

TRUST AND THE SUPPRESSION OF EMOTIONS DURING SACRIFICE IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

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Previous research has found that some people suppress their emotions when making a sacrifice for their relationship partner—and that this can reduce relationship satisfaction. We suggest that trust in one's partner determines who suppresses their emotions during a sacrifice. We hypothesize that individuals with low, compared to high, trust in their partners will be more likely to suppress their emotions when they sacrifice for their partner—and that this, in turn, will reduce satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice, and will subsequently affect personal and relational outcomes (e.g., mood and relationship satisfaction, respectively). Romantic couples ($N = 130$) participated in an experience sampling study that assessed emotional suppression immediately after making a sacrifice for their partner in their daily lives. Results showed that trust negatively related to emotional suppression when making a sacrifice. Moreover, we found that emotional suppression led to lower satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice, which in turn resulted in a lower relationship satisfaction (and a negative mood). We discuss the importance of trust in emotion regulation in close relationships and engaging in behaviors that prevent (or confront) relationship conflict.

Keywords: trust; sacrifice; emotion; emotion regulation; close relationships

In close relationships people can often find that their personal interests are at odds with what is best for each other and what is best for their relationship (Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997). For example, while one part-

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ner may strongly prefer to visit their family on the weekend, the other partner may prefer to spend the weekend with friends. Nonetheless, both partners may strongly prefer to do something together rather than doing separate activities. In such situations one partner may have to sacrifice their own personal interests for what is best for their relationship. Recent research has found that people frequently give up personal benefits to maintain close relationships, such as reducing time with friends, spending less money on a hobby, and even moving to a new location (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). Sacrifice in close relationships has been found to have some positive influences on maintaining healthy, strong, and close relationships. Sacrifice can build trust (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Agnew, & Foster, 1999), enhance commitment (Van Lange et al., 1997), and sometimes promote relationship satisfaction (Impett et al., 2005). However, sacrifice is not always beneficial for the individual and the relationship (Impett et al., 2005). For example, sacrificing for avoidance motives is associated with lower personal and relational well-being (Impett et al., 2005), and costly and difficult sacrifices are associated with lower relationship satisfaction (e.g., Ruppel & Curran, 2012; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007).

Situations in which the partners' preferences do not correspond are not always easy to deal with and they have the potential to elicit strong emotional responses. Giving up personal preferences and goals for one's partner can give rise to anger, disappointment, and frustration. In those circumstances, some people tend to engage in emotional suppression and conceal their emotions from their partners to avoid conflict (Impett et al., 2012). When people suppress their emotions during a sacrifice, they experience lower personal and relationship well-being (Impett et al., 2012; Impett, Le, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2014; Le & Impett, 2013). While previous research has repeatedly shown the negative intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of emotion suppression (Gross, 2002; Impett et al., 2012), no research has taken the important step to understand which factors influence emotional suppression during sacrifice and why this leads to reduced personal and relationship well-being. Here we suggest that trust may be a key reason why people suppress emotions when sacrificing and that this can have important implications for personal and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, we examine whether individuals with low, compared to high, trust in their partner increase the suppression of emotions during situations of sacrifice and whether this reduces satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice, which can lower relationship satisfaction and a positive mood.

TRUST AND EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION DURING SACRIFICE

Trust is a belief that one's partner cares about one's interests and will behave in a benevolent and responsive manner (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Generally speaking, trust has myriad benefits for establishing and maintaining close relationships (Holmes, 2004; Simpson, 2007a, 2007b). Trust is an especially important determinant of behavior in situations that contain a conflict of interests, such as in

situations when people decide (or not) to sacrifice for their partner (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012; Yamagishi, 2011). For example, previous research has found that people with high trust in their partners are more willing to sacrifice in close relationships, compared to people who don't trust their partner (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Yet, people may decide to sacrifice for numerous reasons besides trust, such as to maintain their relationship (i.e., commitment) or because they are concerned about their partner's well-being (Powell & Van Vugt, 2003; Van Lange, Agnew, Harink, & Steemers, 1997).

