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Perceiving that a partner is highly committed tends to benefit close relationships.

However, there may be drawbacks to perceiving that a partner is committed. Considering high commitment may signal that a partner is unlikely to leave the relationship, people may feel more comfortable behaving in a selfish manner to the extent that they perceive that their partner is highly committed to the relationship. This may be particularly likely for people who are low in agreeableness. Specifically, I hypothesized that perceiving that one's partner is committed will be associated with greater selfish behaviors toward that partner among people who are low in agreeableness, but associated with less selfish behavior among people who are high in agreeableness. Two initial studies supported these predictions. In Study 3, two hundred and forty-nine undergraduate participants (126 couples) completed an evaluative priming task and received false feedback based on their partner's responses suggesting that their partners were either high or low in commitment. Participants then engaged in a noise blast task that served as an indicator of selfishness and completed a questionnaire assessing the likelihood that they would engage in selfish relationship behaviors. Results demonstrated that perceiving that a partner is highly committed resulted in more selfish behavior among disagreeable participants, but less selfish behavior among agreeable participants. Together, these results suggest that signaling commitment to disagreeable partners may backfire in romantic relationships.

PERCEIVING GREATER COMMITMENT INCREASES SELFISH BEHAVIORS AMONG
DISAGREEABLE PEOPLE

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Raini N. Sizemore

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Approved by

Dr. Levi R. Baker
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Raini N. Sizemore has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Levi R. Baker, Ph.D.

Committee Members

Shaylene Nancekivell, Ph.D.

Paul Silvia, Ph.D.

August 18th, 2022
Date of Acceptance by Committee

August 18th, 2022
Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Although close relationship partners often facilitate each other's interpersonal and intrapersonal goals (Fitzsimons et al., 2015), it is not uncommon for partners' personal goals to conflict with one another (Wieselquist et al., 1999). When such goal conflicts occur, people are faced with the decision of whether to prioritize their own goals or their partner's (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). For example, after discovering that his partner, Lucy, would rather watch a movie instead of the hockey game that he prefers, Ricky must decide whether to prioritize his own well-being by watching the game or Lucy's well-being by watching the movie. The decisions that result from these interdependence dilemmas have important implications (Rusbult et al., 2001); although being willing to behave selflessly tends to improve relationship quality (Van Lange et al., 1997b), such selfless acts can also harm individual well-being (Righetti et al., 2020), especially when they fail to improve relationship quality (Baker et al., 2012).

Although selfishness is central to numerous interpersonal processes such as altruism (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Trivers, 1971), ostracism (Feinberg et al., 2014), equity (Walster et al., 1976), morality (Frimer et al., 2014), trust (Eilam & Suleiman, 2004), and power (Righetti et al., 2015), scholars have only recently directed their attention to the construct itself (see Carlson et al., 2022; Crocker et al., 2017). Selfishness is defined as the desire to act in a way that would benefit the self at the expense of others' desires and well-being and social expectations to behave more altruistically (Carlson et al., 2022). In the context of romantic relationships, selfishly-motivated people tend to provide lower levels of support (Feeney & Collins, 2003) and be less responsive to (Canevello & Crocker, 2015) their romantic partner's needs. However, research on

selfishness in romantic relationships is scarce and questions about what shapes selfish behavior in romantic relationships remain unanswered.

The extent to which people believe their partners are committed to the relationship (i.e., *perceived partner commitment*; Arriaga & Agnew, 2001) may influence these decisions; however, theory and research make competing predictions about the direction of this influence. On the one hand, people may behave *less* selfishly toward partners who they perceive to be highly committed because they may reason that those committed partners would be more likely to reciprocate such selfless behavior, compared to partners who are perceived to be less committed (Gouldner, 1960; Rusbult et al., 1998a). On the other hand, perceiving that a partner is highly committed may also allow room for selfishness. In particular, given that partners are more likely to minimize transgressions (Menziez-Toman & Lydon, 2005) and less likely to end a relationship (see Rusbult, 1980) to the extent that they are committed to that relationship, people may behave *more* selfishly toward partners who they perceive are highly committed because they may expect that fewer harmful consequences will result from behaving selfishly toward committed partners, compared to partners who are perceived to be less committed.

Given these competing theoretical predictions, the current research seeks to identify whether perceived partner commitment increases or decreases intimates' selfish relationship behavior. The remainder of this introduction will be segmented into three parts. The first section reviews theory and research that suggests that people should behave *less* selfishly to the extent that they perceive their partner is committed to their relationship. In contrast, the second section reviews theory and research that suggests that people should behave *more* selfishly to the extent that they perceive their partner is committed to their relationship. The third section attempts to reconcile these conflicting arguments by describing theoretical and empirical evidence that

suggests that whether perceived partner commitment increases or decreases selfishness depends on intimates' agreeableness.

Perceived Partner Commitment May Decrease Selfish Behaviors

Perceived partner commitment refers to people's beliefs about the extent to which their partner desires for their relationship to persist and intends to maintain their relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Arriaga et al., 2006). Perceiving that a partner is committed to the relationship tends to benefit romantic relationships in numerous ways. For example, perceiving that a partner is committed to the relationship tends to assuage concerns that the partner might be romantically interested in others (Black & Reis, 2022) and thus increase trust (Rempel et al., 2001; Wieselquist et al., 1999) and reduce negative emotions, such as jealousy (Pytlak et al., 2015), and behaviors, such as confrontation (Cross et al., 2017; Lemay & Dobush, 2015). Further, people who believe their partners are highly committed tend to report greater relationship satisfaction (Bar-Kalifa et al., 2015) and overall relationship quality (Drigotas et al., 1999; Ito et al., 2021) compared to those who doubt their partners' commitment. Finally, perceived partner commitment is associated with greater relationship commitment (Joel et al., 2018), reduced interest in romantic alternatives (Park & Park, 2018), and a lower risk of relationship dissolution (Arriaga et al., 2006).

Further, there are reasons why perceiving a partner is committed may also benefit relationships by decreasing selfish behaviors. First, people should be more satisfied with, and thus behave less selfishly toward, committed partners compared to partners who they perceive are less committed. In particular, people tend to be more satisfied with partners who they perceive are highly committed (vs. relatively less committed; Arriaga et al., 2006) and satisfaction decreases selfish behavior (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Second, people should expect

longer-lasting relationships with, and thus behave less selfishly toward, committed partners compared to partners who they perceive are less committed. Indeed, people tend to sacrifice more for their partners when they believe that the relationship is likely to persist (Van Lange et al., 1997b) and partners' commitment reflects their desire to maintain a lasting relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Finally, highly-committed partners should be more likely to reciprocate selfless behavior, and thus people should behave less selfishly toward those partners, compared to partners who they perceive are less committed. Specifically, people tend to sacrifice more for their partners if they believe those partners are similarly willing to sacrifice for them (Kelley, 1983) and highly committed partners tend to sacrifice more than less committed partners (Van Lange et al., 1997a; Wieselquist et al., 1999). In sum, people may behave less selfishly toward partners they perceive are highly committed, compared to those they perceive are less committed, because they should be more satisfied with those partners, expect longer relationships with those partners, and expect those partners to reciprocate such selfless acts.

Previous literature also provides indirect evidence that perceived partner commitment may decrease selfish behaviors. For example, research on trust suggests that people tend to sacrifice more for partners that they trust (vs. those they do not; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012) and such judgments of trust are shaped by the extent that they believe those partners are committed (Wieselquist, et al., 1999). Similarly, theory (Trivers, 1971) and research (Van Lange et al., 1997a) on reciprocal altruism suggest that people are more likely to sacrifice for others whom they believe would reciprocate such sacrificial acts compared to those they believe would not sacrifice for them. Given that commitment is positively associated with the willingness to sacrifice (Wieselquist et al., 1999), individuals who perceive their partners are more committed,

and thus more willing to sacrifice for them, should be more willing to forgo their own interests compared to individuals who perceive their partners to be less committed.

