

For it is in giving that we receive: the benefits of sacrifice in relationships

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In "The Gift of the Magi," O. Henry tells the story of a young married couple, Jim and Della, who are too poor to buy each other presents for their first Christmas together. In acts of great sacrifice and love, they each secretly decide to sell their most prized possessions to buy one another gifts. Jim sells his pocket watch to buy Della a comb for her beautiful long hair, and Della sells her hair to buy Jim a chain for his watch. Ironically then, when they each receive their gifts, Jim no longer has the watch for which Della has bought her a comb, and Della no longer has the hair for which Jim has bought her a chain. At first glance, Jim and Della's decisions to give up the possessions they value the most might seem foolish; in the end, their gifts to each other have no use. But, the author is quick to explain that Jim and Della's decisions to sacrifice for each other are in fact very wise decisions, as expressing that we care about the people we love is a greater gift than any material possession.

In this tragic yet beautiful story, O. Henry makes a very insightful observation about the importance of being willing to give up or *sacrifice* things that we strongly desire in order to please our relationship partners. In fact, a growing literature on close relationships supports the moral of the "Gift of the Magi" story – that sacrifices made with the best interests of the partner in mind have the potential to benefit the giver, the recipient, and the relationship (see review by Impett & Gordon, 2008). This work highlights that in interdependent relationships in which partners' interests and outcomes are intertwined, sacrifice is both inevitable and necessary. Not all sacrifices are as major or quite as touching as the ones that Jim and Della made for each other. Instead, most sacrifices tend to be relatively mundane, such as going to your partner's favorite restaurant instead of your own, taking out the trash on your day off, or picking up your child from daycare when it's

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your partner's turn. But, when taken together, even these small, daily sacrifices can have a significant impact on overall relationship functioning (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005).

In this chapter, we review this growing literature on sacrifice, emphasizing the crucial role that sacrifice plays in optimal relationship development and maintenance. We should note at the outset that we have focused our discussion on sacrifices made in the context of adult romantic relationships because the majority of research on sacrifice has focused on romantic bonds. However, people give to and receive sacrifices from a variety of relationship partners, and developing an understanding of sacrifice within the context of other relationships such as friendship and parent-child relationships is an important endeavor, one that we return to at the end of this chapter. Our chapter is organized into five major sections. In the first section, we define sacrifice and review the ways in which sacrifice has been measured in psychological research. In the second section, we discuss the benefits that a willingness to sacrifice can bring to relationships. In the third section, we present a motivational account of sacrifice and review research showing that people's goals for sacrifice can powerfully impact their own well-being, as well as the quality and success of their relationships. In the fourth section, we review research showing that the way that people regulate the emotions that arise when making a sacrifice – in particular, the extent to which people express or suppress the emotions that they genuinely feel – is a critical element in satisfying relationships. In the fifth section, we conclude by discussing what we see as interesting but currently unanswered questions as well as promising directions for future research on sacrifice.

DEFINING TERMS: WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

Sacrifice has been defined as foregoing immediate self-interest in order to promote the well-being of a partner or a relationship (Impett & Gordon, 2008; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher & Cox, 1997). Sacrifices are most frequently discussed in the context of situations in which two people have personal interests that directly conflict with each other. As romantic relationships develop and partners' lives become more intertwined, situations of conflicting interests are inevitable. Romantic partners depend on each other to meet their needs in many domains, including finances, parenting responsibilities, emotional support, and sex (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Over time, and across all of these domains, it is unrealistic to assume that partners' desires or goals will always be perfectly aligned (Gere, Schimmack, Pinkus, & Lockwood, 2011). In some situations of conflicting interests, one partner's interests are directly at odds with the other's, making it difficult or impossible for both partners to get what they want. When these dilemmas arise in relationships, one or both partners will be required to make a sacrifice.

For example, in a situation in which one partner would like to go out dancing on a Friday evening, while the other partner wants to stay home and relax, their interests are directly at odds. If the couple still wants to spend time together, and in the absence of some sort of compromise or choosing to engage in another activity altogether, one partner will get his or her way, while the other partner will not: either the couple will stay at home and relax or go out for a night on the town.

The types of sacrifice that people can make for a romantic partner range in size from small, seemingly mundane sacrifices such as going to a party when you are not in the mood, to larger, more life-altering sacrifices such as learning a new language or choosing to move to a new city or country so that your partner can pursue his or her dream career (Impett & Gordon, 2008). Clearly, couples have more frequent opportunities to make small sacrifices on a day-to-day basis than they do to make large sacrifices that change their lives. Another important distinction is whether sacrifices are *active* or *passive* in nature (Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). When people make an active sacrifice, they do something that they do not particularly want to do either for or with their partner, such as cleaning the house or driving several hours with their partner in the car to run some errands. Passive sacrifices, on the other hand, involve forsaking a desirable activity, such as giving up an afternoon with friends to spend time with your partner's family (Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). In many cases, sacrifices contain both active and passive elements. That is, oftentimes, when people do something that they do not particularly want to do for their partner's sake, they are also giving up things they would like to do in the process.

