What will you sacrifice for your partner?  
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Introduction

According to Gottman & Gottman (2017), there are seven principles that will prevent a couple from breaking up. The principles are connected to each floor of the Sound Relationship House. The two walls holding up the house are trust and commitment, which are great predictors of marital satisfaction. Indeed, self-commitment in the relationship increases when people perceive that their partner is implementing costly actions to benefit the relationship (Impett, Le, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2014). However, commitment is multifaceted, and can sometimes include a notion of sacrifice (Johnson & Horne, 2016).

Sacrificing for someone you love may show them you care and may even make you feel good about yourself” (Gordon, 2012, p.2).

People engage in sacrifice for many different reasons, but not all of them lead to conjugal satisfaction (Gordon, 2012).

Although some studies have shown that partners are more satisfied and engaged when they feel that the other is sacrificing for the relationship, it depends mostly on the purpose of this act (Impett, et al., 2014). If the sacrifice has “approach motives” (for example seeking to make the partner happy or to enhance intimacy), it increases the probability of breaking up (Gordon, 2012).

Objectives and Methods

The present study aims at highlighting various relational processes that may lead a person to sacrificing a part of his/her Self or his/her family for the couple, and by showing the quality of the relationships of these couples. Most studies on couples rely on individual self-reported questionnaires. In the present study, we used a mixed methodology (direct observation of interactions and questionnaires). A total of 305 individuals completed the questionnaires (mean age: 29.7 ± 10.8; 16% men and 84% women; 71% no child & 29% with children; mean relationship duration: 5.8 ± 2.8 years) and twenty couples were observed directly. Two case studies will be presented in the present poster.

Results

Arnaud & Louise

Hobbies: Party

Education: He has completed graduate studies and is now working with Louise, at his request.

Past relationship: He dated a lot of girls and didn’t really have a serious relationship before.

Present relationship: Very committed to Louise, shares his house projects with her, has sex with her and the other of his children. He sometimes feels betrayed by Louise, and questions their relationship about a year ago.

Sacrifice: Less partying and less going out with friends.

Berard & Françoise

Hobbies: Literature (which allowed her to meet Berard)

Education: She has a master and two children.

Past relationship: She was married and had two children. Although she cared about her husband, she wanted to live with another man.

Present relationship: They had just lived separately and then moved in with Berard’s daughters. Their attempts to create a new family did not succeed: there was too much tension in the couple because Berard’s daughters did not consider that their father left their mother. Moreover, as they had to fight hard to stay together, it strengthen their relationship, and his love, trust and commitment to Berard are very strong.

Sacrifice: She is committed with his daughter who spends a lot of leisure of Berard.

Discussion

When people sacrifice themselves to make their partner happy, that can potentially increase commitment, trust and happiness. The analysis of these two couples shows that sacrificing oneself for the relationship can lead to very satisfied conjugal and sexual relationship or, conversely, unsatisfied relationship.

In particular, people who sacrifice for approach-motivated reasons (for long-term collective gain as a couple or to help fulfill the partner’s dreams) tend to be happier and have more satisfying relationships (just like Arnaud and Louise).

However, although sacrificing to make a partner happy can be useful for a good people, who consistently prioritize other’s needs above their own can pay a cost in self-esteem and mental health over the long run (just Arnaud and Louise). According to Gordon (2012), sacrifice is a hallmark of a close relationship, but it should not lead to sacrificing the partner at the cost of one’s own happiness (by neglecting one’s own.

The real kind of sacrifice can bring people together, but sacrificing for the wrong reasons may be worse than no sacrifice at all. (Gordon, 2012)

Therefore, it is important to consider the pros and cons of a sacrifice, to have clear communication with the partner, to ask the “tough questions”, and to make sure both partners are sacrificing for the right reasons.

ASK YOURSELF:

How committed am I in my relationship?
Do I trust my partner?
What is my motivation to make this sacrifice?

Why should I be the one giving up what I want?
What is my motivation to make this sacrifice?

Do either of us want it more?

ADVICES:

Make sure you are both clear about your own desires and priorities.

Has your partner expressed thanks for your willingness to sacrifice? If your partner isn’t aware that you are sacrificing for him or her, he or she won’t be able to appreciate your selflessness.

Work with your partner to see if there is a solution that doesn’t require much of sacrifice from either of you.

Make an arrangement that suits both of you.

References


https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/when_are_you_sacrificing_too_much_in_your_relationship