Perceived Partner Commitment May Increase Selfish Behaviors

Nevertheless, perceived partner commitment may instead *increase* selfish behaviors in romantic relationships because people who perceive that their partners are highly committed should anticipate fewer harmful interpersonal consequences from their selfish behavior compared to those who believe their partners are less committed. In particular, because highly committed people are more motivated to maintain their relationships, they tend to view their partners in a more positive light than do less committed people (Gagné & Lydon, 2004; Murray et al., 1996). Accordingly, individuals tend to overlook or minimize the severity of their partners' undesirable behavior to the extent that they are committed to their relationship with those partners (Menziez-Toman & Lydon, 2005). Thus, people who perceive that their partners are highly committed should anticipate that those partners would view them more positively and overlook their undesirable behaviors, such as their selfish acts. As a result, perceiving a partner to be highly committed might lead intimates to expect fewer harmful interpersonal consequences from their selfish behaviors and thus increase such selfish behaviors.

Several lines of research also provide indirect support for this argument. For example, research on aggression in romantic relationships suggests that people who are highly committed are more likely to experience dating violence than are less committed people (Hammock & O'Hearn, 2002; Pedersen & Thomas, 1992). One reason why they may be more likely to experience aggression is that their partners may perceive them to be relatively unlikely to leave their relationships in response to their hostile behavior. Indeed, people who are constrained to their relationships and thus are unable to leave those relationships tend to experience higher rates

of aggression than those who are more able to leave (Rhoades et al., 2010). Although committed individuals are still able to leave their relationships, high commitment may signal that they are similarly likely to tolerate selfish behavior. Research outside of close relationships also suggests that people may be more likely to behave selfishly when they anticipate few harmful consequences. For example, studies that employ monetary dictator games that require participants to allocate money between themselves and other players have revealed that people allocate resources more selfishly when they are anonymous, and thus are free of consequences or retribution, compared to when their identity is known (Hoffman et al., 1994; Hoffman et al., 1996). Taken together, these lines of research suggest that people may be more likely to engage in selfish behavior to the extent that they believe their selfish behaviors will not result in harmful consequences for themselves, such as when they are directed toward a committed partner.

The Moderating Role of Agreeableness

Given that perceived partner commitment might decrease selfish behavior by increasing trust in a partner, yet increase selfish behavior by increasing the exploitability of that partner, whether perceived partner commitment increases or decreases selfish behavior may depend on whether the motivation to preserve the relationship by maximizing the partner's well-being is greater than the motivation to maximize one's own well-being. Specifically, it is hypothesized that agreeableness will moderate the relationship between perceived partner commitment and selfishness. Agreeableness is a personality trait that reflects active concern for others' welfare (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Although people high in agreeableness tend to be trusting, tolerant, and cooperative, people low in agreeableness tend to be cynical, greedy, and antagonistic (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and motivated by self-interests (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002), even at the expense of others (Jensen-Campbell et al., 2010). For someone who

is high in agreeableness and thus is motivated to preserve the relationship by maximizing their partner's well-being, perceiving that a partner is committed may provide that person with the assurance that their selfless behavior will not be exploited by their partner and thus should decrease their selfish behavior. In particular, people who are high in agreeableness typically focus on others' needs (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, they should be less likely to act selfishly, especially to the extent that they perceive their partners are committed, given that their partners' commitment signals that their partners are trustworthy and caring (Wieselquist et al., 1999) and thus should decrease their own concerns about whether their selfless behavior would be exploited. However, for people who are low in agreeableness and thus are motivated to maximize their own well-being, perceiving that a partner is committed should provide that person with the opportunity to behave selfishly without experiencing severe repercussions from the partner and thus should increase selfish behavior. In particular, people low in agreeableness are typically motivated by self-interests (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002) and, because commitment can be a signal of relationship longevity and security (Stanley & Markman, 1992), they might be more willing to exploit their partner. As such, they should be more likely to act selfishly, especially to the extent that they perceive their partners are committed, given that their partners' commitment signals that they may hold them less accountable for the selfish behavior and thus leaves them more comfortable to take advantage of those partners.

Overview of the Current Studies

The current study aimed to provide causal evidence that perceived partner commitment affects selfish behavior in romantic relationships. Two previous studies, described below as Study 1 and Study 2, demonstrated that perceived partner commitment was associated with greater selfish behavior among people who were low in agreeableness but not among those who

were high in agreeableness. However, both studies were limited by their correlational designs. As such, I advanced this line of research by conducting an experiment that examined the causal implications of perceived partner commitment for selfish behavior. The current study manipulated perceived partner commitment by offering false feedback about their partner's commitment. Selfishness was measured by (a) allowing participants to choose the volume of a disruptive noise blast for themselves and their partner and (b) a selfishness questionnaire. I hypothesized that, compared to participants who were led to believe that their partners were less committed, participants who were led to believe that their partners were highly committed would behave less selfishly if those participants were high in agreeableness, but *more* selfishly if those participants were low in agreeableness.

CHAPTER II: STUDY 1

Data for Study 1 came from a broader study of newlyweds that examined the extent to which participants would engage in a naturally occurring, specific type of selfish behavior: demanding their spouse change their behavior to meet their own preferences. Participants first completed measures of agreeableness and perceived partner commitment and then engaged in problem-solving discussions that were later coded for demanding behavior. Given that Study 1 was exploratory, no hypotheses or predictions were initially made for these data.

Methods

Participants. Participants were 101 newlywed couples participating in an ongoing broader study of marriage. This sample size was the maximum number of couples the research team had the funds to recruit. Of the 101 couples, 93 identified as heterosexual couples, 7 identified as lesbian couples, and 1 identified as a gay couple. On average, husbands were 32.66 years old ($SD = 8.72$) and wives were 32.08 years old ($SD = 8.74$). Among husbands, 58 (62%) identified as Caucasian, 26 (28%) identified as African American, and the remaining 11 (10%) identified as two or more ethnicities. Among wives, 58 (65%) identified as Caucasian, 27 (26%) identified as African American, and the remaining 11 (11%) identified as two or more ethnicities. Couples were recruited through invitations sent to couples who had applied for marriage licenses in the county. Couples were screened in a telephone interview to ensure they (a) had been married for less than three months, (b) were at least 18 years old, and (c) spoke English.

Procedure. Prior to the laboratory session during which problem-solving behaviors were observed, participants were emailed a link to a survey to complete on Qualtrics. This survey included a consent form approved by the local human subjects review board, self-report

measures that included measures of agreeableness and perceived partner commitment, and instructions to complete all questionnaires independently of their spouse. Upon arriving at their laboratory session, couples participated in two problem-solving discussions designed to assess how they resolve problems in their relationship. Before each discussion, each spouse identified a problem that affected their relationship or an aspect of their relationship that they would like to change. After identifying topics for the discussions, both spouses participated in two, eight-minute videotaped discussions in which they were left alone to “work toward some resolution or agreement” for each problem. The order of the discussions was determined at random. If both partners happened to choose the same topic, that topic was discussed first, followed by a second topic chosen by the spouse who was randomly determined to be discussed second.

Materials

Commitment. Participants completed a modified version of the commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998b) that was modified to assess their perceptions of their partner’s commitment (e.g., “My partner wants our relationship to last for a very long time” and “My partner wants our relationship to last forever”). This scale consisted of seven items that participants indicated their agreement with on a 9-point scale (0 = *Do not agree at all* to 8 = *Agree completely*). Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .68$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the Agreeableness scale, based on Goldberg (1992) from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg, 1999) to assess overall agreeableness (e.g., “I sympathize with others’ feelings” and “I take time out for others”). This scale consisted of ten items that participants indicated their agreement with on a 5-point scale (1 = *Very inaccurate* to 5 = *Very accurate*). Internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .82$).

