

# *Motivations Behind Sacrifice in Romantic Relationships*

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**Abstract:** Understanding the motivations behind selfless actions within romantic relationships is a pivotal area of research, intricately intertwined with an individual's character, values, and societal and cultural influences. This article delves into the nuanced interplay of motives driving sacrificial behaviors in romantic partnerships. "Sacrifice" in this context refers to forsaking immediate desires for the betterment of the relationship or a partner's happiness. Through the lenses of social exchange theory, attachment styles, self-determination theory, love, emotional connection, commitment, and cultural influences, this paper explores when, why, and how individuals are inclined to make sacrifices in romantic relationships. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries in the face of excessive sacrifice, highlighting the delicate balance between dedication and well-being within relationships. This comprehensive analysis offers insights into the intricate dynamics that underlie selflessness in the context of love, devotion, and intimate connections.

**Keywords:** Sacrifice, Motivations, Commitment, Cultural influences, Well-being

## 1. Introduction

Comprehending the motives underlying selfless actions in romantic relationships is a significant focal point in research. These motivations can be intricately intertwined with an individual's character and ideology, which may be influenced by societal and cultural forces, potentially shaping the formation of sacrificial tendencies [1]. While the impact of such factors on an individual's notions of love and devotion remains a relatively uncharted territory, this study aims to shed light on the nuanced interplay between motives driving sacrificial behaviors within romantic partnerships. Within this context, "sacrifice" denotes the act of forsaking immediate desires and goals for the advancement of the relationship or the well-being and happiness of a partner. It's crucial to differentiate this concept of sacrifice from other prosocial behaviors, like acts of heroism [2]. This article aims to pave the way for a comprehensive exploration of the distinct attributes of sacrificial behavior and its singular influence on shaping notions of love and devotion within the realm of romantic relationships. Specifically, this article focuses on discussing when people are more likely to make sacrifices, what motivates them to make sacrifices, and the factors that shape sacrifice motivation. Finally, the authors will discuss the possibilities that influence the formation of the motivation for sacrificing, the boundary lines of triggering the motivation of sacrifice, and the relevance of the motivation of sacrifice in romantic relationships.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Understanding Motivation**

### **2.1. Social Exchange Theory**

This paper employs social exchange theory to elucidate that a partner's sacrifice within a romantic relationship can be understood through a cost-benefit analysis. Social exchange theory posits that relationships evolve through a process of cost-benefit analysis [3]. In essence, it serves as a gauge to ascertain the level of effort an individual invests in a human relationship. Evaluating the strengths and vulnerabilities of a relationship can yield insights into whether an individual is disproportionately dedicating effort to the relationship. Consequently, social exchange theory enables a connection between individuals' conduct in romantic relationships and their self-assessed costs and gains. Utilizing self-determined metrics of "giving" and "receiving," one can analyze the extent of effort feasible to invest in a relationship. The theory suggests that valuable relationships tend to gravitate away from the cost spectrum. In other words, if the "loss" surpasses the "gain," the cost becomes less worthwhile. Therefore, within a romantic relationship, one partner's "sacrificial" behavior—referred to as a "substantial cost"—may stem from an engagement in the process of measurement and juxtaposition with prior relationships, driven by the anticipation that benefits will equal or surpass costs.

### **2.2. Attachment Style**

The decision to sacrifice in a romantic relationship is notably impacted by one's human attachment style. Derived from the early foundations of Freud's love theory, attachment is regarded as a distinctive form of emotional connection characterized by the exchange of comfort, care, and pleasure [4]. An attachment relationship entails an enduring psychological bond between individuals [4]. Furthermore, early childhood experiences significantly shape the psychology of attachment and the behaviors associated with it [4]. Attachment frequently invokes a sense of security; when faced with fear or threats, an attached individual finds solace and ease. This security often correlates with a reliance on the attachment figure and heightened separation anxiety. Cross-cultural studies reveal that individuals are inclined to make fewer sacrifices when their romantic partners display an avoidant attachment disposition [5]. Consequently, individuals are less likely to make sacrifices for their partner if they are accustomed to concealing their emotions from both close companions and partners. Additionally, research on attachment styles indicates a positive correlation between secure attachment and a propensity to compromise and cooperate [6]. While direct research is lacking to suggest that individuals with a secure attachment style would be more inclined to assume the role of sacrificing party in a romantic relationship. Nevertheless, disparities in attachment styles profoundly impact the degree to which individuals are motivated to engage in sacrifices within romantic relationships.