The situations in which partners' interests conflict can take place in any domain in which partners depend on each other. Research has found that people report making sacrifices in a variety of domains. In terms of smaller, frequent sacrifices, the most commonly reported domains of sacrifice include sacrifices that have to do with friends and family (e.g., spending time with a partner's family or spending less time with one's own family), as well as those that have to do with recreational activities and social obligations (e.g., going to parties or events that one does not want to attend) (Impett et al., 2005). Other common domains of sacrifice include running errands for a partner, making sacrifices in the domains of school and work, making changes to one's health and lifestyle, and changing communication patterns in relationships. In addition to small, daily sacrifices, partners are also sometimes called upon to make more major, life-altering sacrifices. In a study of dating couples who were asked to discuss the most important or meaningful sacrifice that they had made for their partner over the course of their relationship (Impett et al., 2012), common sacrifices involved spending time alone or giving up a sense of personal freedom, sacrificing other interpersonal relationships, providing financial

support to one's partner, relocating to a new city or state, turning down potentially lucrative job offers in other geographical regions, limiting college choices to remain in the same area as their partner, and attempting to change personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, jealousy) to please one's partner.

BENEFITS: IS SACRIFICE GOOD FOR RELATIONSHIPS?

Sacrifice is not only necessary in long-term relationships, but it also has the potential to benefit and strengthen relationships. Willingness to engage in sacrifice has unique benefits for the recipient of the sacrifice, the giver of the sacrifice, and the relationship as a whole. The first and most obvious benefit of sacrifice is that – assuming that the recipient wants what the giver provides – the recipient will have his or her immediate needs met. To recall our earlier example of a couple in which the wife wants to go out dancing on Friday night while the husband wants to stay home and relax, if the wife agrees to make a sacrifice and stay in and relax instead of going out, the husband will have his immediate needs for sleep and relaxation met. In addition to receiving the tangible things that they want, recipients of sacrifice also receive less tangible, but arguably more important benefits. When people perceive that their partner is willing to give up their own self-interest to meet their needs, they know that their partner is invested in and cares about the relationship (Joel, Gordon, Impett, & Keltner, 2013; Wieselquist et al., 1999). Thus recipients of sacrifice receive two types of benefits. First, they receive tangible benefits from having their immediate needs met. Second, attribution theory suggests that recipients are also likely to infer that the sacrifice means that their partner is committed, invested, and concerned about their well-being (Kelley, 1973). As such, recipients of sacrifice may derive an added sense of security that comes from knowing that their partner cares about them and is responsive and willing to meet their needs.

Less obvious are the ways in which givers themselves benefit from sacrificing their interests for the good of their partner. Although people incur tangible costs when sacrificing to meet their partner's needs, such as giving up an afternoon with friends in order to run errands with their partner, they also benefit personally by being able to maintain views of themselves as good, responsive relationship partners (Holmes & Murray, 1996). In fact, on days when people report making small sacrifices, they report increased satisfaction with their relationship (Ruppel & Curran, 2012). Further, Reis, Maniaci, and Rogge (2014) found that on days when individuals reported more acts of compassionate love – acts during which one is concerned for a partner's well-being and responsive to his or her needs – their spouses reported higher marital quality.

In fact, sacrifice has been found to uniquely benefit romantic relationships in ways that other costly activities such as daily hassles with a partner do not. In one study, Clark and Grote (1998) found that people who reported engaging in more communal behaviors – such as sacrifice – for their romantic partners and friends experienced enhanced quality of relationships. In this same study, however, when people reported that they had incurred other personal costs that were not meant to benefit a partner, such as experiencing daily hassles, the quality of their friendships and romantic relationships actually declined. This work suggests that small, frequent sacrifices may be the most beneficial to romantic relationships, as they come at a relatively low cost, but also communicate caring concern for one's partner. People who have a strong communal motivation to meet their partners' needs and do so without expectation for reciprocation – that is, those who are high in communal strength (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004; see also review by Clark & Mills, 2012) – are especially likely to benefit from sacrifice. Research has shown that people who are high in communal strength tend to feel more positive emotions when making sacrifices for their romantic partner, as well as feel more appreciated by their partner and experience increased relationship satisfaction on days when they sacrifice for their partner, as compared to those lower in communal strength (Kogan et al., 2010). Research has also shown that an important reason why highly communal people experience sacrifice as highly rewarding is because they feel more authentic or “true” to themselves when they sacrifice to please their partner, as compared to those who are less communal (Kogan et al., 2010).