Demanding behavior. The couples' problem-solving behaviors were coded from videotapes of their problem-solving discussions. Coders used a global, interval coding system to quantify participants' demanding behavior. In particular, coders assigned a code for each two-minute segment of each eight-minute conversation that indicated both the frequency and severity in which each participant "demanded or pressured their partner to change their behavior" using a scale from 1 (*Did not do this at all*) to 7 (*Severe and frequent demands*). Coders assigned codes for each two-minute interval, rather than providing one code for the entire conversation, to reduce the possibility that primacy and recency effects (see Chorney et al., 2015) would bias their coding. The eight codes for each participant (four codes for each conversation) were averaged together to form an index of how much each person tended to demand changes across the two conversations. Approximately 75% of the conversations were coded by a second researcher. Intraclass correlation coefficients indicated that the coders were reliable ($ICC = .76$).

Results

Descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations appear in Table 1. Men and women reported perceived partner commitment and agreeableness scores above the midpoint, suggesting they saw their partners as highly committed and saw themselves as agreeable, on average. Men and women did not differ in perceived partner commitment, $t(200) = -0.42, p = .677, d = -0.06$. However, consistent with previous research (Costa et al., 2001), women's self-reported agreeableness was higher than men's self-reported agreeableness, $t(200) = -2.38, p = .018, d = -0.34$. Similarly, consistent with previous research (Christensen & Heavey, 1990), women exhibited more demanding behavior than men, $t(200) = -2.67, p = .008, d = -0.38$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables in Study 1

Variable	1	2	3	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1) Perceived Partner Commitment	.24*	.01	.02	8.53	.85
(2) Agreeableness	.12	-.06	-.04	4.01	.61
(3) Demands	.13	.13	.02	1.68	.54
<i>M</i>	8.48	3.81	1.50		
<i>SD</i>	.96	.59	.38		

Note. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented above the diagonal for women and below the diagonal for men; correlations between spouses appear on the diagonal in bold.
* $p < .05$.

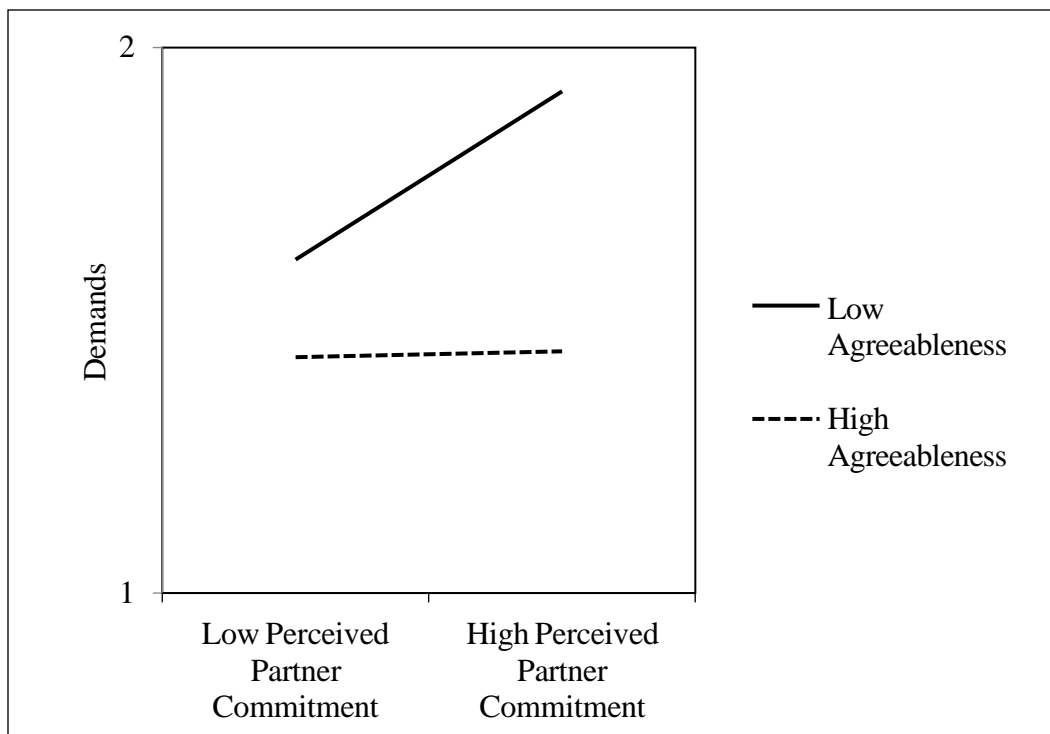
Does agreeableness moderate the association between perceived partner commitment and demands? To address whether the implications of intimates' perceptions of their partners' commitment for the extent to which they demanded behavioral changes from their partners depended on their own levels of agreeableness, I estimated a two-level model using the HLM 7.03 computer program (Raudenbush et al., 2013). In the first level of the model, participants' demand scores were regressed onto their mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered agreeableness scores, and their interaction. The non-independence of couples' data was controlled in the second level of the model, which allowed for a randomly varying intercept. Results are presented in Table 2. As shown, agreeableness was significantly negatively associated with greater demands. Nevertheless, this main effect was qualified by a significant Perceived Partner Commitment \times Agreeableness interaction (see Figure 1). Tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment was associated with greater demands among intimates who were one standard deviation below the mean in agreeableness, $t(97) = 4.67, p < .001, r = .43$, but not among intimates who were one standard deviation above the mean in agreeableness, $t(97) = 0.21, p = .837, r = .02$. Notably, subsequent

Table 2. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment, Agreeableness, and Their Interaction on Demands during Problem-Solving Discussions in Study 1

Measure	Demands			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
PPC	0.09	3.32	.32	.001
Agreeableness	-0.27	-4.44	.41	<.001
PPC × Agreeableness	-0.14	-4.24	.40	<.001

Note. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. *df* = 97.

Figure 1. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Agreeableness on Demands during Problem-Solving Discussions in Study 1.



analyses indicated this interaction was not further moderated by partners' sex, $t(93) = -0.74$, $p = .461$, $r = .08$, and remained significant when estimating an actor–partner interdependence model

(APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) that controlled for their partners' agreeableness, perceived partner commitment, and demands, $t(94) = -3.51, p < .001, r = .34$.

Discussion

Study 1 provided preliminary support that perceived partner commitment interacts with agreeableness to predict a specific form of selfish behavior: demanding that a partner change. Specifically, perceived partner commitment was associated with greater demanding behavior among intimates who were low in agreeableness but not among intimates who were high in agreeableness.

Nevertheless, Study 1 had several limitations. First, Study 1 analyzed a specific form of selfish behavior: demands. Although the implications of perceived partner commitment for spouses' demands were consistent with our theoretical predictions, examining the implications for only one specific type of selfish behavior limits the generalizability of these results. Second, given that participants in the study were newlyweds, perceived partner commitment was quite high, on average. Thus, I conducted Study 2 to examine a broader range of selfish behaviors and to address our predictions with a sample that would have greater variability in commitment.

CHAPTER III: STUDY 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate and extend the results of Study 1 by examining the implications of perceived partner commitment for a broader range of selfish behaviors among people varying in relationship length and commitment. Specifically, Study 2 relied on a more varied sample that consisted of both university students and Amazon MTurk participants to observe levels of commitment that may vary more than those among newlywed samples. In addition, Study 2 also used two measures of selfishness: one that captured self-reports of various types of selfish behaviors and one that served as a behavioral measure of selfishness. Based on the results of Study 1, I hypothesized that perceived partner commitment would be associated with more selfish behaviors among those low in agreeableness, but not among those high in agreeableness. The Online Supplemental Material for Study 2, which includes the preregistration, measures, and dataset, can be found at <https://osf.io/twyr4/>.

