

Abstract

Drawing from interdependence theory and Waves 1, 3, and 5 from continuously partnered focal participants (anchors) and their partners in the German Family Panel (Pairfam) study ($n = 1,543$), the current study sought to examine the temporal ordering between anchor and partner supportive dyadic coping with anchor commitment and willingness to sacrifice for an intimate partner. Autoregressive cross-lagged modeling analyses revealed anchor and partner supportive dyadic coping predicted higher levels of commitment and willingness to sacrifice, while willingness to sacrifice predicted less supportive dyadic coping only for anchors. There were no longitudinal associations between commitment and willingness to sacrifice and gender did not moderate associations among the variables.

Background

- Interdependence theory posits relationship investments (along with satisfaction and low quality alternatives) drive the development of commitment (Rusbult, 1980), which then prompts individuals to transform their motivation from themselves to their relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and make sacrifices for their partner (Van Lange et al., 1997).

Investments → Commitment → Sacrifice

- One's own supportive dyadic coping may operate as an investment into his or her relationship, bolstering commitment, or a sacrificial behavior enacted for one's partner (stemming from prior willingness to make sacrifices).

Investments (Supportive Dyadic Coping?) → Commitment → Sacrifice (Supportive Dyadic Coping?)

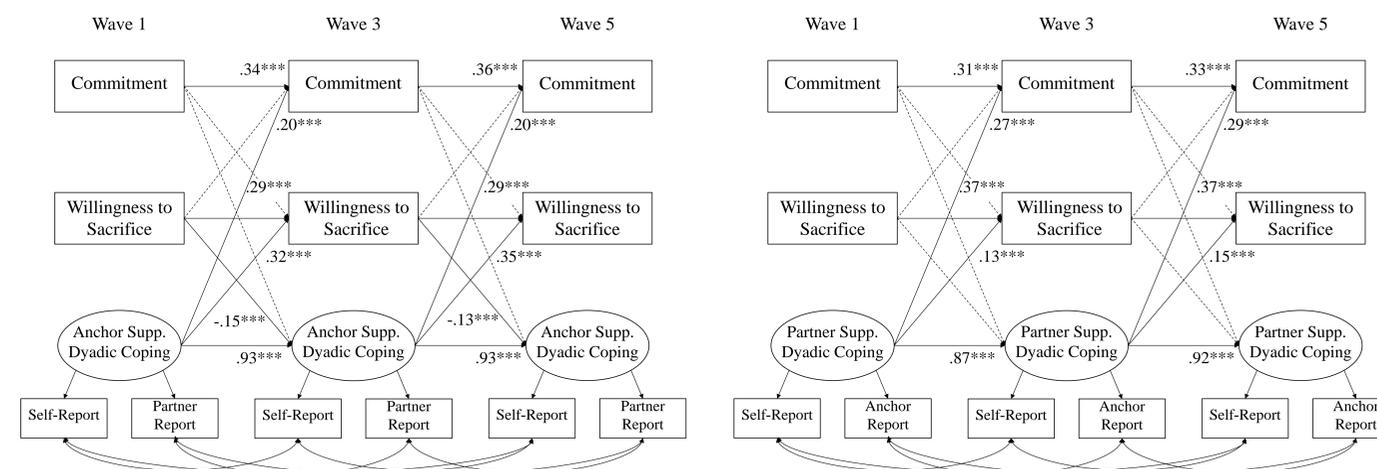
- A partner's supportive dyadic coping might serve as a signal of his or her commitment to the relationship (Stanley et al., 2010), increasing the anchor's commitment and willingness to sacrifice.

Commitment (Partner's Supportive Dyadic Coping) → Anchor's Commitment + Sacrifice

- Prior research demonstrated differences between men and women in associations between dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction (Ruffieux et al., 2014), as well as commitment and sacrifice (Stanley et al., 2006).