When people who have low trust in their partner do decide to sacrifice, their low levels of trust may influence their response to having made a sacrifice. Specifically, we propose that trust might influence the communication of emotions during sacrifice. Because expressing emotions may reveal that people feel troubled or inconvenienced by the sacrifice, some people might engage in emotional suppression to avoid conflict (Impett et al., 2012). However, people who trust their partners, as compared to people who distrust their partners, might feel less vulnerable entering situations of conflict with them because they believe that their partners will be caring and responsive to their needs. When people initiate conflict by expressing negative emotions, such as anger or frustration for having made a sacrifice, the people who have high trust in their partners may expect constructive pro-relationship responses from their partners. However, people who don't trust their partners may feel more vulnerable expressing such emotions that may ignite conflict in the relationship and unresponsiveness from their partner. As indirect evidence in support of this hypothesis, previous research has found that people with avoidant attachment styles, who are primarily characterized by low trust in their partners, tend to often suppress their emotions in their relationships (Gross & John, 2003). Moreover, avoidant attachment has been shown to moderate the relation between sacrifice and relationship satisfaction—with sacrifice leading to lower relationship satisfaction for people with high avoidant attachment styles (Ruppel & Curran, 2012).

Furthermore, research outside of close relationships (e.g., in negotiations and organizations) has found that individuals with low trust in others tend not to share information with others in situations that involve a conflict of interest (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & MacLendon, 2003; Boss, 1978; Butler, 1995, 1999). Indeed, emotional expressions can signal a lot of information in a social interaction (e.g., goals, needs, and partner expectations), information that someone might not want to share (Van Kleef, 2009). Therefore, expressing emotions, similar to knowledge sharing during a negotiation, can make one vulnerable to being exploited by a partner. Yet, previous work has primarily examined the role of trust in promoting information or knowledge sharing in situations of conflict in negotiations or organizations, and not in close relationships. We are the first, to our knowledge, to test the hypothesis that trust will negatively relate to emotional suppression (i.e., not sharing information about how one feels) when people decide to sacrifice for their partner. That is, in the current work, we hypothesize that individuals with low, compared to high,

trust in their partner will be more likely to suppress their emotions when making a sacrifice.

EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION SOURS SACRIFICE AND PERSONAL AND RELATIONSHIP WELL-BEING

Suppressing emotions during sacrifice could affect how people feel about their sacrifice which, in turn, can have consequences for their personal and relationship well-being. Suppressing emotions during sacrifice can induce people to feel less satisfied with the sacrifice for at least two reasons. First, suppressing emotions has usually negative consequences on the emotional experience of the individual (John & Gross, 2004). When people suppress negative emotions, as compared to when they can freely display them, they tend to experience greater negative arousal and greater increase in sympathetic activation of the cardiovascular system, as indicated by finger temperature, finger pulse amplitude, and pulse transit times from the finger to the ear (Gross & Levenson, 1997). Furthermore, engaging in suppression of negative emotions increases the experience of those emotions. For example, when people watched a sad film and were instructed to suppress their emotions, they self-reported greater negative emotions during and after the film (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006). Additionally, people who chronically suppress their emotions tend to self-report greater negative emotions, compared to individuals who less frequently employ this form of emotion regulation (Gross & John, 2003). For these reasons, suppressing emotions about a sacrifice may lead people to feel more negative (and so less satisfied) about their sacrifice.

Second, interpersonal dynamics may also account for why emotional suppression can lower satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice. People who suppress their emotions do not communicate their needs and expectations to their partner, preventing their partner from perceiving the sacrifice. This, in turn, could elicit less social support, less expressed gratitude, and reduced reciprocity. For example, expressed anger can encourage a partner to become more responsive toward one's needs (Sell, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2009). However, if an individual does not express anger, the partner may not recalibrate his concern for the individual's well-being. Indeed, previous research has found that emotion suppression elicits less support from others (Gross & John, 2003). Thus, individuals who suppress their emotions may feel less satisfied with their sacrifice because they fear that their partner will not appreciate and reciprocate their sacrifice. Finally, when people are not satisfied with their sacrifice they can feel worse about their relationship because they had to incur costs and losses because of their partner. Not feeling satisfied about having sacrificed could also potentially reduce the individual's well-being and lower his or her positive mood.

