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Effects of One’s Attachment Style on Willingness and Reactions to Self-Sacrifice and Subsequent Relationship Satisfaction

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Introduction

Defining Self-sacrifice
• Self-sacrifice is a behavioral tool used to sustain a relationship and involves the foregoing of “immediate self-interest to promote the well-being of a partner or relationship” (Van Lange et al., 1997, p. 1374).

• Self-sacrificing can be a useful and constructive tool for the relationship, yet, this practice can also lead to poorer couple functioning (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry, Clements, & Markman, 2006).

• Van Lange et al. (1997) found that willingness to self-sacrifice is positively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Attachment Style and Anger
• Those high in anxious attachment experience more dissatisfaction in their relationships overall from self-sacrificing (Mattingly & Clark, 2012).

• Those high in avoidant attachment self-sacrifice for avoidant reasons, suggesting that they are not concerned with bolstering a relationship, but rather simply trying to reduce issues in the relationship (Mattingly & Clark, 2012).

• Ultimately, the anger expressed and experienced by those insecurely attached has been linked to poorer relationship outcomes (Guerro, La Valley, & Farinelli, 2008; Troisi & D’Argenio, 2004).

• Current Study
• It is possible that one’s level of experienced anger will impact the relationship between willingness to self-sacrifice and relationship satisfaction, and that an insecure attachment style will impact the level of anger experienced given willingness to self-sacrifice.

Hypothesis 1 – We predicted that the level of experienced anger would mediate the relationship between willingness to self-sacrifice and relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2 – We predicted that the relationship between willingness to self-sacrifice and anger would be moderated by one’s level of anxious attachment.

Hypothesis 3 – We predicted that the relationship between willingness to self-sacrifice and anger would be moderated by one’s level of avoidant attachment.

Participants/Procedures
• This sample was comprised of 102 (46 male, 56 female) students between the ages of 18 and 25 from a Midwestern University who were in a romantic relationship.

Measures
• Willingness to Self-sacrifice. This scale, developed by Van Lange et al. (1997) asks participants to list the four most important activities to them and then asks participants to imagine that, if it were not possible to engage in those activities and maintain the relationship with their partner, how much they would consider ending their relationship.

• Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Participants rated 7 statements such as, “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” on a 5-point scale (Hendrick, 1988).

• Experiences in Close Relationships-Revision Questionnaire (ECR-R). The ECR-R questionnaire is a 36 item measure of adult attachment style divided into anxiety and avoidance subscales (Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, 2000)

• Arousal Subscale of the Multidimensional Anger Inventory (Siegel, 1986) was used to measure the frequency, duration, and magnitude dimensions of anger.

Results
Bootstrapping procedures described by Preacher and Hayes (2008) were used to test for moderated mediation.

Results (cont.)
Results supported our hypotheses. Supporting Hypothesis 1, anger mediated the relationship between willingness to sacrifice for one’s partner and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, for those low in anxious attachment, a greater willingness to sacrifice was negatively related to anger, which, in turn, was negatively related to relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2). The same pattern of results was seen for those low in avoidant attachment (Hypothesis 3).

Discussion/Limitations
• This research clarifies the association between willingness to self-sacrifice and relationship satisfaction, revealing that a willingness to self-sacrifice does not predict relationship satisfaction completely.

• Future directions of this research could include examining what other constructs may mediate the relationship between willingness to self-sacrifice and relationship satisfaction.

• Finally, this study is limited by being cross-sectional, its restricted sample, and due to the measures being solely self-report. As such, this study may suffer from limitations with generalizability.