

Gender Differences in Intimate Relationships: Sacrifice and Compromise

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The present study aimed to investigate the role of sacrifice among partners in intimate relationships. The sample consisted of 82 married couples (N = 164). For this purpose Sarah – Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory (SSC, 2004) was used as a tool to assess the level of sacrifice among the participants. It was hypothesized that women will obtain high score on Sarah – Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory as compared to men. The findings of the study support the research hypothesis.

Keywords: intimate relationship, sacrifice, gender difference

Several researches emphasize the importance of sacrifice as an integral component of intimate relationships (Stanley et al., 2006). These relationships are dynamic entities that are extremely important in our lives. They refer to a permanent link between people and are embedded in love, loyalty, and trust in family relationship. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that healthy and pleasant interaction and constant loving relationship is crucial for adjustment as a spouse. If this need is not satisfied, it generates several problems linked to physical and psychological well-being. Marriage is an institution accepted to meet the need for belongingness. Although developing strong family relationships is a complex and difficult task, maintaining a good personal relationship is even more difficult and needs continuous efforts.

Relationships arise from a variety of interpersonal processes of serial crises and threats, and can be analyzed in several ways. Most people want a long-term, stable and satisfying relationship. As a result, many of the studies deal with relational maintenance strategies such as good communication about the focal problem, conflict resolution, social support and participation in the power (Canary & Stafford, 2001; Dindia, 2000).

The partners in intimate relationship have to strive actively by deliberate and purposeful efforts to fulfill their commitment and male sacrifice for maintenance and strengthening of their relationship to attain the unique satisfaction of uniting as a couple rather than two separate entities. A survival chance of marriage in today's hectic world is a more important issue than ever before. In a global perspective there is an increasing concern in helping couples to enter and maintain a strong and healthy marriage (Horn, 2003; Ooms, 1998).

Some of the researchers emphasize the benefits of marriage which includes better health, more active sex life,

high income and the best compromise between the spouses (Dawson, 1991; Glaser et al, 1987). Several studies have been conducted on marital relationship of couples. For instance, Lange et al, (1997) reported that approach and avoidance motives in sacrifice in close relationships are linked with the well-being of a person and quality of the relationship. The study further revealed a positive relationship between approach motives for sacrifice and personal well-being and quality of relationship. On the other hand, a negative relationship has been reported between avoidance motives for sacrifice and personal well-being and relationship quality (Impett et al., 2005).

The need for sacrifice and compromise is often highlighted for maintenance of good quality of intimate relationships in family relationships sacrifice refers to giving up something to maintain and strengthen marital relationship.

Reasons of sacrifice depend on the demand of specific situations. People who feel satisfied with their marital relationship, usually focus on positive incentives (e.g., affection, happiness). By maintaining their relationships such motives can be attained (Frank & Brandstatter, 2002; Strachman & Gable, 2006). On the other hand, those who focus on the investments in the relationships will pay more attention to negative incentives (e.g., losing family ties, feeling lonely etc). These incentives are related with the dissolution of the relationship. Certain aspects of relationship motivate people to make sacrifices in their relationships. Some people are willing to give up their own interests for the sake of a partner whereas, others focus on self-interest a lot (Neff & Harter, 2002), which reflects individual differences in willingness to sacrifice. People who lack power in their relationships can be more likely to engage in sacrifice.

On the other hand, a compromise is made when someone gives up to resolve an existing situation. Compromises are highly loaded with intense emotional feelings. Intimate relationships involve both sacrifices and compromises and in genuine love they are not accompanied by negative emotions.

Neff and Harter (2002) studied ways which man and women use to resolve the conflicts in their relationships. The sample included dating and married couples and it was found that both men (62%) and women (61%) prefer to compromise in order to solve their problems. Relatively an equal number of men and women reported that they use other strategies. It was found that 19% of women and 14% of men preferred the needs of their partners than their own needs; 24% of man and 20% of women reported that they subordinate their own needs as compared to the needs of their partners.

Bishop, (2004) argued that it is not the gender difference but the personality characteristics that contribute to willingness to sacrifice. It is rather gender roles play its role in willingness to sacrifice. People who possess stereotypical feminine personality characteristics (understanding and sensitivity) are willing to sacrifice a lot. On the other hand, people who possess stereotypically masculine personality qualities (independence and assertiveness) are less willing to sacrifice (Hammersla & Frease-McMahon, 1990; Stafford, Dainton, & Hass, 2000). One of the reason for finding no consistent gender differences in frequency of sacrifice could be the possibility that women may be less likely to label their actions as sacrifice. In fact, most of women do nice or helpful things for their partners especially at home and in child care but they do not define such things as sacrifice because such behaviors are expected from the women in the society as their roles (Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007).

Involvement in the relationship is a key factor in the formation of motives and behavior in interdependence dilemmas (Lange, Agnew, Harinck & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher & Cox, 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster & Agnew, 1999). These studies have suggested a positive linear relationship between commitment and willingness to sacrifice. Increased confidence in the partners leads to higher levels of relationship dedication and willingness to sacrifice. Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) demonstrated that spousal relationships are positively associated with partners' mutual trust in marital relationship. They used a series of mediation analyses which indicated that readiness to increase trust in partners, leads to greater adherence to willingness to sacrifice by the partners. These findings demonstrate that sacrifice is an important juncture in the growth process of positive relationships.