Methods

Participants. To increase variability and external validity, participants who were in romantic relationships were recruited from two different locations (total $n = 307$): Amazon Mechanical Turk ($n = 153$; 49.8%) and the undergraduate participant pool at the author's university ($n = 154$; 50.2%). Using the effect size of $r^2 = .16$ that was found in Study 1, an a priori power analysis indicated that a minimum of 44 participants was needed to have sufficient power (.80, two-tail, $\alpha = .05$) to detect the interaction of perceived partner commitment and agreeableness. Nevertheless, given that it is suggested that approximately four times the number of participants is required to have sufficient power to detect simple effects (see Giner-Sorolla, 2018, January 24), I made the a priori decision to recruit a minimum of 176 participants. Participants were eligible for the study if they (a) had been involved in a romantic relationship

for a minimum of three months prior to the beginning of the study, (b) were at least 18 years old, and (c) spoke English.

Participants recruited through MTurk (77 females, 75 males, 1 other) were 37.3 years of age ($SD = 10.2$ years), on average. One hundred and twenty-seven (83.0%) participants identified as heterosexual, 15 (9.8%) identified as bisexual, 3 (2.0%) identified as lesbian, gay, or homosexual, and 8 (5.2%) did not report sexual orientation. Ninety-nine (64.7%) participants identified as Caucasian, 30 (19.6%) identified as African American, 6 (3.9%) identified as Asian, 6 (3.9%) identified as Hispanic, 1 (0.7%) identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, 3 (2.0%) identified with two or more ethnicities, and 8 did not report ethnicity (5.2%). Participants recruited through the undergraduate participant pool (121 females, 31 males, 2 did not report gender) were 20.4 years of age ($SD = 4.03$ years), on average. One hundred and thirteen (73.4%) participants identified as heterosexual, 24 (15.6%) identified as bisexual, 7 (4.5%) identified as lesbian, gay, or homosexual, 4 (2.6%) identified as another sexual orientation, and 6 (3.8%) did not report sexual orientation. Fifty-seven (37.0%) participants identified as Caucasian, 42 (27.3%) identified as African American, 23 (14.9%) identified as Hispanic, 16 (10.4%) identified as Asian, 12 (7.8%) identified with two or more ethnicities, 1 (0.6%) identified as another ethnicity, and 3 (1.9%) did not report ethnicity.

Procedure. After enrolling in the study via either MTurk or the undergraduate participant pool, all participants received a link to the study, which was conducted online through Qualtrics. After signing a consent form approved by the local human subjects review board, participants completed self-report measures that assessed their perceptions of their partners' commitment, their own agreeableness, and their tendency to engage in a variety of selfish behaviors in their relationship. Participants then completed a welfare trade-off task that required participants to

decide whether to prioritize their own interests or the interests of their partner. Participants who were recruited from MTurk were compensated two dollars; participants who were recruited from the undergraduate participant pool were compensated with partial course credit.

Materials

Commitment. Participants completed the modified version of the commitment subscale from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998b) that was used in Study 1. Internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .85$).

Agreeableness. To assess agreeableness, participants completed the Agreeableness scale, based on Costa and McCrae (1992), from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg, 1999; e.g., “I respect others” and “I sympathize with others’ feelings”). This scale consisted of 20 items that participants indicated their agreement with on a 5-point scale (1 = *Very inaccurate* to 5 = *Very accurate*). Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .70$).

Honesty-Humility. To rule out other potential moderators, participants also completed the honesty-humility subscale of the HEXACO Personality Inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2018), which consisted of 16 items (e.g., “I wouldn’t want people to treat me as though I were superior to them”) that participants rated their agreement with on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*). This was scored by averaging all responses to the items; thus, higher scores indicated higher levels of honesty-humility. Internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .82$).

Altruism. Participants similarly completed the altruism subscale of the HEXACO Personality Inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2018), which consisted of four items (e.g., “I try to give generously to those in need”) that participants rated their agreement with on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*). This was scored by averaging all responses to the

items; thus, higher scores indicated higher levels of altruism. Internal consistency was low ($\alpha = .56$).

Self-reported Selfishness. To assess selfishness, participants first completed the Selfishness Questionnaire (Raine & Uh, 2018), which had been modified to address selfishness towards a partner (e.g., “Now and again I’ve manipulated my partner to gain an advantage” and “I’ve occasionally put my partner down to achieve my goals”). This scale consisted of 18 items that participants indicated their agreement with on a 3-point scale (1 = *Disagree*, 2 = *Neither agree nor disagree*, 3 = *Agree*). Internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .93$).

Welfare Trade-Off Task. Participants also completed a welfare trade-off task (see Kirkpatrick et al., 2015) to assess selfishness. This task presents participants with 60 scenarios in which they have to decide whether to benefit either themselves or their partners. Participants completed one of two versions of this task, depending on their living situation. Participants who did not live with their partners completed the traditional monetary version, which gives participants the option to give varying amounts of money either to themselves or their partners (e.g., “Would you rather receive \$55 or have your partner receive \$49?”). Given that this decision would be inconsequential for participants who share finances, and given that participants who cohabit often share finances (see Totenhagen et al., 2018), participants who cohabit completed a modified version of this task that gave them the option to assign various minutes of household chores to either themselves or their partners (e.g., “Would you rather do 55 minutes of chores or have your partner do 49 minutes of chores?”). The values for the partner-directed choices were anchored in six sets of ten choices (anchors set at 45, 49, 63, 72, 94, and 101; either in dollar amounts or minutes of chores) and the values for the participant-directed choices systematically varied to create ten choices for each set. For each choice, I calculated the

ratio of the amount that person could take from their partner to the amount they could give to their partner. Next, within each of the six sets, I identified the point at which participants switched from benefiting their partner to benefitting themselves. Specifically, for each participant, within each set, I calculated the average of the ratio of the smallest amount they were *willing* to take and the ratio of the largest amount they were *unwilling* to take. For example, if the least a participant was willing to take within a set was 65 dollars (instead of giving their partner 63 dollars) and the most they were unwilling to take within that set was 57 dollars (to give their partner 63 dollars), I would calculate the average (i.e., 0.97) of the ratio of both choices (i.e., 1.03, 0.90). Finally, I calculated the average of participants' scores on each of the six sets. The decisions of participants in the chores version of the task were reverse-coded to be equivalent to those in the monetary version. Finally, these scores were standardized and reverse-coded so that, for all participants, higher scores signify more selfish behavior.

