

Variability in Daily Relationship Quality: Roles of Daily Sacrifice Motives and Gender

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Background

- 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.
- Additionally, individuals differ in the degree to which their relationship quality fluctuates over time, such that greater variability reflects instability and uncertainty about the relationship, signaling cross-sectional differences by gender (Whitton, 2014).
- We consider gender in examinations of variability (i.e., within-person change over 14 days) in relationship quality (Hoffman, 2007), versus a common focus on fixed effects (i.e., average effects for all individuals).

Hypotheses

- We examined individual's daily approach and avoidance motives about relationship sacrifice, and variability in daily relationship quality constructs (satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, passion, and love), testing for gender differences.
- RO1: What is the influence of gender on associations between daily approach motives for individuals and partners and variability in daily relationship quality constructs?
- RO2: What is the influence of gender on associations between daily avoidant motives for individuals and partners and variability in daily relationship quality constructs?

Method

Participants

- We recruited 110 heterosexual couples ($N = 220$ individuals) through undergraduate FSHD and Communication classes at a large Southwestern university. Students were offered extra credit to participate with their partner, or they could recruit a couple to participate (parents, friends, roommates).
- Participants were at least 18 years old and in a romantic relationship for at least six weeks. Most were Caucasian (80.67%), 32.96% were married and 16.08% were cohabitating. We have diversity on both age (Mdn = 22, SD = 14.60, range: 18-81 years) and length of relationships in months (Mdn = 42, or -166.51 months (-14 years), SD = 252.25, range: 2 months-76 years).

Method

- Participants completed 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 (Totenhagen et al., 2013). Couples completed an average of 10.66 days.
- IVs:** We assessed individuals' daily approach ($\alpha = .80$; 3 items) and avoidance ($\alpha = .93$; 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 & Tofighi, 2007).
- DVs:** We assessed daily relationship quality of six scales with three items per scale: satisfaction ($\alpha = .93$), commitment ($\alpha = .91$), intimacy ($\alpha = .80$), trust ($\alpha = .91$), passion ($\alpha = .89$), and love ($\alpha = .87$).

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

Results Table

Table: Multilevel Models of Daily Satisfaction, Commitment, Intimacy, Passion, and Love Predicted by Daily Sacrifice Motives

	Daily Satisfaction		Daily Commitment		Daily Intimacy		Daily Passion		Daily Love	
	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)
Fixed effects										
Intercept	6.13***	(0.08)	6.53***	(0.07)	6.08***	(0.08)	5.33***	(0.14)	6.46***	(0.07)
Day	0.01***	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.01*	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Daily motivation of sacrifices and interactions with gender										
Actor effects										
Gender	-0.00	(0.07)	-0.04	(0.06)	-0.05	(0.08)	-0.03	(0.13)	-0.06	(0.06)
Approach motives	0.12***	(0.01)	0.08***	(0.01)	0.13	(0.02)	0.07*	(0.03)	0.08***	(0.01)
Avoidant motives	-0.4**	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.09***	(0.02)	-0.01	(0.01)
Gender * Approach motives	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.11*	(0.04)	0.05*	(0.02)
Gender * Avoidant motives	--	--	--	--	--	--	-0.10***	(0.03)	--	--
Partner effects										
Approach motives	0.02	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.03*	(0.01)	0.03	(0.02)	0.01	(0.01)
Avoidance motives	-0.03*	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)
Gender * Approach motives	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gender * Avoidant motives	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Variability effects										
Daily motivation of sacrifices and interactions with gender as predictors of residual error variance (variability)										
Actor effects										
Gender	0.04	(0.07)	0.35***	(0.07)	-0.22**	(0.07)	-0.26**	(0.07)	0.15*	(0.07)
Approach motives	-0.39***	(0.03)	-0.67***	(0.06)	-0.33***	(0.03)	-0.28***	(0.04)	-0.63***	(0.03)
Avoidant motives	0.23***	(0.02)	0.30***	(0.02)	0.15***	(0.03)	0.19***	(0.04)	0.29***	(0.03)
Gender * Approach motives	--	--	0.14*	(0.07)	--	--	0.29**	(0.06)	--	--
Gender * Avoidant motives	--	--	--	--	0.19***	(0.04)	0.17**	(0.05)	0.09*	(0.04)
Partner effects										
Approach motives	-0.20***	(0.03)	-0.12**	(0.04)	-0.15***	(0.03)	0.02	(0.03)	-0.15***	(0.03)
Avoidance motives	0.08*	(0.03)	0.15***	(0.02)	-0.03	(0.03)	-0.19***	(0.03)	0.17***	(0.02)
Gender * Approach motives	--	--	0.17**	(0.06)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gender * Avoidant motives	0.14***	(0.04)	--	--	0.17***	(0.04)	0.20***	(0.04)	--	--

Note. Actor effects indicate men's and women's effects on their own outcomes, and partner effects indicate men's and women's effects on their partner's outcomes. *** $p < .0001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. For each DV ($N = 110$ couples, 220 individuals). Control variables are not shown in the table, but results reflect patterns once control variables are included in the analyses. Gender is coded 0 = female and 1 = male; for interactions, the main effect is for women, and the interaction is the value to add to the main effect in order to obtain the effect for men. We trimmed non-significant interactions and marked them with a "--". As overall variability in each DV is a between-person factor, it was predicted with between-person sacrifice variables (trait sacrifice motives). Estimates of the effects of predictors of variability must be exponentiated before being added to the residual variance to get the estimate of the residual variance at a certain level of the predictor. We put in **bold font** the *bs* that were significant from the variability analyses.