Previous research has highlighted that low levels of trust can reduce relationship satisfaction (Rempel et al., 1985) and individual outcomes, such as health and well-being (Schneider, Konijn, Righetti, & Rusbult, 2011). In the current work we

will investigate how low trust reduces individual and relationship well-being in the context of sacrifice. Specifically, we will test a three-path mediation model to examine whether trust negatively affects emotional suppression during sacrifice, which will affect satisfaction with the sacrifice, which, in turn will affect relationship satisfaction and mood. Therefore, we will test the hypothesis that the positive relation between trust and relationship satisfaction and mood after sacrificing will be mediated by emotional suppression during sacrifice and by satisfaction with the outcome of having sacrificed for their partner.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

To test our hypotheses we used an experience sampling procedure in a sample of 130 romantic couples. The experience sampling procedure is a superior method to examine the dynamics of sacrifice in close relationships because questions about the event are assessed immediately after, or close to, its occurrence. Three parts were involved in this study: (1) a lab intake, (2) an 8-day experience sampling procedure, and (3) an 8-day diary procedure. Only the data from the lab intake and experience sampling procedure are relevant for the current research question. We measured trust in the partner during an intake procedure. After the intake procedure, couples responded to multiple text messages throughout the day asking them if they had encountered a situation of sacrifice for their partner (or not). If participants reported making a sacrifice for their partner, then they were asked several follow-up questions about the sacrifice, including the extent to which they suppressed their emotions when making the sacrifice and how satisfied they were with the outcome of the sacrifice.

An experience sampling method has several advantages to traditional laboratory methods when doing research on the relation between trust and sacrifice in close relationships. Experience sampling is a labor-intensive field method that allows researchers to learn about what people are doing, thinking, and feeling at the moment of making a sacrifice in their daily lives (e.g., Barrett & Barrett, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi & Larsen, 1987; Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2007). One major advantage of the method is its high ecological validity: Participants are asked to report about the sacrifice when and where the sacrifice takes place. This method allows us to tap into real-world incidents of trust and sacrifice as they unfold in everyday life. A second advantage is that each participant is sampled multiple times, so, in some sense, the method is akin to a powerful within-participants design. Lastly, this approach can measure responses to situations of sacrifice immediately following that sacrifice, which can eliminate specific response biases associated with laboratory research on sacrifice (e.g., recall bias; Scollon, Kim-Prieto, & Diener, 2003).

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 130 couples (260 individuals) who were recruited via advertisements on social media (e.g., Facebook), various Internet forums, and personal approach. All participants were recruited in the Netherlands and were required to speak fluent Dutch to participate. Participants were eligible to the study if they were together for longer than 4 months, if they were childless (to avoid confounding sacrifices for the partner and the relationship with sacrifices for one's child), and if they had a smartphone. Participants were paid 80 euros in return for their participation, but only if they responded to at least 80% of the signals in the experience sampling (and diary) procedure. If not, they were paid according to how many signals they had responded to. Additionally, couples could win a 200 euro bonus which would be paid to one couple, randomly indicated by a raffle.

All couples were heterosexual, except for one homosexual (lesbian) couple. Data from the experience sampling procedure of one couple were not collected because they broke up after study intake, data from two couples and one individual were not considered because they did not properly follow the instructions at intake. The analyses were conducted with the remaining 253 participants. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 43 years ($M = 23.33$, $SD = 3.65$). Over half of the participants (63.6%) were students, 34% were working full time, and 2.4% said to be both working and studying. Couples' romantic involvement ranged from 4 months to 17 years ($M = 34.13$, $SD = 29.01$ months). Furthermore, 34.8% of the couples reported to be living together, of which a minority (2.4%) was married.