### **2.3. Self-Determination Theory**

Exploring intrinsic motivation sacrifices within romantic relationships through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) asserts that human beings require social nourishment and support, which are intrinsic to shaping the external environment, manifesting in a variety of adaptive behaviors [7]. SDT delineates an individual's motivational orientation along an autonomy continuum. Intrinsic motivation, rooted in genuine interest or pleasure, epitomizes the pinnacle of autonomy. Fundamentally, heightened relationship autonomy cultivates openness, flexibility, and positive outcomes, whereas control engenders distance and negativity [8]. Autonomous engagement amplifies commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality. These effects transcend the realm of general relationship motivation. Experimental studies highlight the pivotal role of motivation in a range of relational behaviors, encompassing motives for entering relationships and

participating in caregiving and self-sacrificial acts [8]. Behaviors attain genuine significance when propelled by autonomous motives. In concert, the autonomy expounded by SDT elucidates that the intrinsic motivation behind individuals' self-sacrificial actions in romantic relationships stems from their engagement in relationships characterized by heightened autonomy.

### **3. Psychological and Social Factors**

#### **3.1. Love and Emotional Connection**

The role of love and emotional attachment in motivating selfless acts within romantic relationships is a crucial dimension of understanding the motivations behind sacrifices. Love can be seen as an appropriate response to specific morally significant character traits, forming the foundation of why individuals are willing to make sacrifices [9]. Sacrifices emerge when individuals, initially driven by self-oriented preferences, consciously choose to prioritize their partner and the relationship over their own desires [10].

Research evidence demonstrates that individuals tend to make sacrifices for those they deeply love. When faced with the choice between fulfilling their own desires or meeting the needs of their partners, the majority of individuals opt for the latter. This inclination is rooted in the sense of closeness and the prevalence of positive emotional effects associated with prioritizing a partner's well-being [11]. A noteworthy study found that individuals who transitioned from pursuing their own desires to actively supporting their partners experienced increased satisfaction within their relationships on the same day [11]. Prioritizing a partner's interests over self-serving decisions can have a profoundly positive impact on the overall relationship [11].

Importantly, happiness plays a significant role in motivating individuals to make sacrifices. When individuals perceive that their sacrifices contribute to their own happiness and the well-being of their partners, they become more willing to engage in selfless acts [11]. A week-long study discovered a meaningful correlation between making decisions aimed at satisfying partners throughout the week and experiencing increased relationship satisfaction by the end of the week. This underlines the immediate and long-term positive effects that acts of sacrifice can have on romantic relationships [11].

The concept of trust and cooperation within relationships further enhances the motivation for sacrifice. Individuals often choose to make sacrifices because they believe it fosters an environment of trust and cooperation in their romantic relationships [10]. However, it's essential to acknowledge that long-term sacrifices may carry potential adverse consequences for relationships, as they can lead to imbalances and strains over time [10].

In essence, the intrinsic motivation for making sacrifices in romantic relationships is significantly driven by the emotions of love and attachment. These emotions, intertwined with the desire for happiness and the cultivation of trust, shape individuals' willingness to prioritize their partner's well-being and make selfless choices within the realm of romantic relationships.

#### **3.2. Commitment and Long Term Goals**

The dynamics of commitment and long-term goals play a pivotal role in motivating individuals to make sacrifices within romantic relationships. Researchers suggest a reciprocal relationship between commitment and pro-relationship acts, underscoring the significance of commitment as a powerful motivator for sacrifices aimed at long-term relationship goals [12].

Commitment, defined as a steadfast, long-term orientation towards the relationship with the intent to sustain it, serves as a driving force behind sacrifices. As commitment deepens, so does the sense of interdependence, leading individuals to become increasingly willing to make sacrifices for the betterment of their partners and the relationship itself [12]. The investment model provides a valuable

framework, positing that the sense of commitment is a direct result of investments made in the relationship [12]. As sacrifices are perceived as investments in relationships, they can predict subsequent commitment, creating a cyclical relationship between the two [12].

Within this context, sacrifices are not merely selfless acts but are viewed as investments that benefit both partners and the relationship as a whole [12]. Researchers explore processes related to maintaining relationships, including attitudes toward sacrifices, and consistently find that most individuals are willing to fulfill their partners' desires as a strategic investment in the relationship [12]. A practical example supporting the relationship between commitment and sacrifices can be found in a convenience sample of Chinese military couples. The study revealed significantly higher scores for marital commitment and the quality of male military members compared to their spouses [13]. This real-life scenario demonstrates how commitment can drive individuals to make sacrifices for the sake of the relationship's future, particularly when aligned with long-term goals.