Results Explained

- *Satisfaction:** For approach motives, we found that *individuals* experienced **lower** variability in satisfaction when they ($b = -0.39, p < .001$) and their partners ($b = -0.20, p < .001$) reported greater use of approach motives for sacrifice. For avoidance motives, across gender, we found that individuals experienced **higher** variability in satisfaction when they reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice ($b = 0.23, p < .001$). Specific to gender, both women ($b = 0.08, p < .05$) and men ($b = 0.08, p < .001$) experienced **higher** variability in satisfaction when their partners reported greater use of avoidant motives.
- *Commitment:** For approach motives, specific to gender, *both women* ($b = -0.67, p < .001$) and *men* ($b = -0.53, p < .001$) experienced **lower** variability in commitment when they reported greater use of approach motives as well as when their partners reported greater use of approach motives ($b = -0.12, p < .01$, for women and $b = -0.29, p < .001$, for men). For avoidance motives, we found that *individuals* experienced **higher** variability in commitment when they ($b = 0.30, p < .001$) and their partners ($b = 0.15, p < .001$) reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice.
- *Intimacy:** For approach motives, we found that *individuals* experienced **lower** variability in intimacy when they ($b = -0.33, p < .001$) and their partners ($b = -0.15, p < .001$) reported greater use of approach motives for sacrifice. For avoidance motives, we found that *women* experienced **higher** variability in intimacy when they reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice ($b = 0.15, p < .001$) but this effect was not significant for men ($b = 0.03, ns.$). For partner effects, we found that *men* experienced **higher** variability in intimacy when their partners reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice ($b = 0.15, p < .001$) but this effect was not significant for women ($b = -0.03, ns.$).

Results Explained, Cont...

- *Passion:** For approach motives, we found that both women ($b = -0.28, p < .001$) and men ($b = -0.48, p < .001$) experienced **lower** variability in passion when they reported greater use of approach motives for sacrifice. No partner effects were found significant. For avoidance motives, we found that *women* experienced **higher** variability in passion when they reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice ($b = 0.19, p < .001$) but this effect was not significant for men ($b = 0.02, ns.$). In terms of partner effects, we found that *women* experienced **lower** variability in passion when their partners reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice ($b = -0.19, p < .001$) but this effect was not significant for men ($b = 0.06, ns.$).
- *Love:** For approach motives of sacrifice, we found that *individuals* experienced **lower** variability in love when they ($b = -0.63, p < .001$) and their partners ($b = -0.15, p < .001$) reported greater use of approach motives for sacrifice. On the other hand, *individuals* experienced **higher** variability in love when their partners ($b = 0.17, p < .001$) reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice. For avoidance motives, we found that both women ($b = -0.29, p < .001$) and men ($b = 0.20, p < .001$) experienced **higher** variability in love when they reported greater use of avoidant motives for sacrifice.

Conclusions & Implications

- Summary:**
 - Individuals* experienced **lower** variability in Satisfaction, Intimacy, and Love when both they and their partners reported greater use of approach motives for sacrifice.
 - Individuals* experienced **higher** variability in Satisfaction and Commitment when they reported greater use of avoidance motives for sacrifice.
 - Individuals* experienced **higher** variability in Love and Commitment when their partners reported greater use of avoidance motives for sacrifice.
 - Both women and men* experienced **lower** variability in Commitment and Passion when they reported greater use of approach motives for sacrifice.
- *** *Women* experienced **lower** variability in Passion when their partners reported greater use of avoidance motives.
- These findings are significant in a number of ways:**
 - First, both types of sacrifice motives influence variability or within-person change over 14 days in relationship quality, extending previous research focused on fixed effects in relationship quality (e.g., Author citation, in press; Impett et al., 2008).
 - Second, we find patterns specific to both individuals and their partners (although more robust for approach than avoidant motives), illustrating the importance of including data from both members of the couple.
 - Third, the inclusion of gender was influential, as some results emerged across individuals, while others were specific to either men or women (latter more illustrative in results for avoidant motives).

For family therapists: Greater approach motives signify relational benefits, whereas greater avoidant motives signal relational difficulties. Thus, practitioners can work with both members of the couple to inquire as to why one or both members are using more avoidant motives. Practitioners can also help guide members toward greater motives of approach for sacrifice, which should offer less variability in relationship quality.

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