Results

Descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are reported in Table 3. As shown, and consistent with previous research (Arriaga et al., 2006; Claxton et al., 2011; Holden et al., 2014), participants reported perceived partner commitment and agreeableness scores above the midpoint, suggesting that they saw their partners as at least moderately committed and themselves as agreeable, on average. Consistent with previous work suggesting people may hesitate to report undesirable behaviors like selfishness (Furnham & Henderson, 1982), participants reported selfishness scores below the midpoint, suggesting that they saw themselves as less selfish on average. Men and women did not differ in agreeableness, $t(302) = 0.85, p = .396, d = 0.10$, or welfare trade-off scores, $t(299) = -1.38, p = .169, d = -0.17$. However, women reported higher perceived partner commitment,

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables in Study 2

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1) Perceived Partner Commitment		-.21**	.27**	.45**	-.11	.03	7.65	1.40
(2) Agreeableness	-.22*		-.40**	-.32**	-.16*	-.21**	3.25	0.41
(3) Honesty-Humility	.36**	-.36**		-.48**	-.12	-.05	3.49	0.65
(4) Altruism	.50**	-.30**	.55**		-.14	.03	4.09	0.70
(5) Selfishness Questionnaire	-.15	-.11	-.32**	-.30**		.35**	1.55	0.44
(6) Welfare Tradeoff	-.13	-.03	-.23*	-.12	.38**		0.07	0.96
<i>M</i>	7.20	3.30	3.21	3.69	1.75	-0.10		
<i>SD</i>	1.62	0.43	0.62	0.77	0.52	1.07		

Note. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented above the diagonal for women and below the diagonal for men.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$t(302) = -2.53, p = .012, d = -0.30$, honesty-humility, $t(302) = -3.74, p < .001, d = -0.45$, and altruism scores, $t(302) = -4.64, p < .001, d = -0.56$, than did men. Conversely, men reported higher selfishness questionnaire scores than women, $t(302) = 3.58, p < .001, d = 0.43$, consistent with previous research (Eckel & Grossman, 1998).

Does agreeableness moderate the association between perceived partner commitment and selfishness? To address the primary hypothesis, I first regressed participants' scores on the *welfare trade-off task* onto mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered agreeableness scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 4. As shown, agreeableness was negatively associated with selfish behavior on the welfare trade-off task. However, this main effect was qualified by a significant Perceived Partner Commitment \times Agreeableness interaction (see Figure 2). Tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment was negatively associated with scores on the welfare tradeoff task, which indicates less selfish behavior, among people who were one standard deviation above the mean in agreeableness, $\beta = -0.31, SE = 0.06, t(300) = -5.64, p > .001, r = .31$, but positively associated with scores on the welfare trade-off task, which indicates more selfish behavior, among people who were one standard deviation below the mean in agreeableness, $\beta = 0.19, SE = 0.05, t(300) = 3.61, p > .001, r = .20$. Further, this interaction was not moderated by sample, $\beta = -0.01, SE = 0.11, t(296) = -0.06, p = .957, r = .00$, or task version, $\beta = -0.01, SE = 0.11, t(296) = -0.11, p = .915, r = .01$.

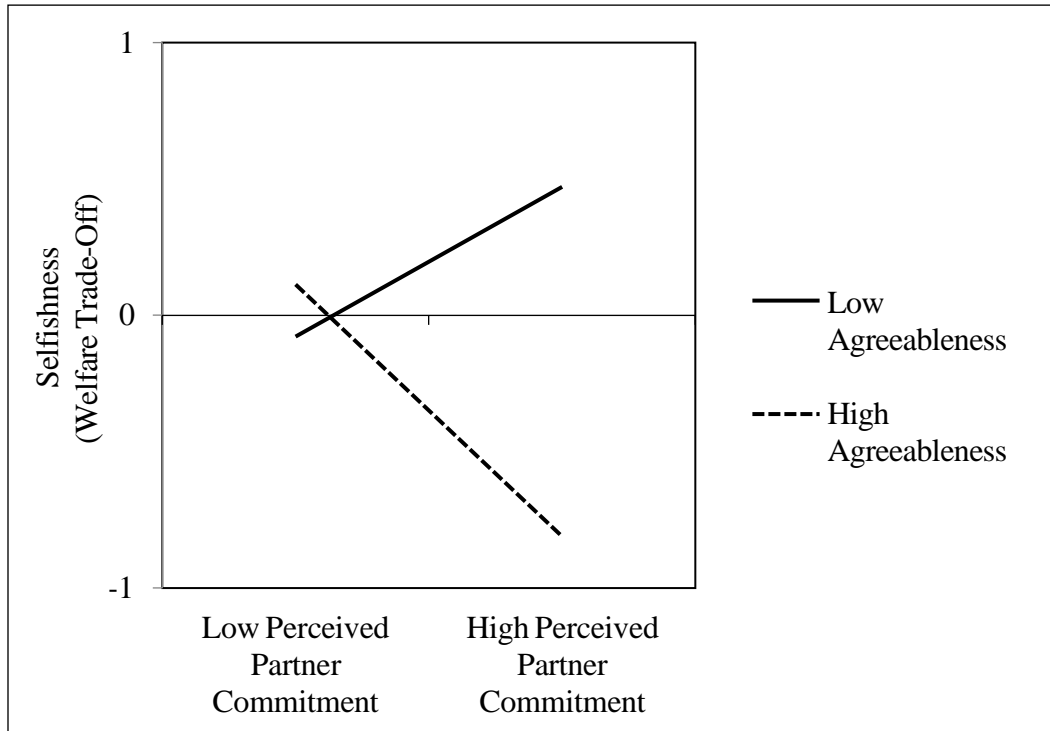
Next, I examined whether a similar pattern would emerge with participants' *self-reported selfishness*. Specifically, I regressed participants' scores on the selfishness questionnaire onto mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered agreeableness scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 4. As

Table 4. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment, Agreeableness, and Their Interaction on Selfishness in Study 2

Measure	Welfare Trade-Off				Selfishness Questionnaire			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
PPC	-0.06	-1.69	.10	.092	-0.07	-4.11	.23	<.001
Agreeableness	-0.66	-4.77	.27	<.001	-0.35	-5.47	.30	<.001
PPC × Agreeableness	-0.60	-6.51	.35	<.001	-0.32	-7.48	.39	<.001

Note. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. For the welfare trade-off task, *df* = 300. For the selfishness questionnaire, *df* = 303.

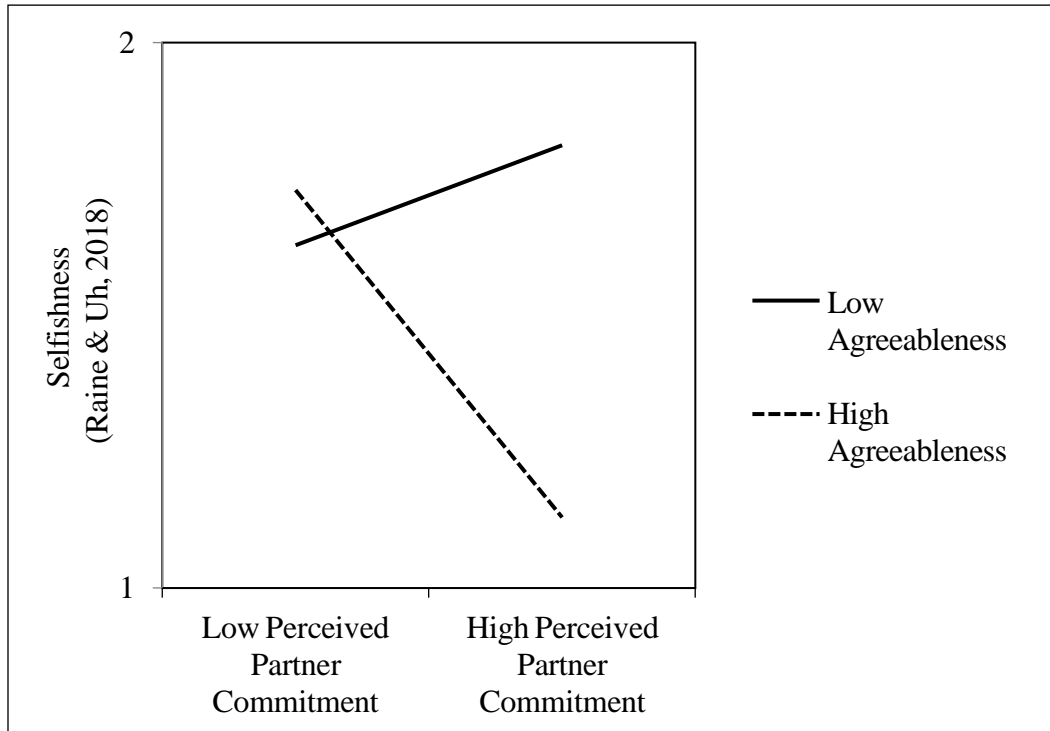
Figure 2. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Agreeableness on Selflessness, as measured by the Welfare Trade-Off Task, in Study 2.



shown, perceived partner commitment and agreeableness were both associated with less selfish behavior. However, these main effects were qualified by a significant Perceived Partner Commitment \times Agreeableness interaction (see Figure 3). Tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment was associated with less selfish behavior among people who were one standard deviation above the mean in agreeableness, $\beta = -0.20$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(303) = -8.00$, $p < .001$, $r = .42$, but associated with greater selfish behavior among people who were one standard deviation below the mean in agreeableness, $\beta = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(303) = 2.59$, $p = .010$, $r = .15$. Further, this interaction was not moderated by sample, $\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(299) = 0.39$, $p = .696$, $r = .02$.

