lee, 2007) that are likely to induce people to sacrifice. For example, trait agreeableness (i.e., the tendency to be compassionate and cooperative with others) and honesty-humility (i.e., the tendency to be fair and modest when dealing with others) may be important predictors of sacrifice.

Given that, as we have previously discussed, sacrifice may be a mixed blessing from both an actor and a recipient's perspective, future research should investigate not only if people feel more positive or negative after having made or received a sacrifice, but whether they are likely to feel more positive *and* negative at the same time. Thus, an important avenue for future research is to understand the extent to which people feel ambivalent and experience conflictual attitudes toward their partner and their relationship (e.g., Priester & Petty, 1996) after a sacrifice has occurred. Ambivalence has been shown to impact communication and reactions to partners' behaviors (Fincham & Beach, 1999), as well as to function as a catalyst that moves the relationship in one direction (e.g., break up) or another (e.g., significant improvement) (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005). Thus, experiencing ambivalence after sacrifices could have important consequences for the future of the relationship.

Furthermore, as we have previously discussed, one of the major problems with giving and receiving sacrifices is that people may feel that they owe their partner a sacrifice or that their partner owes them a sacrifice. This may create

feelings of uneasiness and indebtedness. This problem may be especially relevant for couples who have an exchange orientation in their relationship (Clark & Jordan, 2002). Couples with an exchange orientation are likely to keep track of the benefits that are given and received and want to make sure that there is reciprocity in the quality and frequency of such benefits. On the contrary, couples with a communal orientation may be less likely to experience the costs of sacrifices because they do not expect anything in return and they do not feel obliged to reciprocate. Thus, couples with a communal orientation may especially experience the benefits, and not the costs, of sacrifices.

Certainly, when couples encounter divergence of interests, they do not necessarily have to sacrifice. There may be situations in which partners would be better off if they went separate ways. For example, Mark and Linda might have been perfectly happy by doing separate activities on that Friday evening. In fact, there is research that shows that it is important to maintain a sense of independence in close relationships and that this actually fosters relationship satisfaction (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). Researchers may benefit from disentangling the situations in which partners would be better off if they went separate ways from the situations in which a sacrifice is necessary or, at least, the most optimal solution. It may be that when the divergence of interests does not threaten the future of the relationship because, for example, it has a limited temporal duration (e.g., it involves what to do on a Saturday afternoon vs. where to move for the next few years) partners may be better off by not sacrificing.

Furthermore, future research could investigate whether the most well-adjusted couples are the ones that have similar preferences in how to handle divergence of interests. For example, a person who values autonomy and independence (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991) might well be better off with a partner who shares these same values, such that they face fewer situations in which their interests conflict, and when they do find themselves in these situations, the partners may be more likely to go separate ways and feel good about it. However, if that same person who values autonomy has a partner who prefers more interdependence in the relationship, the couple may experience more frequent conflicts of interest, given their differing values. It is also possible that the more interdependent partner may be more willing to make sacrifices, perhaps in order to spend time with their partner, but these sacrifices might make the more independent partner feel constantly "in debt" or guilty about being overbenefitted in the relationship (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999).

Finally, while the majority of research on sacrifice has focused on romantic relationships, probably because this is one of the contexts in which sacrifices occur with regularity and frequency, future research should extend this work to other types of relationships. Sacrifices occur among friends, colleagues, and family members, and different contexts could have a profound impact on the consequences of sacrifices for individual and relationship well-being. For example, it may be possible that the outcomes of sacrifice might be more positive in relationships that are more communal in nature (e.g., romantic relationships) than those which are relatively more exchange oriented (e.g., work relationships). However, in relationships that are more imbalanced in nature and sacrifice is more normative (e.g., parent-child relationships), people may feel less grateful after receiving such benefit. On the contrary, in relationships where people do not expect sacrifices (e.g., between acquaintances), instances of sacrifice can be seen as very diagnostic of people's good motives and dispositions and may have a profound impact in forming and maintaining trusting relationships. However, if in romantic relationships, which are contexts where people know each other very well, partners miss half of the sacrifices (Visserman et al., under review) it may be that in other types of relationships people miss even more sacrifices and with it, the opportunity to feel grateful.

## 7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a dream relationship, partners' preferences would be well aligned and correspond much of the time. But dream relationships are far from reality, and the truth is that partners often face situations in which they are forced to choose between pursuing their self-interest or their partner's interest. These dilemmas are not trivial as people may have good reasons for both options. Although, to date, there is not a definitive answer to whether "sacrifice is good or bad" for partners and for relationships, our review of the existing literature suggests that several factors

(e.g., motivation, emotion regulation, and individual differences in communal orientation) play an important role in determining whether sacrifices will strengthen the relationship or drive a wedge between partners.

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