The main objective of the present study was to find out whether any gender differences exist in sacrificing and compromising behaviors of the spouses in KPK. Marriage is a lifelong bond and to carry on with this relationship one needs to sacrifice and compromise a number of times. In our culture it is observed that women sacrifice more than men. Furthermore, they have to compromise frequently to maintain their marital relationship. In our society, girls are trained from their early childhood years to be other-oriented. They are expected to scarify for their younger

siblings and compromise with the demands of their parents and other family members. Consequently, majority of women are well trained by their parents to face the challenges they are going to face in their marital life. Men in a patriarchal society like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) are quite dominating which often creates adjustment problems for the spouse. In most of the cases the women strived hard to maintain their relationship with husband and in laws. Despite the fact that men have a right to divorce and a woman can take *khula* but women very rarely, if ever, go for their right even when they are facing serious hardships in their marital life. This situation may be attributed to their gender role training which emphasizes that women, when get married, must cope with their problems and spend their life with the partners even in difficult situations by making sacrifices and compromises. Finding out the important role of sacrifice in marital relationship, the present study was designed to investigate whether men or women make more sacrifice in marital relationships.

Hypotheses

For the present study the following, hypotheses were formulated:

- Women will obtain significantly higher scores on Sarah – Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory as compared to men.
- Women are more scarifying than men in marital relationship.
- To maintain and strengthen marital relationship, women are more compromising than men.

Method

Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of eighty two couples. Individuals, who were divorced, separated or married a second time were not included in the sample. The participants were divided into two groups (men=82; women=82). All the participants belonged to different areas of Peshawar were in the age range of 25 – 50 years. Convenience sampling technique was used for data collection.

Instrument

Sarah-Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory (SAC 2004) was used to measure the frequency of sacrifice of listed behavior performed by marital partners in everyday activities, where one partner gives up his/her self-interest for the sake of other to keep a relationship intact. Participants reported the frequency of occurrence of the behavior on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from *Never* (assigned a score of 0) to *Almost Always* (4). The scale consists of 17 items with a coefficient alpha of .87. Construct validity of the scale was measured by item total correlations. These correlations ranged from .478 to .736 all being significant at .01 levels. The minimum possible score on this scale is 0 and the maximum score is 68. Based on the content, this scale was further divided into two subscales: *sacrifice subscale*

(number of items 10) and *compromise subscale* (number of items 7).

Procedure

For the present study, respondents consisted of eighty two couples. Each person was approached individually. The researcher asked each respondent first to complete the demographic data sheet and then record his/her answers to each item comprising the questionnaire.

The participants were told that there was no right/wrong answer to any statements, and they have to select the option that was most accurate for them. There was no time limit to complete the questionnaire. They were requested to answer each item and should not leave any statement unanswered.

Results

Table 1

t-values showing gender differences in scores on Sarah – Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory (N = 164).

Scales	Women (n=82)		Men (n=82)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Full Scale	44.52	9.28	34.76	12.23	5.773	.000
Sacrifice subscale	25.82	5.74	20.59	7.87	4.869	.000
Compromises subscale	18.71	4.19	14.17	5.1	6.228	.000

The results presented in the above table show significant difference between women and men on Sarah – Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory ($P < .000$). Women obtained high scores on Full Scale as well as the two subscales (Sacrifice; Compromise). The results clearly demonstrate that women are more sacrificing and compromising than men.

Discussion

The present study examined the relative role of women and men in maintaining marital relationships. For this purpose Sarah–Rakshanda Behavior Sacrifice Inventory was used to explore if women give up more frequently than men when there is a need to sacrifice or compromise in intimate relationships. The results (Table 1) clearly demonstrate that women are more often sacrificing and opt for compromises in their marital life.

A growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that if the partners show positive attitude and trust each other, it strengthens their relationship. Such partners largely succeed to grow their relationship because they are willing to sacrifice in their relationship (Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002). Such an attitude can also increase their feeling of security and safety. Furthermore, if partners show a positive attitude towards marital relationship, it helps them to show willingness to sacrifice for each other (Whitton et al, 2002, Stanley & Markman, 1992, Van Lange et al, 1997). Quality of

sacrifice can affect the relationship positively and play an important role in maintaining the bond and make a better adjustment. Real commitment certainly enhances the marital relationship. According to Wieselquist et al., (1999), dedication and commitment in the relationship enhances intimacy among the couples. Individuals who are more likely to sacrifice, are more committed to the relationship and want it to continue, have a greater “we” feeling for the partnership, are more willing to give up their own interest for maintaining the relationship and are perhaps more in love with their partners. It was also expected that partners who show a greater level of agreement with each other on most activities of everyday life, are more satisfied with life in general, have fewer negative interactions, more positive connections, and enjoy a better quality of marital relationship and have lesser chances of being depressed.

To conclude, being in a loving long-term romantic relationship is one of the surest routes to long term happiness, but it does not happen naturally. It demands the couples to sacrifice and compromise in conflicting situations. However researchers have identified both costs and benefits of giving up one’s immediate desires in intimate relationships. It seems that a sacrifice to meet the other partner’s needs may result in feelings of happiness and satisfaction. On the other hand, a sacrifice to avoid harmful repercussions may lead to negative outcomes. Similarly, a compromise requires to give up the pursuit of a better prospect to avoid risk in the present situation and is often loaded with intense emotional outcomes (for example, frustration). However, although sacrifices and compromises are frequently made in intimate relationships, in genuine love they are not experienced as unpleasant decisions.

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