RAW lab
Relationships and Well-Being Lab

Taking stock of reality: Biased perceptions of the costs of romantic partners' sacrifices

How might sacrificing your own self-interest for the benefit of a relationship bias yours or your partner's perceptions of the costs and benefits of the sacrifice?

We conducted two studies

In one study, 125 romantic couples came to the lab where they discussed a current situation of conflictual interest. Both partners reported on how costly theirs and their partner's sacrifice would be to resolve the conflict. They also reported on their mood and satisfaction with the relationship.

Then 6-times daily for 8 days, they reported whether a sacrifice occurred, and if so, how costly theirs or their partner's sacrifice was as well as their current mood and relationship satisfaction.

In another study, 775 romantically involved individuals either imagined themselves, their partner, or a stranger (control condition) making a sacrifice and rated how costly and beneficial they believed the sacrifice would be. They also rated what they thought the sacrificer's mood and relationship satisfaction would be after making the sacrifice.

What we found

Across the studies, we found that sacrificers and their partners typically viewed the costs and benefits of sacrifices differently.

In particular, sacrificers underestimated their personal costs and overestimated the benefits of their sacrifices.

And the more that sacrificers held these biases, they also reported being in a better mood and more satisfied with their relationship after a sacrifice.
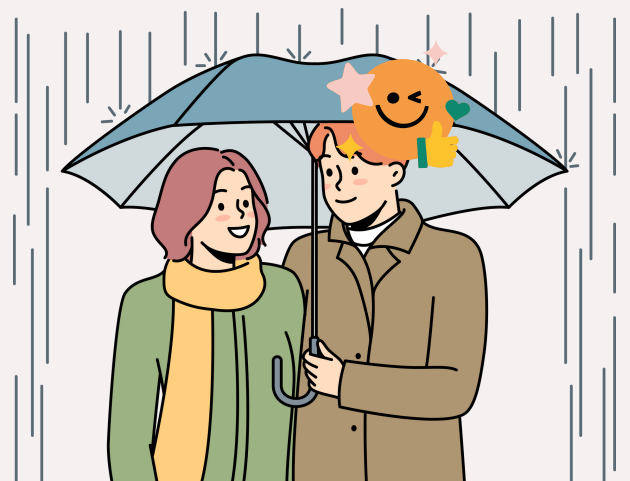
In Short

It appears that people often underestimate the costs of their sacrifice in relationships, which may help them feel better and more satisfied with their relationship when giving up their own goals and preferences for the relationship.

Visserman, M. L., Righetti, F., Impett, E. A., Muise, A., Joel, S., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2021). Taking stock of reality: Biased perceptions of the costs of romantic partners' sacrifice. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 12*, 54-62.