PROCEDURE

Romantic couples came to the lab together, they were separated and asked to complete some questionnaires (including a measure of trust in one's partner) and other tasks that are not relevant for the current research question. After that, they were given instructions by the experimenter about the experience sampling procedure and they also received a booklet containing those instructions. The experience sampling always started on Saturday (so participants had to wait for 6 days maximum, depending on which day they came to the lab for the intake session). For 8 days, they received six signals a day, approximately one signal every two hours, transmitted through an SMS via SurveySignal (Hofmann & Patel, 2015; total of 48 SMS signals). In the SMS, participants had to click on a link which directed them to a Qualtrics survey that took approximately 2 to 4 minutes to complete. If participants were not able to click on the link within an hour, the link expired. In the survey, participants were first asked to reply to a few questions about how

they felt at that current moment and, after that, they replied to some questions about their experiences in the past hour. Relevant to the present research, first participants were asked how satisfied they felt about their relationship and how was their mood at the current moment. Afterwards they were asked whether they had sacrificed in the previous hour and other questions related to that sacrifice. To make sure that there was no overlap between time periods, signals were sent randomly but with a minimum of one hour and a maximum of three hours in between signals. In general, participants had a high response rate and replied to 86.8% of the experience sampling signals.

MEASUREMENTS

Trust. During the lab intake of the study, participants completed a 12-item Dutch version of a measure of trust in their partner (Rempel et al., 1985; see also Muusses, Finkenauer, Kerkhof, & Righetti, 2013). Participants stated how much they agreed with statements such as: "I know that my partner will always be there for me and willing to offer me strength and support." These statements were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree*, and used as a composite score indicating trust in the partner ($\alpha = .83$). Higher scores indicated higher trust in their partner.

Sacrifice. During the experience sampling procedure, we asked participants if in the past hour they had encountered a situation of divergence of interests with their partners (i.e., situations in which their preferences did not correspond with their partner's preferences). We collected data on 1,072 situations of divergence of interests. If participants reported that such a situation had occurred, participants were asked about the outcome of this situation, that is who sacrificed. They could choose one of the following options: "Me," "My partner," "We reached a compromise and both sacrificed a little bit," or "None of us (we went separate ways)." For the current research question we focused only on the situations of divergence of interests in which the participant reported to have sacrificed (38% of the situations of divergence of interests). When participants indicated to have sacrificed, they received further questions about this sacrifice (see below).

Emotion Suppression. When participants indicated to have sacrificed, they were asked to which extent they engaged in emotional suppression during the sacrifice with one item from the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003, see also Impett et al., 2012; "Did you control your emotions by not expressing them?"; 0 = *not at all*, to 6 = *very much*).

Satisfaction with Sacrifice. Participants were also asked how satisfied they feel with the outcome of this situation (i.e., their sacrifice), on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = *not at all*, to 6 = *very much*.

Relationship Satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured at the start of the experience sampling questionnaire and before participants indicated if they experienced a situation of a divergence of interests (or not). Relationship satisfaction was measured with the following statement: "At the moment, I am satisfied with my relationship," answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = *not at all*, to 6 = *very much*.

Mood. Participants' mood was also measured at the start of the questionnaire before any questions about a situation of sacrifice. Two items assessed positive and negative mood (e.g., "At the moment, I am in a positive mood"), and were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = *not at all*, to 6 = *very much*. These two indicators of mood reliably fit together ($\alpha = .84$), and thus a composite score was used in the analyses, with higher scores indicating a more positive mood.

RESULTS

ANALYSIS STRATEGY

Because data provided by each participant was collected on multiple research occasions and since the data provided by two partners in an ongoing relationship are not independent, we employed multilevel-modeling procedures (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In our analyses, measures from each time point of the experience sampling procedure were nested within participants, which were nested within couples, in a three-level hierarchical linear model. Specifically, measures that were repeatedly assessed during the experience sampling procedure represented Level 1 variables, whereas trust represented a Level 2 variable because it does not vary within participant and was assessed only once at intake. We represented intercept terms as random effects and represented slope terms as fixed effects as recommended for dyadic data analyses (Kenny et al., 2006). Findings were not reliably moderated by participant sex and, therefore, we treated dyad members as indistinguishable. We hypothesized that trust would lead to lower emotion suppression (mediator 1), leading to higher satisfaction with the outcome of the sacrifice (mediator 2), which, in turn, would positively affect satisfaction with the relationship (as well as mood). To analyze two sequential mediators, we performed three-path mediation analyses and tested the significance of each path (joint significance tests), as recommended by Taylor, MacKinnon, and Tein (2008).

