

Paradox of Sacrifice

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PREP

Smart Marriages 2007

“Sacrifice”

- What's in a word?
- Other words
 - Altruism
 - Generosity
 - Giving

Sacrifice

- The essence of sacrifice is choosing to give up something for the benefit of the other.

Traditional Wedding Vows

Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her,

- in sickness and in health,
- for richer, for poorer,
- for better, for worse,
- in sadness and in joy,
- to cherish and continually bestow upon her your heart's deepest devotion,
- forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her

... as long as you both shall live?

Royal Bank of Scotland

“Of course that very much depends on what you mean by the question, ‘*Do you?*’”

You mean I have to choose to let something else go?

Maybe

- “Maybe I do”
 - If you only focus on what you could be losing, you have already lost.
- “Do you . . . ?” is a question inviting a clear decision.

Let's Be Clear

- I am suggesting “all out” commitment includes sacrifice.
- I am suggesting that these things contribute to healthy, strong marriages.
- But choosing a partner wisely, in the first place, is part of the smarter path.
- Sliding vs. Deciding
 - (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006)

The Reality of Sacrifice

- Sacrifices are frequently called for and performed in close relationships because conflict between self-interest and the good of the relationship occurs often.

Sarah Whitton

Research on Sacrifice:

Young field but much replication

- Strong findings across many studies:
 - different Researchers
 - different Samples
 - different Measures
 - different Methods
- Same general findings

NIH Support

- This talk and the research cited here from our lab was supported by grants from:

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

- R01HD48780-1A1 (NICHD) Marriage Education and Risk Reduction for Army Families
- R01 HD047564-01A2 (NICHD) The Role of Cohabitation in Marriage and Union Formation
- R01 HD053314-20A1 (NICHD) Long Term Effect of Premarital Intervention
- Senior Investigators:
 - Howard Markman
 - Scott Stanley
 - Elizabeth Allen
 - Galena Kline Rhoades

More Detail on Studies and other Information
Posted On Our Website

- www.PREPinC.com
- Look for the link to this talk.

Fourteen samples/studies across these publications:

- Stanley & Markman, 1992 (two samples)
- Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox (1997) (six studies)
- Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew (1999) (two studies)
- Whitton, Stanley, & Markman (2002, 2007) (two studies)
- Stanley, Whitton, Low, Clements, & Markman (2006)
- Tom Smith (2007) at National Opinion Research Center

Sacrifice Measured Many Ways

- Willingness to give up something very important
- Level of resentment when giving up something (even if small) for the partner
- Preference to suffer rather than let loved one suffer
- Inner satisfaction with giving to partner

A Paradox

- Focusing on getting an “equal” return will get you less of what you want.
- Givers make the best lovers.

Murstein & MacDonald: Exchange Orientation

- Exchange orientation the expectation that you should get back equal to what you give.
- Exchange orientation is associated with divorce and marital unhappiness

Murstein, B. I., & MacDonald, M. G. (1983). The relationship of “exchange-orientation” and “commitment” scales to marriage adjustment. *International Journal of Psychology*, 18, 297-311.

Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said “I do”: Discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years based on premarital data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 613-626.