Relatedly, communal orientation – the motivation to meet other people's needs in general – has also been found to have benefits in terms of giving to others. For individuals who are high in communal orientation, giving to other people is a part of the self, and integral to one's self-concept. Research on communal orientation suggests that when communally oriented people give to close others, the personal benefits that they receive are largely unintentional. That is, while their primary motivation is to care for others, they often experience unanticipated rewards such as boosts in positive emotions from giving to others (Le, Impett, Kogan, Webster, & Cheng, 2013). Taken together, research on communal strength and communal orientation indicates that highly communal people experience these rewards of sacrifice and giving to others, not because they are motivated to receive them, but because giving up their own self-interest allows them to verify or authenticate an important part of who they are as giving people.

Greater willingness to sacrifice can also be beneficial for romantic relationships as a whole, as reported by both partners in the relationship. Several studies have found that people who are more willing to sacrifice for their romantic partner also report greater relationship satisfaction and stability (Van Lange, Agnew, Harnick, & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult, et al.,

1997). For example, in one study of married couples, people who reported a greater willingness to sacrifice important personal interests for the sake of their romantic partner at the beginning of the study were more satisfied and less likely to have broken up with their partner 1 ½ years later (Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997). Further, when people make costly daily sacrifices for their romantic partner, they tend to perceive their partner as more valuable on subsequent days in order to justify their greater investment in the relationship (Murray et al. 2009). These sacrifices, in turn, impact how the partner on the receiving end feels about the relationship as well. When people perceive that their partner is willing to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the relationship, they feel a sense of trust that their partner will be responsive to their needs and feel more committed to the relationship as a result (Joel et al., 2013; Wieselquist et al., 1999).

It is important to note that while research has generally shown that people who are more willing to sacrifice have higher relationship satisfaction than those who are less willing, not everyone benefits from an increased willingness to sacrifice. In particular, research has shown that people who are high in attachment anxiety – that is, people who tend to be preoccupied with concerns about being abandoned by their partner and have high needs for reassurance from their partner – do not tend to benefit from sacrifice as much as those who are relatively more securely attached (for a review of attachment research, see Simpson & Rholes, 2012). Research by Ruppel and Curran (2012) has shown that for individuals low in attachment anxiety (those who are relatively more securely attached), the more frequently they make small, daily sacrifices for a romantic partner, the more satisfied they feel with their relationship. However, for people who are relatively more anxiously attached, frequency of daily sacrifice was not associated with relationship satisfaction. The authors suggest that this might be because anxiously attached individuals are so preoccupied with their value to their partner that they might not be able to enjoy the benefits of sacrifice such as the positive feelings associated with meeting a partner's needs and the anticipation of reciprocity.

Sacrifice is often beneficial; however, this is not always the case – in fact sacrifice can even be quite costly – when taken to an extreme. The term *unmitigated communion* refers to the motivation to meet another person's needs to the exclusion of one's own needs (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998). People who are high in unmitigated communion are excessively concerned with meeting the needs of their romantic partner, so much so that they actually ignore their own needs in an attempt to meet the needs of their partner (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). Research has shown that unmitigated communion is associated with higher levels of depression and lower levels of subjective well-being (Aube, 2008). Thus, it seems likely that the willingness to sacrifice can be beneficial for romantic relationships as long as partners do not

completely lose sight of their own needs and desires. Although no research to date has specifically investigated the role of unmitigated communion in shaping people's willingness to sacrifice or their satisfaction with sacrifice, research stemming from interdependence theory suggests that relationships are the most successful when partners feel that their levels of commitment to the relationship are mutual. For example, in samples of both dating and married couples, Drigotas, Rusbult, and Verette (1999) found that people who perceived their levels of commitment and their partner's levels of commitment to be relatively more equal or mutual experienced enhanced relationship relative to those who perceived a greater discrepancy in commitment between the two partners. Further, recent research has shown that while people who are high in sexual communal strength – those who are highly motivated to meet their partner's sexual needs – are able to maintain sexual desire over time (Muise, Impett, Kogan, & Desmarais, 2013) and have romantic partners who are more satisfied and committed to the relationship (Muise & Impett, 2015), people high in unmitigated communion specific to the domain of sexuality do not reap these same rewards (Muise & Impett, 2014). Fortunately, research suggests that one-sided giving is more the exception than the rule in romantic relationships. In fact, in most romantic relationships, partners display mutual styles of giving – where they take both their own and their partner's needs into account when making decisions – although mutual sacrifice is less common in relationships where there is a power discrepancy between partners (Neff & Harter, 2002a). More research is needed to investigate the conditions under which the willingness to sacrifice can be taken too far, as well as the role of mutuality specifically in the domain of sacrifice in ongoing romantic relationships, a point to which we return at the end of the chapter.

