Background

- In all close relationships, conflict between interdependent partners occurs (Canary, 2003).
- Yet interdependent partners will sometimes sacrifice for their relational partner even if such choices are costly for themselves (Kelley, 1979).
- Understanding the sacrifice motives by which individuals choose to forego their self-interest and make relational sacrifices is important in understanding how such choices can benefit or undermine the romantic relationship (Impett & Gordon, 2008).
- Using interdependence theory (Kelly, 1979), Impett and colleagues (2005, 2008, 2010) have documented that sacrifice motives differently impact relationship quality such that:
  - approach motives (i.e., focus on obtaining positive outcomes like a partner’s happiness or enhanced relational intimacy) often have positive effects for relationship quality
  - avoidance motives (i.e., focus on evading negative outcomes like relational conflict) often have negative effects for relationship quality.

Hypotheses

- We make the following hypotheses. On days in which individuals or partners experience more than their usual:
  - H1: Approach motives for sacrifices, the higher are individuals’ reports of positive daily constructs (i.e., satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love).
  - H2: Avoidant motives for sacrifices, the lower are individuals’ reports of the positive daily constructs.

Methods

Participants

- We recruited 114 heterosexual couples (N=228 individuals) through undergraduate family studies and human development and communication classes at a large Southwestern university. Students were offered extra credit to participate in the study with their partner or they could pass along flyers for a couple to participate (e.g., parents, friends, roommates).
- Participants were at least 18 years old and in a romantic relationship for at least six weeks. Most were Caucasian (79.73%), 33.56% were married and 16.18% were cohabitating. We have variability on both age (Mdn = 22, SD = 14.60, range: 18-81 years) and length of relationships in months (Mdn = 48, or ~4 years, SD = 268.57, range: 2 months-76 years).

Method

Participants completed a survey of demographic information, followed by 14 days of daily surveys about relational sacrifice motives and relationship quality. We retained only those couples who completed the daily survey and matched on at least 3 days (e.g., Totenhagen et al., 2012, 2013). Couples completed an average of 10.58 days.

IVs: We assessed individuals' daily approach (α=.80; 3 items) and avoidance (α=.93; 5 items) motives about sacrifice using Impett et al.’s (2005) scale. We person-centered individuals' and partners' daily approach and avoidance scores prior to analyses so that these variables could be interpreted as being above or below one's own average (Enders & Tofghi, 2007).

DV: We assessed daily relationship quality of six scales with three items per scale: satisfaction (α=.93), commitment (α=.91), intimacy (α = .80), trust (α = .91), passion (α = .89), and love (α = .87).

Controls: Gender, (women = 0) relationship length (in months), children (yes = 1)

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects</th>
<th>Daily satisfaction (Mdn)</th>
<th>Daily commitment (Mdn)</th>
<th>Daily intimacy (Mdn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F(df)</td>
<td>Stat</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor effects</td>
<td>Approach motives</td>
<td>(1,1650)</td>
<td>95.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance motives</td>
<td>(1,1651)</td>
<td>11.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner effects</td>
<td>Approach motives</td>
<td>(1,1657)</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance motives</td>
<td>(1,1691)</td>
<td>7.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Actor effects indicate men’s and women's effects on their own outcomes, and partner effects indicate men’s and women’s effect on their partner's outcomes.

Conclusions and Implications

- Overall, our most robust patterns of results were specific to approach motives for individuals.
  - In line with H1, on days in which individuals reported more than their usual approach motives for sacrifices, the higher were their reports of all six relationship quality constructs.
  - For partners, findings were specific to higher satisfaction, trust, and passion. In comparison, and partially in line with H2, on days in which individuals or partners reported more than their usual avoidance motives for sacrifices, the lower were individuals’ reports of satisfaction.
- Our results suggest the relationship between sacrifice motives and relationship well-being is predominantly an intra-personal process given the more robust patterns for approach motives for individuals rather than for partners (e.g., Totenhagen et al., 2013; Whitten et al., 2005).
  - Attributions may play a role, such that individuals often overestimate how much they do in the relationship, while underestimating how much their partners do (Kelly, 1979).
- In response to Stanley and colleagues (2006), our findings can inform therapeutic strategies with families and couples:
  - Among the relationship quality constructs we examined, both approach and avoidance motives for sacrifice, for both individuals, were significantly in explaining higher and lower satisfaction, respectively.
  - Clinicians could direct their clients to focus on how both individuals’ and partners’ sacrifice motives impact relational satisfaction most specifically.
  - Clinicians could use our findings to work with a variety of couples (e.g., dating, cohabiting, married).

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