Co-Dependency

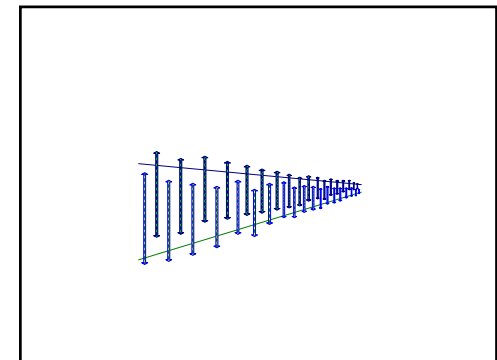
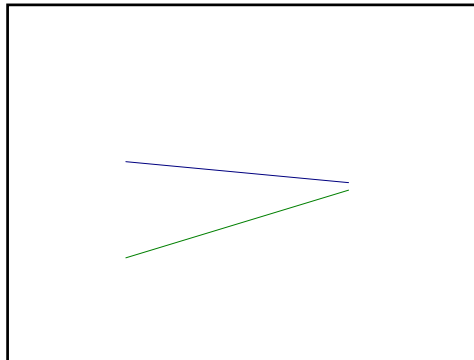
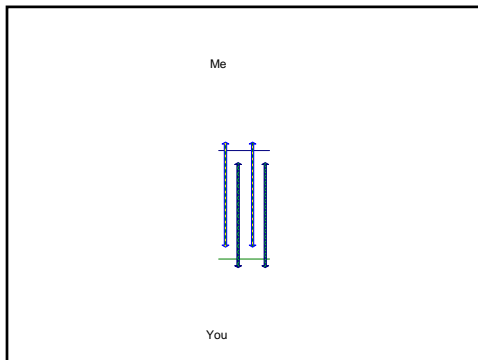
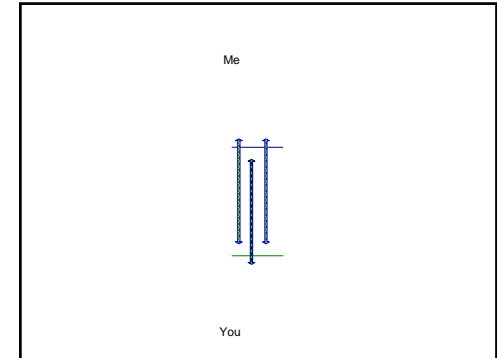
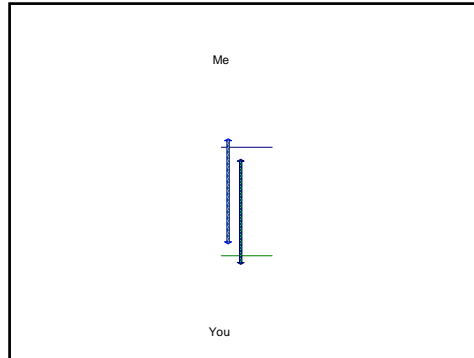
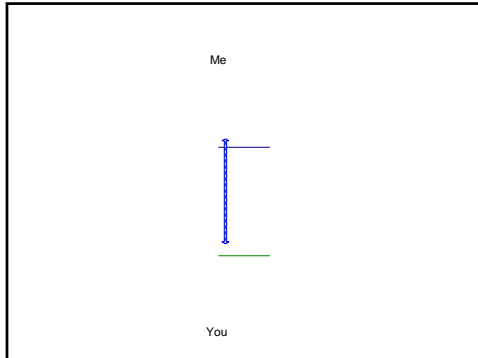
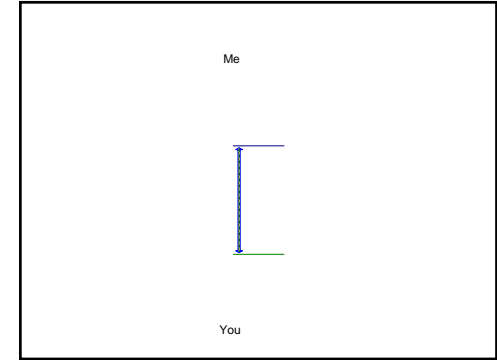
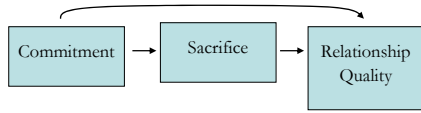
- A great idea gone bad
- “Real, healthy sacrifice involves a choice to be useful to another, not to be used by another.”

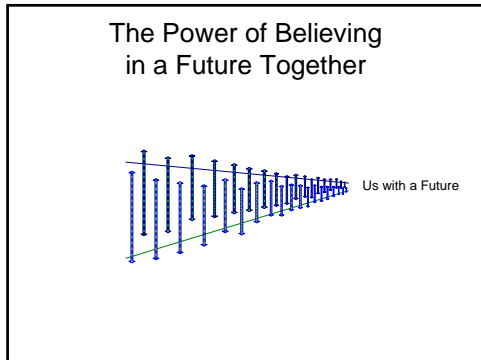
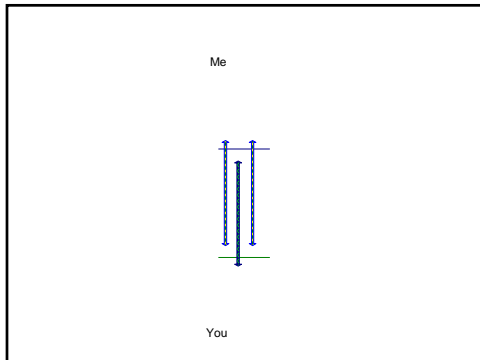
To be very clear . . .

- A person can give too much.