KEY RESULTS

Before conducting the mediation analyses, we examined the direct associations between trust and relationship satisfaction and mood. After making a sacrifice for their partner, trust positively predicted relationship satisfaction, $b = 0.50$, $t(127) = 3.83$, $p < .001$, and positively predicted mood, $b = 0.38$, $t(125) = 2.71$, $p = .008$. The three-path mediation analyses revealed that emotion suppression and satisfaction with outcomes were sequential mediators of the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction and mood. First, following Taylor et al. (2008), we regressed emotion suppression onto trust. Trust was negatively associated with emotion suppression during sacrifice, $b = -0.61$, $t(171) = -3.41$, $p < .001$. Second, we regressed satisfaction with sacrifice onto emotion suppression and trust. Emotion suppression was negatively associated with satisfaction with sacrifice after con-

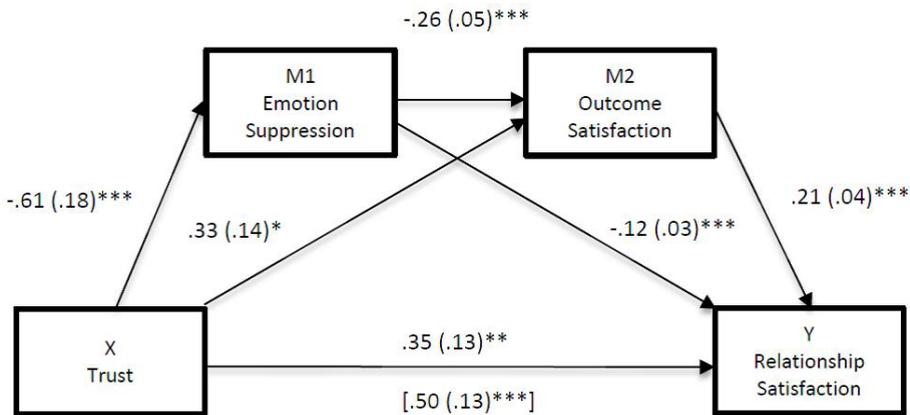


FIGURE 1. The mediation model for trust and relationship satisfaction. All reported values are unstandardized estimates (b values), with their standard errors reported between brackets. Between “[]” are the values of the total effect of trust on relationship satisfaction. Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

trolling for trust, $b = -0.24$, $t(293) = -5.18$, $p < .001$. Finally, we tested the full three-path mediation model regressing relationship satisfaction onto satisfaction with sacrifice, emotion suppression, and trust. Outcome satisfaction was positively associated with relationship satisfaction after controlling for emotion suppression and trust, $b = 0.21$, $t(260) = 5.15$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 1), whereas the effect of trust was reduced, $b = 0.35$, $t(132) = 2.75$, $p = .007$. A Sobel test of the three-path mediation effect showed a significant sequential mediation of emotion suppression and outcome satisfaction in the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction (sequential indirect effect, $b = .03$; $z = 2.49$, $p = .013$). We also tested the full three-path mediation model regressing mood onto satisfaction with sacrifice, emotion suppression, and trust. Outcome satisfaction was positively associated with mood after controlling for emotion suppression and trust, $b = 0.22$, $t(285) = 4.07$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 2), whereas the effect of trust was not significant anymore, $b = 0.21$, $t(128) = 1.49$, $p = .137$. A Sobel test of the three-path mediation effects showed a significant sequential mediation of emotion suppression and outcome satisfaction in the relationship between trust and mood (sequential indirect effect, $b = .03$; $z = 2.33$, $p = .020$).¹

DISCUSSION

Using an experience sampling procedure, this study investigated how trust relates to the way people respond to making a sacrifice for their partner in their daily

1. The results of the sequential mediation remain significant if we use a within person-centering approach of the Level 1 variables (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). A Sobel test of the three-path mediation effect showed a significant sequential mediation of emotion suppression and outcome satisfaction in the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction ($z = 2.30$, $p = .022$) and between trust and mood ($z = 2.03$, $p = .042$).