MOTIVATION: WHY DO PEOPLE SACRIFICE?

Given that sacrifice is inherently costly, *why* do romantic partners choose to make sacrifices for one another? A growing body of work suggests that people sacrifice for a variety of reasons and that people's *motivations* for giving up their own self-interest shape the outcomes of sacrifice – and are sometimes more important than the simple act of sacrifice itself. Based on approach-avoidance motivational theory (see reviews by Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Elliot & Covington, 2001), people's motivations for sacrifice can be classified into two broad types of goals (see review by Impett & Gordon, 2008). When people sacrifice for approach goals, they focus on trying to bring about positive outcomes in their relationships, such as making their partner happy or increasing intimacy in their relationship. In contrast, when people sacrifice for avoidance goals, they focus on averting negative outcomes, such as feeling guilty, disappointing their partner, or

causing conflict in their relationship. For example, consider a man who decides to surprise his wife on their wedding anniversary by cooking her a romantic dinner after the couple has put their kids to bed. Perhaps he went out of his way because he is excited about their anniversary and wants to show his wife how much he loves and appreciates her. Alternatively, he could have forgotten their anniversary last year and wanted to prevent his wife from feeling hurt or let down again. In both of these examples, the man is engaging in the same behaviors (i.e., surprising his wife, preparing a nice dinner), yet he is motivated by two different sorts of goals – goals which research has shown have important implications for the happiness and success of relationships (see review by Gable & Impett, 2012).

In an experience sampling study of individuals in dating relationships who provided reports of daily sacrifices each day for 14 consecutive days, on days when people sacrificed for approach goals such as to make their partner happy or to increase intimacy in the relationship, they experienced boosts in positive emotions and increases in relationship quality (Impett et al., 2005). In contrast, on days when they sacrificed to avoid negative outcomes such as disappointing their partner, feeling guilty, or causing tension in the relationship, they experienced increased negative emotions and relationship conflict. More strikingly, the extent to which people sacrificed for approach versus avoidance goals predicted the success and happiness of relationships over time. Specifically, the more that people sacrificed for approach goals over the course of the 2-week diary study, the more satisfied they were and the more likely they were to still be together with their romantic partner 1 month later. In contrast, the more people sacrificed for avoidance goals, the less satisfied they felt and the more likely they were to have broken up with their partner 1 month later. Thus, the sacrifices that partners made had different consequences depending on whether they were made for approach goals, such as wanting to communicate caring concern for the partner, or for avoidance goals, such as wanting to prevent an argument.

People's goals for sacrifice not only shape their own experiences, but also shape the recipients' experiences as well. In another daily experience study of both members of romantic couples, sacrifice goals predicted increased positive emotions and relationship quality for the recipient of sacrifice, whereas avoidance goals predicted increased negative emotions (Impett, Gere, Kogan, Gordon, & Keltner, 2013). Again in this study, sacrifice goals were associated with the long-term success of relationships, as those who made more approach-motivated sacrifices during the course of the diary study reported greater satisfaction, as did their romantic partners, at a 3-month follow-up, whereas those who made more avoidance-motivated sacrifices and their partners reported less relationship satisfaction and closeness, and had more thoughts about breaking

up with their partner 3 months later. Therefore, it is not simply whether or not people sacrifice or the overall frequency of sacrifice that is important for maintaining relationship quality; people's reasons for sacrifice matter as well.

There are important individual differences that shape people's goals for making a sacrifice for their romantic partner. Whereas individuals who are more anxiously attached – those who are fearful of losing their romantic partner – tend to be more willing to sacrifice both for approach and for avoidance goals, people who are more avoidantly attached – those who are more fearful of becoming dependent on their romantic partner – tend to make fewer approach-and more avoidance-motivated sacrifices (Impett & Gordon, 2010). Given that avoidance-motivated sacrifices tend not to provide the same benefits as those made for approach goals, this research suggests that people who are either anxiously or avoidantly attached are less likely than those who are more relatively more securely attached to reap all the potential rewards of sacrificing for a romantic partner.