The Link Between Commitment and Sacrifice

Sacrifice: A commitment-inspired pro-relationship behavior
(from Whitton, Stanley, Kline Rhoades, Clements, & Markman, 2006)





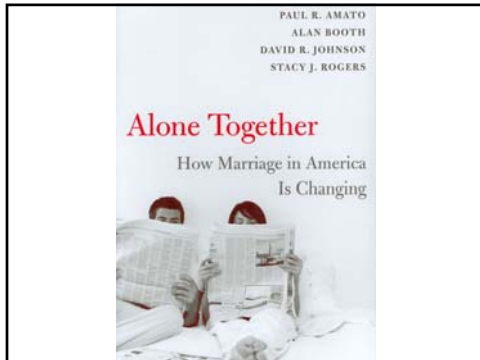
- Men and Women and Sacrifice:
 - Our studies to date show that sacrifice is more strongly related to long-term commitment in men than women.
 - Will look at in more studies over time, but . . .

A Trend Related to our Discussion

Disconnection from Community



- ### Alone, Alone, Alone
- Robert Putnam's
 - *Bowling Alone*
 - Gregg Easterbrook's
 - *The Progress Paradox*
 - Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers'
 - *Alone Together*
- Amato, P. R., Booth, A., Johnson, D. R., & Rogers, S. J. (2007). *Alone Together*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



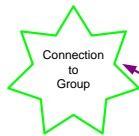
- ### Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers
- We have fewer friends and memberships in common with spouse than 20 years ago.
 - The decrease in shared friendships, in marriage, was associated with declining marital quality (page 202).
 - "Increasing individualism appears to have had a corrosive effect on marital quality." (page 203)

"We opened our home . . ."

How does community and connection relate to sacrifice?



"I belong"



Signals Trustworthiness



"I belong"



Signals Trustworthiness

Making "Do"

Strengthening Community

Sample Strategies from PREP's
Within My Reach and *Within Our Reach*

- Developing community connections.
 - Increase support
 - Giving back

Building on Sacrifice

Types of Sacrifice: Big and Small

- Small acts of awareness of the other
- Acceptance of quirks
- Listening
- Forgiveness of transgressions and imperfections
- Resisting the desire to return negative for negative
- Doing something your partner wants to do for fun
- Expressing gratefulness

Types of Sacrifice: Big and Small

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- Nancy to Scott:

"If you didn't want to be improved, you shouldn't have gotten married."

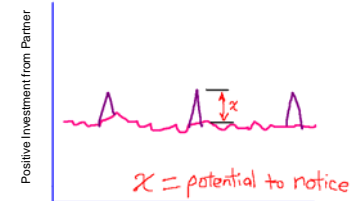
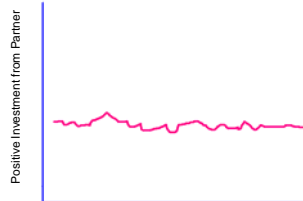
What's Makes Sacrifice Special?

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- "Less Talk, More Action"
 - Getting it done is what matters most.

Visibility: Seeing is Believing

- We get acclimated to the positive things our partner does.
- We just won't notice it unless we push reflection and gratefulness.
- BUT, sacrifice can be "seen" above the din of the daily grind.



“my partner shows me love . . .”

A Little Challenge

(Example of New Exercise in both
Within Our Reach and *Within My Reach*)

- **Two Things I Can Do This Week To Show My Love and Commitment**

- Write down two specific things you can do in the next few days for your partner.
- Don't share your ideas with your partner.
- Make a commitment to yourself to carry these two things out.

The Age Old Question?

Does size matter?

A Trend: Exploding Interest in Research on Happiness

Trying to Answer the Question:
“What makes people truly happy in life?”

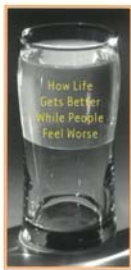
Hot Off the Press

- *The Happiness Hypothesis* (2006)
- *The Progress Paradox* (2004)
- *The Paradox of Choice* (2005)
- *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006)
- *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (2007)
The Exciting New Research that Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life

An Area of Exploding Empiricism

- Edward Diener
- Martin Seligman
- Daniel Kahneman
- Daniel Gilbert

The Progress Paradox



Gregg Easterbrook

The Progress Paradox

- Gregg Easterbrook (2004)

About the American Dream

“ . . . [The American Dream], in its vital assumption, that the good life would confer happiness, turns out not to be true.”
(p. 187)

“Happy People” Research Summary

- Have and protect **Friendships**
- Are more **Giving** of themselves to others
- Are more **Grateful** and let others know it
- Are more **Forgiving**

What's your motive? More Paradox


- Where positive psychology may go wrong
- As soon as our primary motive in giving is to be seen giving, it seems (to me) likely to destroy the power of the thing.
- That turns it back into "you owe me" in that you owe me recognition.