Moreover, the Investment model of commitment illustrates that marital quality and commitment mutually influence each other, extending beyond mere satisfaction [13]. Commitment emerges as a linchpin in the fulfillment of a marriage. Consequently, individuals who commit more are generally more willing to make sacrifices, recognizing that these sacrifices contribute to their own happiness and the overall success of the relationship. Theorists emphasize the fundamental role of comprehending commitments in understanding the development and quality of romantic relationships [14]. Commitment serves as a driving force that motivates individuals to endure challenges and make sacrifices, particularly when confronted with social pressures to remain together. These tangible and intangible investments further underscore how commitment and long-term goals shape the intrinsic motivation for sacrifices in romantic relationships.

### 3.3. Cultural Influences and Cultural Norms

The motivations for sacrifices in romantic relationships are profoundly influenced by cultural norms and values, which often dictate acceptable behaviors within societies. This investigation delves into the intrinsic motivation for sacrifices within romantic relationships through the lens of cultural influences and norms. Individuals find themselves situated within complex sociocultural environments characterized by an array of shared values, customs, social practices, institutional constraints, and opportunity structures. These multifaceted contexts give rise to divergent perspectives on sacrifice [15]. Within these environments, individuals actively shape their moral selves by constructing standards of right and wrong to guide and deter their behavior. The consequences of their actions resonate with personal satisfaction and self-worth, ultimately contributing to bolstered self-esteem through subsequent acts of sacrifice in the context of their romantic relationships. Simultaneously, these contexts establish the boundaries of acceptable behavior, molding and guiding individuals' choices and actions [15].

In today's interconnected world, cultures are no longer isolated entities, thanks to transnational interdependencies and the pervasive influence of global market forces. Despite the increasing integration of cultures, individuals residing in different regions continue to uphold distinct perspectives on sacrifices, shaped by cultural factors like individualism and collectivism. In this rich tapestry of cultural diversity, individuals have the option to either align with their personal attitudes or conform to established social norms, thereby contributing to a wide array of behavioral responses [16].

It's vital to recognize that individualism and collectivism, often perceived as opposing forces, can also be complementary within certain cultural contexts [16]. Individualism, characterized by its distinct self-concept and goals, places a premium on discernment when evaluating and selecting social relationships. In this framework, personal autonomy and choice are highly valued. Conversely, collectivism fosters a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence, emphasizing the importance

of the collective over individual interests. Within collectivist cultures, the well-being and harmony of the group take precedence.

To illustrate the profound impact of cultural influences on sacrifice motivations, consider a cross-cultural comparison between collectivist and individualistic societies. In collectivist cultures, individuals often make sacrifices driven by a deep sense of responsibility to their families and communities. Sacrifices may manifest as prioritizing familial obligations over personal desires, ensuring the harmony of the group. In contrast, individuals in individualistic cultures may be more inclined to make sacrifices based on personal values and goals, emphasizing personal autonomy and choice.

This cross-cultural exploration underscores the intricate interplay between cultural influences and intrinsic motivation for sacrifices in romantic relationships. It reveals that cultural norms and values serve as potent determinants of why, when, and how individuals make sacrifices within the realm of romance. Understanding these cultural dynamics enriches our comprehension of the multifaceted nature of intrinsic motivation in romantic relationships across the globe.

### **3.4. Personal Fulfillment and Self-Identity**

In the realm of romantic relationships, a compelling impetus that propels individuals to make sacrifices lies in the promise of personal fulfillment and the fortification of self-identity. Sacrificing for the well-being of a partner frequently begets personal satisfaction and contentment. A plethora of research studies have demonstrated that acts of sacrifice, encompassing the prioritization of a partner's needs or the negotiation of compromises for their happiness, wield the potential to ameliorate an individual's well-being. To illustrate, Righetti's study unveiled that individuals who consistently engaged in selfless acts within their relationships reported heightened levels of positive emotions and life satisfaction compared to their less altruistic counterparts. This underscores that the act of making sacrifices not only redounds to the benefit of the recipient but also exerts a favorable influence on the emotional well-being and overarching life contentment of the giver.