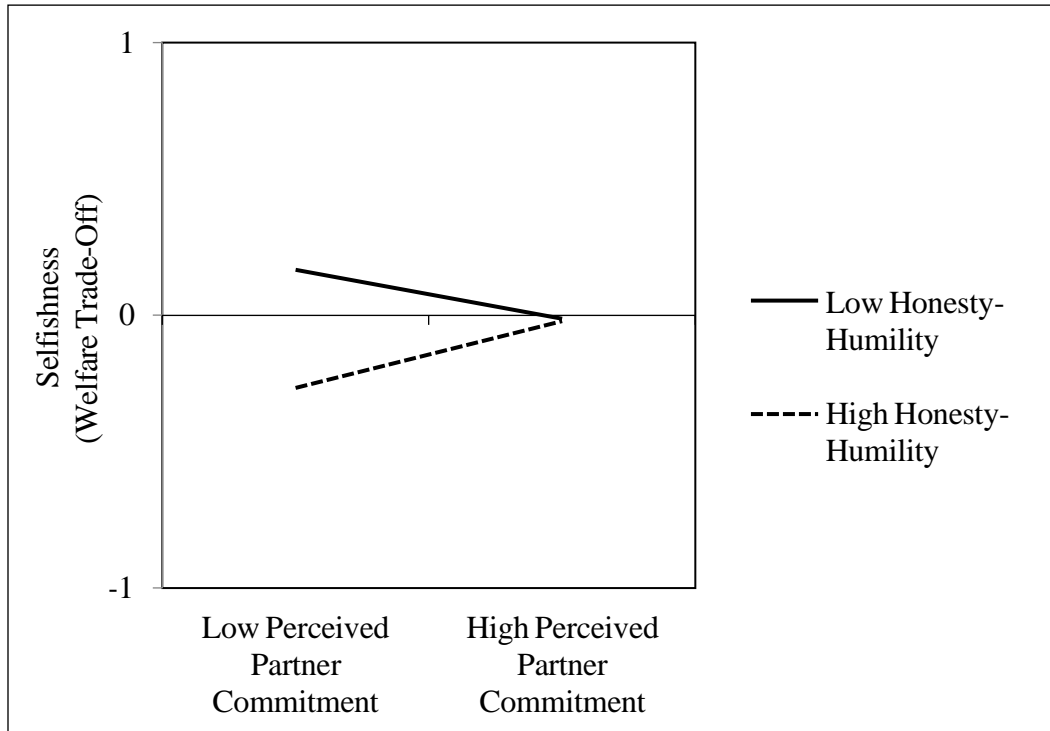
Do similar variables also moderate the association between perceived partner commitment and selfishness? To assess whether similar variables also determine the

Figure 3. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Agreeableness on Selfishness, as measured by the Selfishness Questionnaire, in Study 2.



implications of perceived partner commitment, I conducted two supplemental sets of analyses. The first addressed the role of honesty-humility. The first model addressing honesty-humility regressed participants' scores on the *welfare trade-off task* onto mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered honesty-humility scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 5. As shown, the Perceived Partner Commitment \times Honesty-Humility interaction significantly predicted scores on the welfare trade-off task (see Figure 4), but tests of the simple slopes revealed perceived partner commitment did not predict welfare trade-off scores among participants one standard deviation above, $\beta = 0.08$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(300) = 1.44$, $p = .152$, $r = .08$, or below the mean, $\beta = -0.06$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(300) = -1.19$, $p = .234$, $r = .07$, in honesty-humility. The second model addressing honesty-humility

Figure 4. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Honesty-Humility on Selflessness, as measured by the Welfare Trade-Off Task, in Study 2.



regressed participants' scores on the *selfishness questionnaire* onto mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered honesty-humility scores, and their interaction.

Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 5. As shown, honesty-humility did have a significant positive main effect on self-reported selfishness. However, this main effect was qualified by a significant Perceived Partner Commitment \times Honesty-Humility interaction (see Figure 5). Tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment was negatively associated with self-reported selfishness for people one standard deviation below the mean in honesty-humility, $\beta = -0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(303) = -2.98$, $p = .003$, $r = -.17$, but not for people one standard deviation above the mean in honesty-humility, $\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(303) = 0.87$, $p = .384$, $r = .05$.

Table 5. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment, Honesty-Humility, and Their Interaction on Selfishness in Study 2

Measure	Welfare Trade-Off				Selfishness Questionnaire			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
PPC	0.01	0.27	.02	.790	-0.02	-1.23	.07	.221
Honesty-Humility	-0.17	-1.84	.11	.067	-0.15	-3.60	.20	.000
PPC × Honesty-Humility	0.11	2.05	.12	.041	0.07	2.86	.16	.005

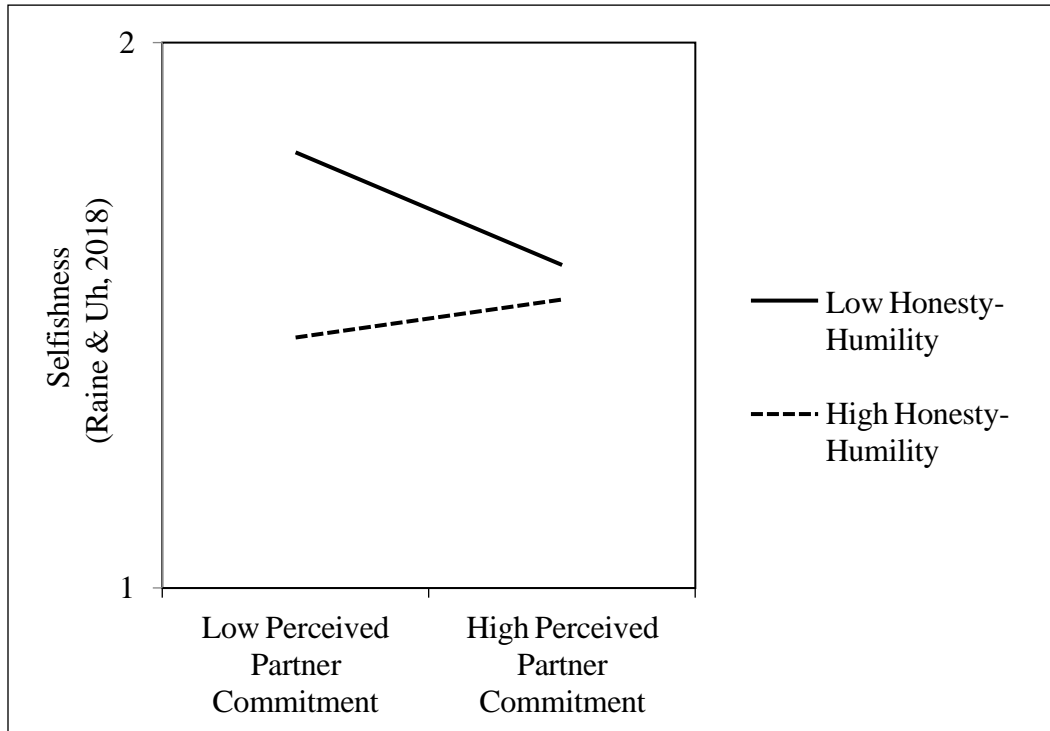
Note. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. For the welfare trade-off task, $df = 300$. For the selfishness questionnaire, $df = 303$.