The Hope of Sacrifice

- We do not meet our own standards. Mostly, we are not doing, thinking, or being for the other what we so often demand the other do, think, or be for us. (This is normal.)
- None of us would want a jury of our peers to examine our own behavior against the standard we hold our partner up to meeting.

The Hope of Sacrifice

- Sacrifice gives us a way around this, . . .
 - In the moment we choose, we overcome our focus on self in order to give to another.
 - In the moment we choose, we are able to focus on what we do rather than what will happen to us.
 - This is the essence of commitment: making a choice to give up other choices. It is also deciding, not sliding.
 - That choice to give transcends, for one moment, the focus on the self.



More details posted on our website:
(see Scott's Corner by going to any of the major sections and checking the menu bar)

www.PREPinC.com

My book "The Power of Commitment" is available at Amazon.com or on our website.

The Paradox of Sacrifice

Smart Marriages June 29, 2007

Scott M. Stanley

Abstracts of Selected Studies Mentioned in Keynote Address

Empirical Studies Related to Sacrifice and Marriage

Murstein, B. I., & MacDonald, M. G. (1983). The relationship of “exchange-orientation” and “commitment” scales to marriage adjustment. *International Journal of Psychology, 18*, 297-311.

Believing that "exchange" and "commitment" are basic dimensions associated with marriage adjustment (MA), scales measuring these 3 dimensions were administered to 40 married couples (aged 26-57 yrs). Exchange was predicted to be negatively correlated with MA, commitment positively associated with it, and an individual's exchange and commitment qualities were predicted to affect his or her partner's MA. The hypotheses were all supported. Further analyses, however, revealed that husbands' MA was more strongly associated with their own exchange and commitment scores than those of their wives. However, wives' MA was equally associated with their own and their husbands' exchange and commitment scores. Implications for women's positions in marriage are discussed.

Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992) Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 54*, 595-608.

Presents a model for conceptualizing relationship commitment and describes the development of a measure corresponding to this model. Commitment is considered as 2 constructs: personal dedication and constraint commitment. In Exp 1, items developed for the Commitment Inventory (CI) were given to 141 adult Ss. Item analyses resulted in selection of the items for the inventory. In Exp 2, 279 Ss (aged 17-86 yrs) yielded data used in further testing of the CI. Tests were conducted on the reliability of the subscales, the factor structure of the CI, and the associations between the CI and various other measures of commitment. Further, the CI was examined in relation to various demographic variables and various measures of other relationship constructs. Overall, the research demonstrated that the CI shows promise as a reliable and valid instrument for measuring commitment.

Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., Sadberry, S. L., Clements, M. L., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sacrifice as a predictor of marital outcomes. *Family Process, 45*, 289-303.

We investigated the prospective associations between attitudes about sacrifice and marital outcomes in 38 married couples. Specifically, a measure of satisfaction with sacrifice was proposed to be a potent longitudinal predictor of marital adjustment and distress based on existing cross-sectional studies and also to mediate the association between commitment and marital adjustment. Results demonstrated that attitudes about sacrifice discriminated between

couples who would become distressed versus nondistressed over time. Sacrifice attitudes also predicted the maintenance of relationship adjustment over time even better than earlier relationship adjustment. Finally, sacrifice attitudes mediated the link between commitment and relationship adjustment for husbands, but not wives. Implications for intervention are discussed.

Van Lange, P. A. M., Agnew, C. R., Harnick, F., & Steemers, G. E. M. (1997). From game theory to real life: How social value orientation affects willingness to sacrifice in ongoing close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 1330-1344.

This research adopted an interdependence analysis of sacrifice, examining the link between commitment (i.e., the subjective experience of dependence and long-term orientation) and willingness to sacrifice in ongoing close relationships, and determining whether this link is moderated by preexisting individual differences in social value orientation (i.e., prosocial, individualistic, or competitive orientation). Consistent with hypotheses, results of 2 studies revealed both that willingness to sacrifice was associated with greater commitment and that this link was more pronounced among individualists than among prosocials. Results also revealed an association between one's own willingness to sacrifice and beliefs regarding the partner's willingness to sacrifice (this link was somewhat more pronounced among prosocials than among individualists) and one's own willingness to sacrifice and actual partner's willingness to sacrifice.