Results

Figure 1
Autoregressive Cross-Lagged Analyses Testing Interrelations of Anchor and Partner Supportive Dyadic Coping, Commitment, and Willingness to Sacrifice ($n = 1,543$)



Note: Standardized estimates. Within-wave covariances between commitment, sacrifice, and supportive dyadic coping and covariances between each variable at Waves 1 and 5 were included in the analysis. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

- Anchor and partner dyadic coping were associated with higher commitment and willingness to sacrifice over time. A greater willingness to sacrifice was associated with less anchor supportive dyadic coping, but did not predict partner supportive dyadic coping. Commitment did not predict either anchor or partner supportive dyadic coping, and commitment and willingness to sacrifice did not exhibit longitudinal associations.
- Gender did not moderate the associations in either model: $\chi^2_{diff}(6) = 4.87, p = .560$ for anchor supportive dyadic coping and $\chi^2_{diff}(6) = 11.96, p = .062$ for partner supportive dyadic coping.

Research Question

What are the longitudinal interrelations among anchor participants' and their intimate partners' supportive dyadic coping with anchors' commitment and willingness to make sacrifices, and does gender moderate these associations?

Measures

Supportive Dyadic Coping. Three items from the Dyadic Coping Questionnaire (Bodenmann, 2000) were used. Anchors and partners were asked, "When your partner is stressed out, how often do you do the following things?" Items were, "I let my partner know that I understand him/her," "I listen to my partner and give him/her the chance to express himself/herself," and "I support my partner in concrete ways when he/she has a problem."

Commitment. Two items inspired by the investment model developed to measure commitment (Grau, Mikula, & Engel, 2001) were used: "I would like for our partnership to last for a long time," and "I'm counting on a long-term future together with my partner."

Willingness to Sacrifice. One item from the Marburg Attitude Inventory for Styles of Loving (Bierhoff, Grau, & Ludwig, 1993) was used: "Usually, I am willing to sacrifice my own desires for my partner's desires."

Control Variables. Anchor and partner relationship satisfaction at Wave 1, relationship length, and marital status.

Procedure and Sample

- Analyzed data from Waves 1, 3, and 5 of the German Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (Pairfam) study.
- This study draws from intimate partner pairs (anchors and partners) recruited at baseline from two birth cohorts: young adults 25-27 years old (1981-1983) and adults approaching midlife 35-37 years old (1971-1973).
- Filtered initial sample to include participants in continuing unions and omit adolescent and same-sex couples because these subgroups had too few couples to analyze their data.
- Final subsample of **1,543 German couples**: 55.5% female and 44.5% male; 33.6% in the young adult cohort and 63.4% in the midlife cohort; majority in longer-term unions ($M = 9.48$ years, $SD = 5.68$) and married (67.2%).

Data Analysis

- Autoregressive cross-lagged regression models were used to answer the research question (separate models for anchors' and partners' supportive dyadic coping).
- The moderating influence of gender was tested with multiple group structural equation modeling and applying equality constraints.

Discussion and Implications

- Supportive Dyadic Coping = Investment**
Supportive dyadic coping seems to serve as an investment made in a partnership that informs commitment and willingness to sacrifice. Supportive dyadic coping directly predicted willingness to make sacrifices for a partner, rather than indirectly via commitment, potentially because enacting supportive actions during times of stress may mitigate the deleterious consequences of sacrificing in these scenarios (Totenhagen & Curran, 2011).
- ↑ Willingness to Sacrifice → ↓ Anchor Supportive Dyadic Coping**
The underlying motivation to engage in supportive dyadic coping might be informed, at least partly, by a selfish desire to limit one's own stress (Bodenmann, 2005). If these actions do cultivate a future transformation of motivation, as evidenced by an increased willingness to sacrifice, one may be less likely to engage in pro-relationship behaviors undertaken for self-serving reasons.
- No Association Between Commitment and Willingness to Sacrifice**
An underlying developmental process may be responsible for this lack of longitudinal association. Committed partners regularly encounter situations that necessitate them to prioritize either their own immediate self-interest or make a sacrifice (Van Lange et al., 1997). Over time, this process may become routine for long-term couples, such as those in our study.
- No Moderating Influence of Gender**
- Implications**
Stress can have detrimental effects on relationship functioning and stability (Neff & Karney, 2010), but couples have the opportunity to **enact pro-relationship behaviors** at these times that **can reinforce desires to maintain and sacrifice for a relationship** years into the future. Insofar as enhancing commitment and increasing altruistic, sacrificial behaviors among partners is a desired aim, treatments should include a focus on **teaching effective ways to support a partner during stressful periods**.