Table 6. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment, Altruism, and Their Interaction on Selfishness in Study 2

Measure	Welfare Trade-Off				Selfishness Questionnaire			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
PPC	-0.02	-0.45	.03	.654	-0.00	-0.19	.01	.853
Altruism	0.02	0.18	.01	.856	-0.13	-3.21	.18	.001
PPC × Altruism	0.04	0.76	.04	.448	0.10	3.87	.22	.000

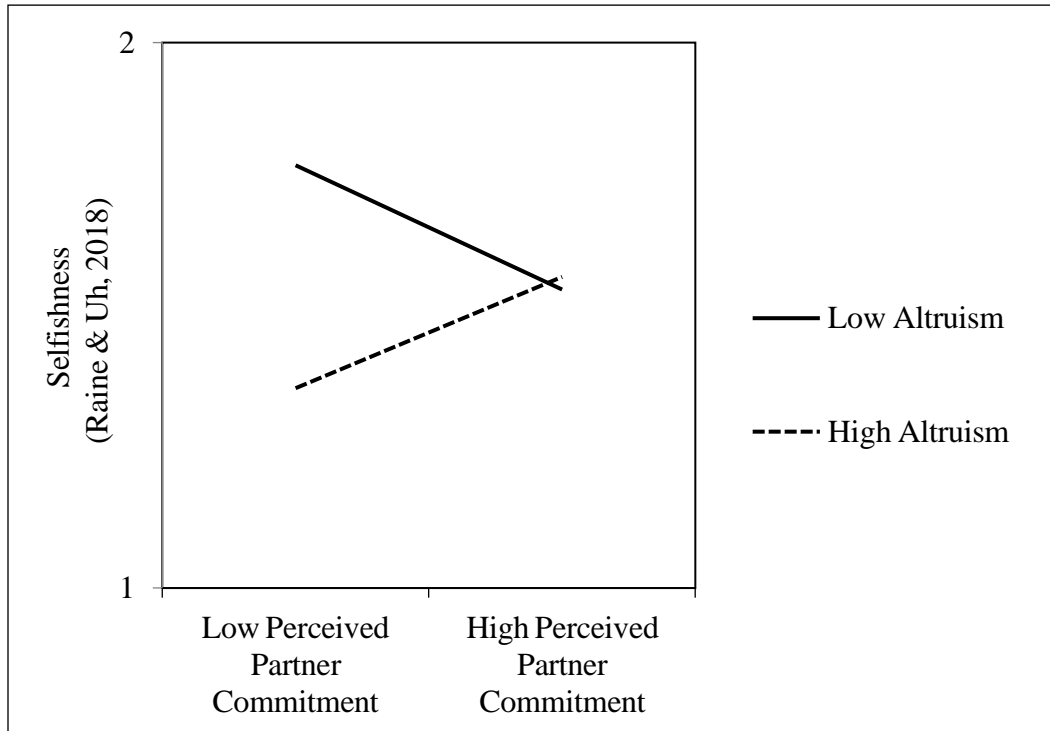
Note. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. For the welfare trade-off task, $df = 300$. For the selfishness questionnaire, $df = 303$.

Figure 5. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Honesty-Humility on Selflessness, as measured by the Selfishness Questionnaire, in Study 2.



The second set of supplemental analyses addressed the role of altruism. The first model addressing altruism regressed participants' scores on the *welfare trade-off task* onto mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered altruism scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 6. As shown, altruism did not have a significant main effect on welfare trade-off scores, nor was there a significant interaction between perceived partner commitment and altruism on welfare trade-off scores. The second model addressing altruism regressed participants' scores on the *selfishness questionnaire* onto mean-centered perceived partner commitment scores, mean-centered altruism scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 6. As shown, there was a significant main effect of altruism on self-reported selfishness. However, this main effect was qualified by a significant Perceived Partner Commitment \times

Figure 6. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Altruism on Selflessness, as measured by the Selfishness Questionnaire, in Study 2.



Altruism interaction (see Figure 6). Tests of the simple slopes revealed perceived partner commitment was positively associated with self-reported selfishness for participants one standard deviation above the mean in altruism, $\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(303) = 2.32$, $p = .021$, $r = .13$, but negatively associated with self-reported selfishness for participants one standard deviation below the mean in altruism, $\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(303) = -3.00$, $p = .003$, $r = .17$.

Discussion

Study 2 provided further evidence that perceived partner commitment interacts with agreeableness to predict selfishness using both a self-report measure of previous behavior and a measure of hypothetical behavior. Specifically, perceived partner commitment was associated with greater selfishness among intimates who were low in agreeableness but associated with less selfishness among intimates who were high in agreeableness. Further, this pattern of results was

replicated across two types of assessments: one that assessed their previous selfish behaviors and one that assessed their selfish responses to hypothetical trade-off scenarios.

Nevertheless, Study 2 had limitations that should be addressed. First, Study 2, like Study 1, was correlational, thus limiting the causal conclusions that can be drawn. Second, the welfare trade-off task was hypothetical and participants were aware that their decisions would not have an actual impact on their partner or relationship, which limits ecological validity. Therefore, Study 3 sought to address these limitations by experimentally manipulating perceived partner commitment to examine the implications for actual selfish behaviors.

CHAPTER IV: STUDY 3

The goal of Study 3 was to provide experimental evidence for the relationship between perceived partner commitment, agreeableness, and selfish behaviors. Specifically, I manipulated whether participants would perceive their partners to be high or low in commitment.

Additionally, similar to Study 2, I used two measures of selfishness: a self-report of various types of selfish behaviors and a behavioral measure of selfishness that required participants to choose the volume of a disruptive noise blast for themselves and their partners. I hypothesized that, compared to participants who are led to believe that their partners are less committed, participants who were led to believe that their partners are more committed would behave more selfishly if they were low in agreeableness, but less selfishly if they were high in agreeableness. The Online Supplemental Material for Study 3, which includes the preregistration, measures, and dataset, can be found here: <https://osf.io/t9bcv/>.

Methods

Participants. Participants were 252 college students (126 couples). Following our preregistered criteria, three participants were excluded because they failed two or more attention checks. Thus, the final sample consisted of 249 participants (141 females, 108 males). An a priori power analysis to determine sample size indicated that, for a multiple regression analysis with three predictors, a medium effect ($r^2 = .15$; see Cohen, 1988), an alpha of .05, and a power of .80, the sample size needed to include at least 55 participants. However, given that I anticipated a cross-over interaction, roughly four times the number of participants was needed to conduct sufficiently powered simple effects tests (see Giner-Sorolla, 2018, January 24), suggesting that the study needed at least 220 participants (110 couples). Due to a technical error, exact age and relationship length were not recorded. However, eligible participants were at least

18 years old, college students, and in a romantic relationship for a minimum of three months prior to the beginning of the study. Participants were recruited from the undergraduate participant pool at the authors' university.