Van Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., Arriaga, X. B., Witcher, B. S., & Cox, C. L. (1997). Willingness to sacrifice in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 1373-1395.

The authors advance an interdependence analysis of willingness to sacrifice. Support for model predictions was revealed in 6 studies (3 cross-sectional survey studies, 1 simulation experiment, 2 longitudinal studies) that used a novel self-report measure and a behavioral measure of willingness to sacrifice. Willingness to sacrifice was associated with strong commitment, high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high investments; feelings of commitment largely mediated the associations of these variables with willingness to sacrifice. Moreover, willingness to sacrifice was associated with superior couple functioning, operationalized in terms of level of dyadic adjustment and probability of couple persistence. In predicting adjustment, willingness to sacrifice accounted for significant variance beyond commitment, partially mediating the link between commitment and adjustment; such mediation was not significant for persistence.

Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2007). If I help my partner, will it hurt me? Perceptions of sacrifice in romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 26, 64-92.

We proposed and tested a theory of the associations among relationship commitment, perceived harmfulness of relationship sacrifices to the self, and relationship and individual well-being. Results from a cross-sectional study of 145 couples provided reliability and validity data for a measure of the extent to which relationship sacrifices are perceived to be harmful to the self. As predicted, greater perceived sacrifice harmfulness was associated with lower relationship commitment, poorer couple functioning, and higher depressive symptomatology. However, commitment was more robustly predictive of perceived sacrifice harmfulness for males than

females; in women, the association was weaker and could be accounted for by partner commitment and relationship satisfaction. Perceived sacrifice harmfulness partially mediated the association between commitment and relationship functioning in males.

Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C. E., Foster, C. A., & Agnew, C. R. (1999). Commitment, pro-relationship behavior, and trust in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 942-966.

The present work advances and tests an interdependence-based model of the associations among commitment, pro-relationship behavior, and trust. Findings from two longitudinal studies revealed good support for model predictions. Commitment-inspired acts such as accommodation and willingness to sacrifice provide diagnostic information regarding a partner's pro-relationship motives. Individuals come to trust their partners when they perceive that their partners have enacted pro-relationship behaviors, departing from their direct self-interest for the good of the relationship. The results of mediation analyses are consistent with a model of mutual cyclical growth in which (a) dependence promotes strong commitment, (b) commitment promotes pro-relationship acts, (c) pro-relationship acts are perceived by the partner, (d) the perception of pro-relationship acts enhances the partner's trust, and (e) trust increases the partner's willingness to become dependent on the relationship. Auxiliary analyses revealed that self-reported attachment style does not account for substantial variance beyond the features of interdependence that form the basis for the present model.

Other References from Presentation of Special Note

[I referenced many works and much literature. What follows below are abstracts from only a few of the works that seem particularly important to points that I made.]

Crawford, D. W., Houts, R. M., Huston, T. L., & George, L. J. (2002). Compatibility, leisure, and satisfaction in marital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 433-449.

Examined associations between compatibility, leisure, and satisfaction in marital relationships. 73 married couples (aged 18-47 yrs) completed interviews in 1983 and 11-12 yrs subsequently concerning leisure compatibility, marital satisfaction, and leisure behavior. Results show that compatibility in activity preferences did not serve to draw partners together and encourage leisure companionship, but did generally suppress spouses' inclination to pursue leisure activities independently. Couples' joint pursuit of mutually liked activities, although extremely common, was not associated with compatibility, nor was leisure compatibility related to the pursuit of mutually-liked leisure apart. Pursuit of activities that both spouses liked was significantly related to satisfaction only for husbands. The more often couples pursued leisure activities together that only husbands liked, the lower was wives' satisfaction with marriage.

Diener, E. & Oishi, S. (2005). The nonobvious social psychology of happiness. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16, 162-167.