Moreover, a compelling anecdote elucidates how sacrifices contribute to personal growth and the bolstering of self-identity. Consider, for instance, the case of Jimmy, a 24-year-old resident of China, who recounted his decision to sacrifice a promotion that entailed relocating to support his partner's aspirations. Initially, this sacrifice may have appeared as an ill-advised choice. However, over time, Alex recognized that this act not only deepened their connection but also furnished him with profound insights into his own values and aspirations, thereby advancing his personal growth in tandem with his partner. This exemplar underscores the profound sway that sacrifices driven by personal fulfillment and self-identity can wield over individuals within romantic relationships.

By delving into personal fulfillment and self-identity as the motivating forces underpinning sacrifices, the authors attain a deeper understanding of why individuals willingly make such concessions within relationships. This impetus not only augments the relationship itself but also nurtures the individual's sense of happiness and self-awareness.

### **3.5. Challenges and Boundaries**

Sacrifices, often regarded as a testament of dedication within romantic relationships, can become a source of challenges when they extend beyond healthy boundaries, inevitably impacting the well-being of the individuals involved. This exploration into the dynamics of intrinsic motivation sacrifices in romantic relationships underscores the importance of maintaining a delicate equilibrium between selflessness and self-care.

As Righetti contends, individuals who consistently neglect their own well-being in favor of prioritizing their partners' needs frequently find themselves grappling with heightened stress levels



and emotional exhaustion. This precarious situation not only endangers the giver's mental health but also culminates in diminished self-worth and an overarching sense of dissatisfaction within the confines of the relationship.

Evelyn and Michael's story serves as a poignant illustration of the repercussions of unrestrained sacrifice [10]. Michael, motivated by a genuine desire to strengthen their bond, took upon himself a multitude of responsibilities within their relationship, including shouldering Evelyn's emotional burdens and wholeheartedly fulfilling her every desire [10]. However, the absence of clearly defined boundaries led to an unintended consequence - Evelyn shouldered an overwhelming emotional burden herself [10]. Over time, this relentless cycle of surpassing his own well-being to meet his partner's expectations resulted in Michael's physical and emotional burnout [10]. This unfortunate outcome reverberated throughout their relationship, manifesting as strained communication, emotional detachment, and the gradual erosion of intimacy, ultimately culminating in their painful breakup.

In the intricate tapestry of romantic relationships, the challenges that accompany sacrifices serve as a poignant reminder. While selflessness is undoubtedly commendable, it necessitates a thoughtful and deliberate approach. Cultivating a healthy relationship involves not only a willingness to give but also an unwavering commitment to safeguarding one's own well-being. This entails a profound respect for the boundaries that underpin the vitality of the partnership. It is in this careful navigation of the delicate balance between dedication and well-being that the true strength of romantic relationships is found.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this comprehensive exploration, this paper has delved into the multifaceted motivations driving sacrifices within romantic relationships. These motivations, intricately intertwined with an individual's character, values, and influenced by societal and cultural forces, have been examined to shed light on their role in shaping sacrificial tendencies within romantic partnerships. Differentiating the concept of sacrifice from other prosocial behaviors and emphasizing the distinctive attributes of sacrificial behavior, particularly its influence on notions of love and devotion within romantic relationships, has been the primary focus of this article. The main areas of focus have been on when and why individuals are inclined to make sacrifices, the factors influencing sacrifice motivation, and the potential determinants of this motivation.

Throughout the exploration, the analysis has highlighted the intricate interplay of motivations that drive sacrificial behaviors within romantic relationships. These motivations are not isolated but are shaped by a myriad of factors, including attachment styles, self-determination, cultural influences, and personal fulfillment. Understanding these motivations offers a nuanced perspective on why individuals choose to make sacrifices in their relationships.

In conclusion, it is imperative to recognize that while sacrifices are a testament to dedication, they can also pose challenges when taken to unhealthy extremes. The story of Evelyn and Michael exemplifies the importance of setting boundaries and safeguarding individual well-being within relationships.

A call to action is extended to individuals within romantic relationships to foster healthy sacrifices. While selflessness is admirable, it must be coupled with thoughtful navigation, ensuring that one's own well-being is preserved. Fostering a healthy relationship involves not only a willingness to give but also a commitment to maintaining individual happiness and respecting the boundaries that sustain the partnership's vitality. In this intricate tapestry of romantic relationships, the motives behind sacrifices are complex, reflecting the rich diversity of human experience and the profound ways in which love, devotion, and selflessness intertwine to shape the course of our most intimate connections.

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