Why does sacrificing to please one's partner or create intimacy in relationships benefit relationships while sacrificing to avoid conflict seems to ironically backfire? Recent research has begun to shed light on some of the reasons why people's motivations for sacrifice matter. Thus far, research suggests the importance of two mechanisms: the emotions that people feel when they sacrifice in pursuit of different goals and people's self-reported feelings of authenticity. First, regarding the role of emotions, research has shown that the emotions that people experience are a critical reason why approach sacrifice is so beneficial and why avoidance sacrifice can be so costly. The more frequently people sacrifice for approach goals such as to make their partner happy, the greater positive emotions, such as excitement and joy, they tend to experience, and in turn, both partners report feeling more satisfied with their relationship (Impett et al., 2005; Impett et al., 2013). In contrast, the more frequently people sacrifice for avoidance goals such as to avoid conflict or a partner's disappointment, the greater negative emotions, such as frustration and resentment, they tend to experience, and these negative emotions in turn have been shown to diminish both partners' satisfaction and ironically lead to even more conflict in the relationship (Impett et al., 2013). The mediating role of emotions has been demonstrated when partners make sacrifices for each other in the course of daily life and in the laboratory when partners discuss major sacrifices that they have made for each other, demonstrating that emotional experience plays an important role in both smaller, daily sacrifices as well as in more consequential sacrifices. No research to date has looked at the possible moderating role of successfully versus unsuccessfully meeting the goals that people strive to pursue when they make a sacrifice for a partner on the emotions felt during a sacrifice. For example, if a woman sacrifices to avoid conflict with her boyfriend and

successfully prevents conflict from ensuing, she might feel frustrated while making the sacrifice, but may experience a sense of relief from successfully meeting her goal.

In addition to emotional experience, the extent to which people feel that they have been genuine or authentic when making a sacrifice for their partner is another important mechanism of the link between sacrifice goals and personal and interpersonal outcomes. Sometimes people feel authentic or "true" to themselves when they sacrifice their self-interest for a romantic partner (Impett et al., 2012; Kogan et al., 2010). Other times, however, people feel as though they are putting on a "false face" or acting disingenuously when they sacrifice or give up their own interests (Neff & Harter, 2002b). Several studies combining experimental, cross sectional, and daily experience methods have shown that when people sacrifice for approach goals, they experience greater feelings of authenticity, and in turn, they experience greater personal well-being and higher quality relationships (Impett, Javam, Le, Asyabi-Eshghi, & Kogan, 2013). In contrast, when people sacrifice to avoid negative outcomes, they often feel that they have been less authentic, and these decreased feelings of genuineness seem to detract from their well-being and the quality of their relationships.

While sacrificing to pursue positive outcomes tends to feel more authentic than doing so to avoid negative outcomes, avoidance-motivated sacrifice does not *always* feel inauthentic. Recent research has shown there are particular people who feel that they are being relatively genuine when they sacrifice for avoidance goals. In particular, people who construe the self as highly interconnected with close others – those with an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) – do not experience declines in authenticity when they sacrifice to pursue avoidance goals such as preventing their partner's disappointment or warding off conflict in their relationship (Impett, Le, Asyabi-Eshghi, Day, & Kogan, 2013). People with an interdependent self-construal are also buffered against drops in emotional well-being and relationship quality when they sacrifice for avoidance goals. Thus, it seems likely 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, & Sheldon, 2001). Future research is needed to identify other important boundary conditions of the effects of approach and avoidance sacrifice goals on personal and interpersonal outcomes.

EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION: HOW DO WE DEAL WITH OUR EMOTIONS WHEN WE SACRIFICE?

Despite the fact that many people who sacrifice for their romantic partners reap unintended rewards, they also incur some costs by choosing to give up

their own self-interest. As such, not all sacrifices are experienced as inherently joyful. In some cases, people experience negative emotions such as feelings of irritation, resentment, or anger when they sacrifice for their partner. For example, consider a young couple furnishing their first home together. One partner might be particularly excited about shopping for all of the necessities for their new home, while the other might be less than enthused. If the less enthusiastic partner agrees to shop all weekend for furniture, it is possible that he or she will experience negative emotions, such as frustration or boredom at some point from engaging in an undesired activity for an extended period of time. What should people do with the negative emotions that might arise when they do something they are not particularly excited about? Should they express their emotions openly and honestly to their partner or keep them to themselves? Similarly, should people fake or feign interest in something that their partner wants to do if they are not really "feeling it"?

To date, research has focused primarily on one emotion regulation strategy: emotional suppression, defined as attempting to inhibit or conceal the emotions that people experience (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). In some ways, suppressing one's emotions could be seen as an intuitive way to manage situations of conflicting interests in relationships. The partner who is reluctant to spend the weekend shopping for furniture might try to conceal their disinterest or irritation in an attempt to avoid hurting their partner's feelings. However, a growing body of work on emotion regulation has shown that the suppression of emotions is typically quite costly for both partners in relationships (see review by English, John, & Gross, 2013). For example, people who report that they habitually suppress their emotions tend to experience less positive and more negative emotions in general (Gross & John, 2003), feel less authentic, and show poorer social functioning (John & Gross, 2004; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009) than those who are less inclined to suppress their emotions.