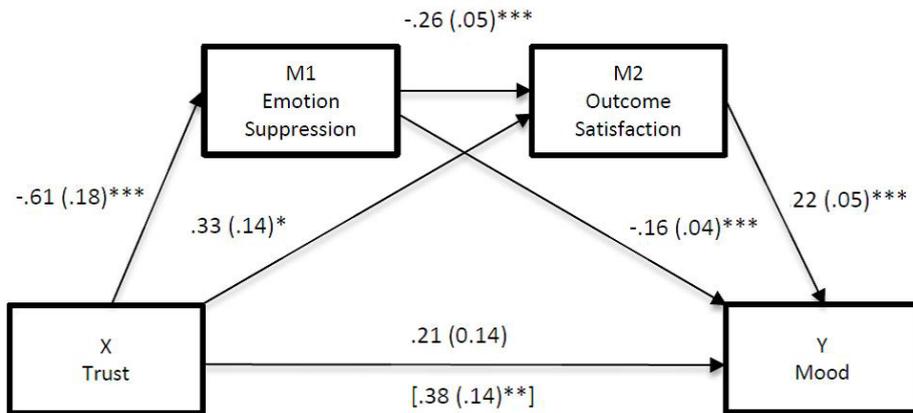


FIGURE 2. The mediation model for trust and mood. All reported values are unstandardized estimates (b values), with their standard errors reported between bracket. Between “[]” are the values of the total effect of trust on mood.

Note. $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

lives. The primary contribution of the present article is the discovery that trust is an important predictor of who suppresses their emotions during sacrifice. We found that people with low, compared to high, trust in their partners suppressed their emotions when making a sacrifice and that this led to less satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice. Moreover, we identified one novel pathway through which trust promotes relationship satisfaction and personal well-being. We found that emotional suppression and lower satisfaction with the outcome of having sacrificed for a partner could explain, in part, how low trust can reduce relationship satisfaction and a positive mood. Below we elaborate on each of these contributions and suggest directions for future research.

TRUST AND EMOTION SUPPRESSION DURING SACRIFICE

We found that individuals with low trust in their partner were more likely to suppress their emotions when making a sacrifice, compared to individuals with high trust in their partner. Individuals with low, compared to high, trust in their partner may suppress their emotions in close relationships in order to avoid conflict with their relationship partner. People with low trust in their partner do not believe that their partner is concerned for their well-being and so may expect that expressions of negative emotions following sacrifice would lead to further conflict and lack of responsiveness. People with high trust in their partner, on the other hand, may feel less vulnerable when expressing their negative emotions when making a sacrifice. After sacrificing, people with high trust in their partner likely expect that their partner will respond with constructive pro-relationship behaviors that display concern for their well-being (e.g., expressions of gratitude, enhanced trust, and subsequent sacrifice). Here we have employed the highly ecological valid experi-

ence sampling method to establish the relation between trust and emotion suppression during sacrifice. Future research may examine the precise psychological mechanisms that account for a causal relation between trust and emotion suppression during sacrifice. For example, future research can examine if individuals with low trust in their partner suppress their emotions in order to avoid subsequent conflict in close relationships or in other relationship contexts (e.g., during negotiations or amongst coworkers). This mechanism could be examined by testing how trust affects expectations of constructive pro-relationship behaviors following the expression of negative emotions for having sacrificed.

Research may also consider how trust relates to alternative types of emotion regulation during sacrifice. Emotional suppression is only one of the possible emotion regulation strategies that people use in situations of sacrifice, other strategies (e.g. cognitive reappraisal; Gross & John, 2003) can be used too in this context. Cognitive reappraisal involves construing an emotional eliciting event in non-emotional terms (Gross, 2002). Previous research has found that cognitive reappraisal, compared to emotional suppression, has greater positive personal and relationship consequences (Gross & John, 2003). Perhaps when people with high, compared to low, trust in their partner make a sacrifice, then they have systematically different construals of why their partner did not chose to sacrifice. High trust individuals may focus on benign reasons for their partner's behavior, whereas low trust individuals may feel that their partner is selfish or does not care about their well-being (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). Future research may consider if trust positively relates to reappraisals of the sacrifice.