We will briefly touch on five sets of findings in social psychology, discuss the implications of these findings to well-being, and describe studies conducted by well-being researchers that follow directly from the social psychological studies. First, we discuss the famous article of Brickman et al. (1978) in which they maintain that people adapt hedonically to both positive and negative conditions. The idea of adaptation has arguably been the most influential concept guiding conceptions of well-being. We discuss the current state of our knowledge about whether the hedonic treadmill (Brickman & Campbell, 1971) of adaptation is adequate. The second area we review is the importance of social relationships to adequate human functioning. Social psychologists such as Baumeister and Leary (1995) reviewed the negative impact of ostracism and a lack of social support on people's functioning. Evidence has shown that close social relationships might also be necessary to the subjective experience of well-being, not simply beneficial to it. The third topic we cover relates to the second, and it concerns the fact that negative stimuli are more powerful than positive stimuli (e.g., Rozin & Royzman, 2001). In social relationships, as with other stimuli, negative episodes seem to be weighted more heavily than positive ones. This helps explain why good social relationships are essential to well-being. Our fourth topic is concerned with the power of culture. Social psychologists have demonstrated the dramatic influence of culture on thinking and behavior (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003; Triandis, 1989). We describe how culture can also influence the definition, experience, and causes of happiness. Finally, we describe evidence showing that memory is reconstructive rather than an exact replica of the original experience. (e.g., Ross, 1989). In the domain of well-being this has implications not only for how people recall their moods and emotions, but also for how memory influences people's future choices. The findings from each of these five lines of psychological research have strongly influenced our understanding of well-being and ill-being, extending our scientific conceptions far beyond self-evident popular notions of happiness.

Schwartz, B. (2000). Self-determination: The tyranny of freedom. *American Psychologist*, 55, 79-88.

Americans now live in a time and a place in which freedom and autonomy are valued above all else and in which expanded opportunities for self-determination are regarded as a sign of the psychological well-being of individuals and the moral well-being of the culture. This article argues that freedom, autonomy, and self-determination can become excessive, and that when that happens, freedom can be experienced as a kind of tyranny. The article further argues that unduly influenced by the ideology of economics and rational-choice theory, modern American society has created an excess of freedom, with resulting increases in people's dissatisfaction with their lives and in clinical depression. One significant task for a future psychology of optimal functioning is to deemphasize individual freedom and to determine which cultural constraints are necessary for people to live meaningful and satisfying lives.

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding vs. deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499-509.

Premarital cohabitation has consistently been found to be associated with increased risk for divorce and marital distress in the United States. Two explanations for this "cohabitation effect" are discussed: selection and experience. We present an empirically based view of how the experience of cohabitation may increase risk for relationship distress or divorce for some people beyond what is accounted for by selection. Specifically, using a commitment framework, we suggest that some couples who otherwise would not have married end up married because of the inertia of cohabitation. We discuss practice implications for relationship transitions that are characterized more by sliding than deciding, especially where a transition such as cohabitation increases inertia to remain in a relationship regardless of quality or fit.

Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Maybe I do: Interpersonal commitment and premarital or nonmarital cohabitation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 496-519.

Explanations for the risks associated with premarital and nonmarital cohabitation (e.g., higher rates of breakup and divorce, lower relationship satisfaction, and greater risk for violent interaction) have focused on levels of conventionality, including attitudes about commitment to the institution of marriage. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of interpersonal, not institutional, commitment. In a national random sample (United States), premarital and nonmarital cohabitation were associated with lower levels of interpersonal commitment to partners, suggesting links to further understanding of risk in these relationships. Premarital cohabitation was particularly associated with less committed and less religious males. Prior findings associating cohabitation with lower levels of happiness and religiosity, and higher levels of negative interaction (for men) were replicated.

Background Research Articles and Books Related to:

Scott Stanley's Keynote Address at Smart Marriages Conference

The Paradox of Sacrifice

June 29, 2007

Amato, P. R., Booth, A., Johnson, D. R., & Rogers, S. J. (2007) *Alone Together*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 323-370.

Beach, S. R. H., & Fincham, F. D., & Stanley, S. M. (2007). Contextualizing the study of marital transformation: Point of convergence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 315-319

Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said "I do": Discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years based on premarital data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 613-626.

Crawford, D. W., Houts, R. M., Huston, T. L., & George, L. J. (2002). Compatibility, leisure, and satisfaction in marital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, pp. 433-449.

Cutrona, C. (1996). *Social support in couples: Marriage as a resource in times of stress*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Diener, E., & Oishi, S. (2005). The nonobvious social psychology of happiness. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16(4), 162-167.

Diener, E., Tamir, M., & Scollon, C. N. (2006). Happiness, like satisfaction, and fulfillment: The social psychology of subjective well-being. P. A. M. Van Lange (Ed.), *In Bridging social psychology: Benefits of transdisciplinary approaches* (pp. 319-324). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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Putnam, R. D., (2001). *Bowling alone : The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

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