Similar costs to suppression have been documented in the context of sacrifice. For example, in a study in which couples discussed major sacrifices that they had made for each other over the course of their relationship, increased suppression was associated with decreased authenticity, and in turn with more negative emotions and less positive emotions (Impett et al., 2012). In a related line of work, researchers have shown that people who consistently self-conceal – or hide personal information from their romantic partner – tend to have lower relationship satisfaction and commitment as a result of diminished feelings of autonomy in their relationships. Further, on days when people self-conceal more in their romantic relationships, they feel that their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are met to a lesser degree than on days with less self-concealment, and in turn they tend to feel lower relationship satisfaction and commitment (Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012). Similarly, Impett et al. (2012) also found that suppressing emotions

when making daily sacrifices for a romantic partner is costly for both partners in the relationship. In a daily experience study, on days when people suppressed their emotions when sacrificing their self-interest for their romantic partner, both partners reported decreased emotional well-being and relationship quality. The effects of suppression on both partners' outcomes were mediated by authenticity, suggesting that when people suppress their emotions when making a sacrifice for the good of the relationship, they feel less authentic, and these decreased feelings of genuineness or authenticity dampen both partners' well-being and feelings about the relationship. In this study, 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 (Impett et al., 2012). Taken together, the results of these studies on suppression and self-concealment suggest that when people are actively trying to conceal their feelings from their partner, they feel that they are not being authentic, or true to themselves, which in turn detracts from both partners' emotional experiences and feelings about the relationship.

Additional research suggests that when one partner suppresses their emotions, to a certain extent, their romantic partner can detect that they are not being genuine and, as a result, they experience decreases in emotional well-being and relationship quality. In one study, the more people reported suppressing their emotions – both when discussing an important sacrifice that they had made for their partner in the lab and when making sacrifices in daily life – the more their romantic partner indicated that they were indeed suppressing their emotions (Impett, Le, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2014). In other words, suppression was to a certain extent detectable, perhaps due to the fact that there are some nonverbal indicators of suppression identified in previous research such as compromised responsiveness and appearing more withdrawn and hostile (Butler et al., 2003; Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007) that make suppression detectable. Further, the more people thought their partner suppressed their emotions, the less authentic they perceived them to be, and in turn, perceived partner inauthenticity during sacrifice was associated with poorer personal well-being and relationship quality (Impett, Le et al., 2014).

Suppression is not always costly, however. Recent research has shown that people with an interdependent self-construal actually experience benefits when suppressing negative emotions when sacrificing their self-interest for a romantic partner. In a daily experience study of individuals in dating relationships, on days when interdependent people suppressed negative emotions when making a sacrifice for their romantic partner, they actually felt *more* authentic, and experienced increased emotional well-being and higher quality relationships as a result (Le & Impett, 2013). In contrast, those who had a less interdependent sense of self experienced the typical negative

consequences of suppression, including decreased authenticity, poorer emotional well-being, and lower quality relationships. This study suggests that suppression during sacrifice is not always negative, and in fact for some people, it may have positive consequences, likely because suppressing negative emotions helps highly interdependent people maintain the harmony in their close relationships that they so highly value. Future research is needed to replicate these findings and investigate the effects of suppressing emotions during sacrifice on the romantic partners of people who are highly interdependent. It is possible that the partners of highly interdependent people might experience benefits comparable to the benefits experienced by the partner who suppresses his or her emotions. Alternatively, it is possible that being in a relationship with a partner who suppresses his or her emotions when sacrificing for the good of the relationship is almost always costly, regardless of how the giver construes themselves in social interactions with others. Research is needed to test these two possibilities.

It is important to note that emotional suppression is only one of many emotion regulation strategies that partners may use when they experience unpleasant emotions when making a sacrifice. Another strategy that we think has the potential to help people deal with negative emotions in a healthier way than suppression is cognitive reappraisal, defined as attempts to reconstrue an emotionally arousing situation in a non-emotional way (Gross, 2002). For example, if one partner is experiencing boredom or frustration while furniture shopping, he or she could reconstrue the situation as a chance to spend time with their partner, or an opportunity to make their partner feel loved, rather than a waste of their time. Future research should investigate different emotion regulation strategies in addition to suppression to determine how partners can best manage the negative emotions that may arise during sacrifice.