We also advance previous research by identifying that emotional suppression relates to reduced satisfaction with the outcome of having sacrificed—and that this can lead to lower relationship satisfaction and a less positive mood. We forwarded several intrapersonal and interpersonal processes by which emotional suppression can result in feeling less satisfied about the outcome of having sacrificed. First, emotional suppression may intensify the experience of negative emotions, but not positive emotion, after having sacrificed (see Gross, 2002). Second, emotion suppression may impede communicating to a partner that one has made a sacrifice, and so a partner may fail to perceive the sacrifice and respond positively to it. Future research should examine if one or both of these processes can account for the negative relation between emotion suppression and satisfaction with the outcome of sacrifice.

Previous research has found that emotional suppression in close relationships can lead to lower relationship satisfaction and personal well-being (Impett et al., 2012). Our research positions satisfaction about the outcome of sacrifice as a mediator of the relation between emotional suppression during (and after) making a sacrifice and relationship satisfaction. When people do not feel good about their sacrifice, they might be likely to focus on the costs of this act, and they may become unhappy and blame the relationship for such costs. Finally, previous research has shown that low trust in a partner can reduce relationship satisfaction (Rempel et al., 1985) and individual well-being (Schneider et al., 2011). Our work illuminates

one process, emotional suppression during sacrifice, through which low trust can negatively affect the individual and the relationship.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We assumed that when people sacrifice, they would be more likely to experience greater negative affect, such as anger, disappointment, and frustration. However, positive emotions, such as joy and elation, might also arise when people sacrifice. People with low trust in their partner could potentially experience more negative than positive emotional responses when making a sacrifice, compared to people with high trust in their partner, and this may account for why low trust individuals tend to suppress their emotions. Yet, people with low, compared to high, trust in their partner may equally suppress both positive and negative emotions, because they fear that their partner could use each type of emotional expression as information to exploit them (i.e., “you enjoy making sacrifices, thus you may also enjoy future similar sacrifices”). Future research can measure distinct negative and positive emotional responses to making sacrifices to test if any differences in the type of emotion that is suppressed account for the relation between trust and emotion regulation during sacrifice.

We measured satisfaction about the outcome of sacrifice, but other research has also measured perceptions of sacrifice difficulty and how harmful a sacrifice is to the self (Whitton et al., 2007). It is also plausible that trust would negatively relate to how harmful (and difficult) a sacrifice is to the self. This is because individuals with low trust in their partners may believe that they are being taken advantage of by their partners. Indeed, there is a positive relation between partner trust and actual partner trustworthiness (Wieselquist et al., 1999). If people with low trust in their partners do find themselves making sacrifices for a selfish and demanding partner, then they may actually be engaging in behaviors that are harmful to the self. Future research may consider if our findings generalize to perceptions of how harmful a sacrifice is to one’s self.

Cultural values may influence emotional suppression, sacrifice, and the relation between sacrifice and relationship satisfaction (Le & Impett, 2013). Previous research has found that the negative personal and interpersonal consequences of emotion suppression are specific to Western European cultures (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007). Thus, given that we tested our hypotheses in a Dutch sample, the conclusion of this work might apply only to Western cultural contexts. First, cross-cultural research may find that trust does not relate to emotional suppression in Eastern cultural contexts because there are strong cultural norms around emotional expressions in Eastern cultural contexts that might play a relatively stronger role in shaping emotional expressions than trust (Butler et al., 2007). Second, suppression of emotions during sacrifice may benefit individuals from Eastern cultural contexts because these cultures prioritize relationship and collective interests over personal interests (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and relational harmony is more important than personal concerns (Le & Impett, 2013).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

All close romantic relationships face situations when partners have diverging preferences, that is, when partners want to pursue conflicting goals. In these situations, one partner may have to sacrifice some of their own personal goals and interests for their partner and the relationship. Such situations can elicit strong emotional responses and people sometimes suppress these emotions, which can lead to reduced relationship satisfaction. In an experience sampling study, we found a strong negative relation between trust and emotion suppression during situations of daily sacrifice. Individuals with low trust in their partner were more likely to suppress their emotions when making a sacrifice, compared to individuals with high trust in their partner. We also discovered that this emotional suppression led to lower satisfaction about the outcome of sacrifice, reduced relationship satisfaction, and a more negative mood. These findings augment the pivotal role of trust in how people decide to confront or avoid relationship conflict and how such decisions can promote flourishing (or less satisfying) relationships.

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