

**LIGHTENING THE LOAD:
HOW PERCEIVING A PARTNER AS
RESPONSIVE BUFFERS AGAINST
THE COSTS OF MAKING
SACRIFICES FOR A PARTNER**



SACRIFICE

Couples often face conflicts of interests due to partners having different goals, needs, or preferences.

In order to resolve conflicts and benefit their partner and their relationship, people may sacrifice their own self-interests.

Sacrifices can occur on a daily basis, such as taking on extra chores around the house, or they may be more substantial and potentially life changing, such as moving to a new city or country for a partner's career.



SACRIFICE APPRAISALS

People form **sacrifice appraisals**, which are evaluations of the sacrifice a person is making, including the costs, the benefits, how satisfying it feels, and how much regret is anticipated or experienced afterward.

Sacrifices that seem especially costly can detract from relationship and personal well-being.

In contrast, greater satisfaction with making a sacrifice is associated with greater personal and relational well-being.

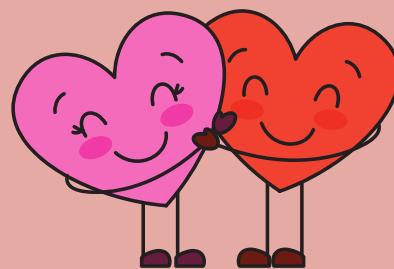
WHAT FACTORS AFFECT SACRIFICE APPRAISALS?

PERCEIVED PARTNER RESPONSIVENESS

One way that people may view their sacrifices in a more positive light is by **perceiving their partner as highly responsive to their needs and interests.**

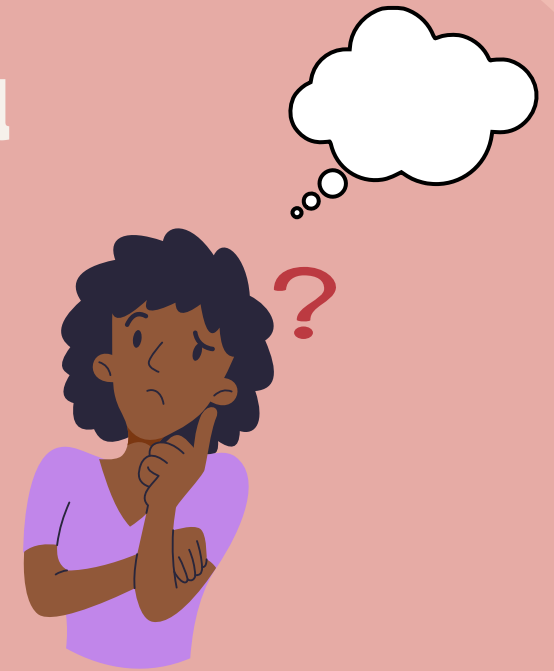
People who perceive their partner as responsive feel that their partner **understands, validates, and cares for them.**

Past research shows that perceiving a partner as responsive helps couples maintain **high relationship satisfaction when dealing with **conflict.****



WE CONDUCTED 4 STUDIES...

STUDY 1: (n = 537) we manipulated perceptions of partner responsiveness (PPR) in a hypothetical sacrifice scenario.

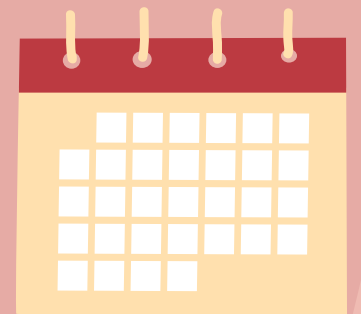


STUDY 2: (n = 126) couples discussed a potential sacrifice in lab and reported on their PPR and sacrifice appraisals. Then we tracked the same couples over 8 days to assess PPR and appraisals of sacrifices as they occurred in daily life.



WE CONDUCTED 4 STUDIES...

STUDY 3: (n = 111) romantic couples engaged in lab conversations about a sacrifice that entailed making a change that one partner desired from the other, and reported on their progress 2 weeks later.



STUDY 4: (n = 230) we surveyed romantically involved individuals who recently made a life-changing sacrifice by relocating to a new city or country to support their partner's career.



THE FINDINGS

People who perceived their partner as responsive had more positive sacrifice appraisals - i.e. they reported:

- **viewing the sacrifice as less costly**
- **lower regret for making sacrifices**
- **greater satisfaction**
- **greater personal and relational benefits**
- **greater sacrifice behaviour**



THE FINDINGS

In Study 3, we found that the association between perceiving a partner as responsive and positive sacrifice appraisals was in part due to greater closeness with and lower negative affect toward the partner.

Study 4 findings suggested that people perceived their partner as responsive partly due to the partner's efforts to fulfill fundamental psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness).

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

Though making sacrifices is common and inevitable in romantic relationships, perceiving a partner as responsive can help lighten the load of daily and life-changing sacrifices partly through having fundamental psychological needs met and feeling closer to and less negative affect towards a partner.



Learn more about this research here:

Visserman, M. L., Muise, A., Righetti, F., Horne, R. M., Le, B. M., Côté, S., & Impett, E. A. (2021). Lightening the load: Perceived partner responsiveness fosters more positive appraisals of relational sacrifices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.