TAKING STOCK: WHERE HAVE WE BEEN AND WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

Given that research on sacrifice has grown tremendously in recent years, the time is ripe to take stock of important questions that have yet to be answered and to look toward the future of research on sacrifice. In the last section of our chapter, we highlight five key areas that we see as places of growth in research on sacrifice including: research on the decision making processes that people engage in when deciding whether or not to sacrifice for a romantic partner; research on the importance of mutuality of sacrifice between partners; research that sheds light on the question regarding whether the decision to sacrifice represents an automatic impulse or more controlled decision; research on how people's feelings about sacrifice might shift over the time from before they make decisions until after the

consequences of those decisions have played out; and research on sacrifice in other types of relationships besides romantic relationships such as the relationship between parents and their children.

First, sacrifices sometimes involve quite complex decision making processes that we as relationship scientists know surprisingly little about (see review by Joel, MacDonald, & Plaks, 2013). What kinds of individual and relational factors do people take into account when they make decisions about whether they will pursue their self-interests versus sacrifice for the good of their relationship? We would argue that when people are faced with decisions about whether or not to sacrifice, they are likely to weigh the relevant costs and benefits – both to themselves and to their romantic partner – when making these important decisions. But *what are* the particular costs and benefits that people weigh when they make decisions that hold great importance and perhaps even symbolic value in their relationship? How does the decision making process impact the quality of people's relationships? Preliminary research suggests that people who are high in communal strength make decisions in giving, prosocial ways that ultimately benefit both partners in the relationship, as compared to those who are less communal. For example, several studies from our lab (Day & Impett, 2015) suggest that when people contemplate making sacrifices for their romantic partner, those who are more communally motivated tend to perceive engaging in sacrifice as less costly to the self and more beneficial to their partner. In turn, this decreased focus on the self and increased focus on the partner leads people to be more willing to sacrifice as well as to feel more satisfied with their relationships. In another set of studies in our lab in the domain of sexuality (Day, Muise, Joel, & Impett, 2015), we have found that when people experience situations in which their partner has a high desire for sex but they are less than enthused, highly communally oriented people react to these desire-discrepant situations in ways that enrich rather than detract from the quality of their relationship. In particular, they report that they are less likely than people who are low in communal motivation to be deterred by the costs of sex (e.g., losing time spent sleeping, relaxing, or doing other things). Instead, they are even more motivated by the ways that they can benefit their partner (e.g., making their partner feel desired and valued, creating intimacy in the relationship). Although these findings await replication, they suggest that there are important individual differences that shape how people make decisions about sacrifice – both in general and in the domain of sexuality – and that the ways in which people consider the costs and benefits of sacrifice shape people's emotional experiences and the quality of their romantic relationships.

A second key direction for future work concerns identifying the circumstances under which decisions to sacrifice are automatic versus controlled in nature. Interdependence theorists assert that when partners find

themselves in situations of conflicting interests, one or both partners will undergo a *transformation* of their initial self-interested motives into more prosocial motives to benefit their partner (Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). In addition, interdependence theorists have long suggested that the transformation process can happen quite quickly and automatically (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). For example, one set of studies has shown that people who are low in trait self-control show a greater willingness to sacrifice (Righetti, Finkenauer, & Finkel, 2013), especially if they are highly communal. This work suggests that some people have a gut instinct to act prosocially, but then later, self-control sets in and allows people to override their automatic inclination to give to others to focus more on what may be best for themselves. This set of studies is also consistent with more recent work on prosocial emotions (Keltner, Kogan, Piff, & Saturn, 2014; Rand, Greene, & Nowak, 2012), which suggests that humans might be inherently motivated to be kind, to act prosocially, and to care for others (Keltner, 2009). On the other hand, though, two additional sets of studies out of independent labs have shown that people who have higher trait self-control are more willing to make sacrifices in romantic relationships than those with lower self-control, suggesting that gut-level impulses to act based on self-interest might need to be overridden in a controlled and effortful manner in order for people to sacrifice (Findley, Carvallo & Bartak, 2014; Pronk & Karremans, 2014).

How can we make sense of these conflicting findings in this literature on self-control and sacrifice? Interestingly, whereas the studies conducted by Righetti et al. (2013) focused on people's willingness to make quite small, oftentimes seemingly mundane sacrifices, the studies conducted by Findley et al. (2014) and one of the studies by Pronk and Karremans (2014) focused on more major sacrifices such as moving across the country away from one's own friends and family. It is possible that when people are called upon to sacrifice something relatively minor for a close, romantic partner, their first instinct might be to act prosocially, as these kinds of sacrifices happen quite frequently and partners might not need to think much about whether they will make a low-cost sacrifice in order to benefit their partner. However, during the less frequent but likely more emotionally charged times when people are called upon to make large, even life-altering sacrifices, their gut instinct might be to act based on their own self-interest, but then with time and cognitive effort, they might be able to override these self-oriented motivations and take broader relationship factors into consideration. It will be important for future research to unpack these conflicting findings, as well as situate them in the broader literature on altruism and helping.

A third key area that is ripe for future research has to do with how people's feelings about sacrifice might change over the course of time. Most of the existing research on sacrifice has examined how people feel about

sacrifices *after* they have been made. Much less research has investigated how people feel about sacrifices *before* they are made, or looked at potential changes in people's feelings about sacrifices over time. An important feature of large, costly sacrifices is that they typically involve people having a great deal of lead time in which to make decisions about whether or not to sacrifice. Hence, for costly behaviors, such as moving to a new city so that one's partner can take a better job, people are challenged to make decisions in the distant future based on thoughts and feelings which may change significantly as the event approaches. Work in our lab suggests that as the time for making a major sacrifice for one's partner draws near, people view sacrifices as more costly to the self than when they originally made the decision to sacrifice (Day, Asyabi-Eshghi & Impett, 2015). These findings fit with existing literature on temporal construal theory showing that temporal proximity heightens people's sensitivity to potential obstacles and the possibility of negative outcomes (Liberman & Trope, 1998). To the extent that people's romantic partners are able to pick up on these changing feelings, they may view these "changes of heart" as a potential breach of their partner's earlier agreements or promises. Consistent with this possibility, research has shown that people oftentimes fail to keep promises that they have made to their romantic partner because they promise too ambitiously and do not think about the concrete consequences and costs of what these promises entail when they first make them (Peetz & Kammrath, 2011). In turn, this research shows that people report being less satisfied with their relationships when their partners break the promises that they have made too ambitiously in the past. Based on this work, in future research, it will be important to examine how both the giver and the recipient's feelings about sacrifice and their relationship potentially change over the course of time.

A fourth interesting direction that researchers could take is bettering our understanding of the importance of mutuality of sacrifice in romantic relationships. To date, much of the research on sacrifice has been conducted from the perspective of one romantic partner, typically the person who sacrifices as opposed to the recipient (see Impett, Gere, Kogan, Gordon, & Keltner, 2014 for an exception). Interdependence theory predicts that couples will reap the most benefits when both romantic partners are willing to sacrifice for each other; however, when one partner defects and there is not a mutual give-and-take in relationships, it is possible that both partners will experience fewer benefits (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978). Indeed, research on commitment has shown that when feelings of commitment are not mutual in relationships, partners experience poorer dyadic adjustment (Drigotas et al., 1999). Research that includes data from both members of romantic dyads is needed to determine if there are optimal levels of willingness to sacrifice across partners.

Finally, future research on sacrifice should move beyond what has been an almost exclusive focus on romantic relationships. As we mentioned at the

outset of the chapter, the overwhelming majority of research on sacrifice has focused on romantic relationships including dating relationships and marriage. Given that romantic relationships are arguably one of our strongest and most important communal bonds (Clark & Mills, 2012), it is not surprising that research has focused on understanding sacrifice in this context. However, sacrifice is common in other types of relationships, such as among family members and close friends. Perhaps no other relationship involves greater sacrifice than the relationship between parents and their children. In parent-child relationships, sacrifice is essential, and unlike in most adult close relationships, is imbalanced in nature, with care being given completely unilaterally from parent to child, at least in the early parenting years. In some new research on parenting in our lab, we have found that parents who are communally motivated to meet their child's needs experience caring for their children – even when it comes at some cost to the self – as highly rewarding (Le & Impett, 2015). This work also shows that one important reason why communal parents reap benefits is because they feel more authentic when responsively meeting their child's needs. In short, giving to their children is inherently rewarding for communally motivated parents. It will be particularly interesting for future work to examine the sacrifices that adult children make for their parents as they enter older adulthood and require more assistance and care. This new work on parenting highlights the importance of examining the role of sacrifice in other types of relationships beyond romantic relationships.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although making sacrifices for a romantic partner is inherently costly to the self, as we hope to have shown in this chapter, the benefits of sacrificing for a romantic partner frequently outweigh the costs of doing so. Nearly two decades of research on sacrifice corroborate the moral of the "Gift of the Magi" story and show that the willingness to sacrifice for a romantic partner, particularly when those sacrifices are motivated by a desire to make one's partner happy, is beneficial for both partners in the relationship. This research suggests that a critical way to promote optimally functioning and flourishing romantic relationships is for people to focus on what they can give to their partner, rather than what they can receive or get in return. In this chapter, we hope to have shown that, in the context of ongoing close relationships, it is in giving that we truly receive.

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