Ninety-four participants (37.8%) identified as White/Caucasian, 76 (30.5%) identified as Black/African American, 32 (12.9%) identified as Hispanic/Latino/a, 18 (7.2%) identified as Asian, 1 (0.4%) identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, 6 (2.4%) identified as another ethnicity not listed, and 22 (8.8%) identified as two or more ethnicities. Two hundred (80.3%) participants identified as exclusively dating, 27 (10.8%) identified as casually dating, 14 (5.6%) identified as married, and 8 (3.2%) identified as engaged.

Procedure. Participants signed up for the study through the undergraduate participant pool. Participants had to sign up both themselves and their partners to attend the session. Upon arriving at the laboratory, couples were taken to separate rooms where they individually completed all aspects of the study. Participants signed a consent form and completed questionnaires assessing their demographics, agreeableness, honesty-humility, and Dark Tetrad personality traits.

Participants then completed an evaluative priming task that was used to manipulate perceived partner commitment and was not actually scored (see McNulty & Russell, 2016; Russell et al., 2018). The evaluative priming task required participants to categorize words as either commitment-related or neutral after being primed with either their own name, their partner's name, or a random name. The name was shown for 300 ms before one of eight commitment (e.g., "devoted") or neutral (e.g., "floor") words that each appeared six times in random order. Participants were asked to categorize the target words as commitment-related or neutral words by pressing a key on the keyboard. After completing this task, a researcher

informed participants that the task ostensibly measured their automatic feelings of commitment toward their partner. All participants were then told that they scored slightly above average (65th percentile), which indicated that they were moderately committed to their partner. Participants were also told that their partners completed the same task. To manipulate perceived partner commitment, participants were randomly assigned to be told that their partner scored either above (91st percentile) or below (31st percentile) average on their evaluative priming task, indicating that their partner was either relatively high or low in commitment, respectively. Participants then completed a perspective-taking questionnaire that contained a single item that served as a manipulation check of their perceptions of their partners' commitment and a questionnaire assessing how likely they would be to engage in various selfish behaviors.

Following this, participants were told they would participate in an ostensibly unrelated study that involved testing their cognitive abilities. First, participants completed a Stroop task (Stroop, 1935), which served as a filler task and took approximately 3-4 minutes to complete. Second, participants were instructed that they will complete a memory task that will require them to memorize words with noise in the background. Participants were told that the study requires testing participants at varying levels of noise. To ensure that participants were aware of the range of volumes they could hear, participants listened to samples of the noise at the lowest (i.e., 0), middle (i.e., 50), and loudest (i.e., 100) possible volumes. Next, participants were informed that they could select the volume that they would hear, ranging from 0 to 100; however, participants were also told that, to ensure adequate variability, their partners would hear the exact opposite of their selection. For example, if they selected a relatively loud noise (e.g., 75), their partners would hear a relatively quiet noise (e.g., 25), and vice versa. The research assistant then left the room and allowed the participant to make their choice on a sliding scale. Scores on this task were

reversed so that higher scores indicated greater selfishness. After making the choice, participants were debriefed and given partial course credit for their participation.

Materials

Commitment Manipulation Check. To ensure the validity of the commitment manipulation, participants completed a short questionnaire that contained a manipulation check to assess commitment (see Appendix A). To ensure participants did not become aware of the purpose of the experiment, this questionnaire contained several filler items (e.g., “How anxious does your partner get?”) and one manipulation check item (i.e., “How much does your partner care about your relationship?”). Participants reported their agreement with all items on a 7-point scale (1 = *Does not describe my partner at all* to 7 = *Describes my partner completely*).

Attention Checks. Participants completed three attention checks throughout the study (see Appendix B). The first attention check was presented during the agreeableness questionnaire (“Please select the third option”). The second attention check was presented during the selfishness questionnaire (“Please select the second option”). The third attention check was presented during the demographics questionnaire (“Which of the following is most likely to fall from the sky: houses, pigs, printer paper, rain [correct answer], or bridges?”). All attention checks were to ensure participants are paying attention and following directions during the experiment.

Selfishness. In addition to the noise blast task (described in the procedure), participants completed the same modified version of the Selfishness Questionnaire (Raine & Uh, 2018) that was described in Study 2. Modifications were made to the original scale to orient the selfish behaviors towards the participant’s partner and relationship (e.g., “Now and again I’ve manipulated my friends to gain an advantage” to “Now and again I’ve manipulated my partner to

gain an advantage”). This questionnaire was scored by averaging all responses to the items; thus, higher scores indicated higher levels of selfishness. Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .81$).

Agreeableness. To assess agreeableness, participants completed the Agreeableness scale (Costa & McCrae, 1992) described in Study 2. This questionnaire was scored by averaging all responses to the items; thus, higher scores indicated higher levels of agreeableness. Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .78$).

Honesty-Humility. To rule out other potential moderators, I also included the Honesty-Humility scale (Lee & Ashton, 2018) described in Study 2. This questionnaire was scored by averaging all responses to the items; thus, higher scores indicated higher levels of honesty-humility. Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .76$).

Dark Tetrad Traits. I similarly included the short Dark Tetrad Scale (Paulhus et al., 2021) that consisted of 28 items that participants indicated their agreement with on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*). The original version of this scale uses four subscales: narcissism (e.g., “I like to show off every now and then”), Machiavellianism (“e.g., “Keep a low profile if you want to get your way”), psychopathy (e.g., “People often say I’m out of control”), and sadism (e.g., “Some people deserve to suffer”). I created both a total scale score by averaging all responses to the items and individual subscale scores by averaging all responses to the items that correspond to each trait; thus, higher scores indicated higher levels of the Dark Tetrad traits for both the total scale score and individual subscale scores. Internal consistency was high (total scale, $\alpha = .84$; narcissism, $\alpha = .70$, Machiavellianism, $\alpha = .66$; psychopathy, $\alpha = .70$; sadism, $\alpha = .80$).

Results

Descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are reported in Table 7 and relevant correlations are presented in scatterplots in Figure 7. As shown, and consistent with Study 2 and previous research (Ashton et al., 2014; Mund & Neyer, 2014; Paunonen, 2003), participants reported agreeableness and honesty-humility scores above the midpoint, suggesting that they saw themselves as agreeable, fair, and genuine, on average. Men and women did not differ significantly on agreeableness, $t(247) = -1.32, p = .094, d = -0.17$, or honesty-humility scores, $t(247) = -0.71, p = .240, d = -0.09$. In addition, consistent with previous work (Neumann et al., 2022), participants reported Dark Tetrad scores around the midpoint, with males reporting higher Dark Tetrad scores than females, $t(247) = 4.70, p < .001, d = 0.60$. Consistent with Study 2 and previous work (Furnham & Henderson, 1982), participants reported selfishness questionnaire scores below the midpoint, suggesting that they believed themselves to be less selfish, on average. Men and women did not differ significantly on self-reported selfishness, $t(247) = -0.41, p = .343, d = -0.05$. Men and women differed significantly on volume choice on the noise blast task, such that women chose higher volumes, suggesting more selfishness, than men, $t(247) = -5.09, p < .001, d = -0.65$. Agreeableness was positively correlated with honesty-humility and negatively correlated with scores on the selfishness questionnaire for both men and women. In addition, agreeableness was negatively correlated with the Dark Tetrad for both men and women. Agreeableness, honesty-humility, and the Dark Tetrad were not correlated with volume choice on the noise blast task for both men and women. Self-reported selfishness was positively correlated with volume choice for women, but not for men. Finally, analysis of the manipulation check indicated that participants reported that their partners were more committed in the high perceived partner commitment

condition ($M = 6.68, SD = 0.67$) than in the low perceived partner commitment condition ($M = 6.21, SD = 1.16$), $t(247) = -4.03, p < .001, d = -0.51$, suggesting that the manipulation of perceived partner commitment was effective.

Does agreeableness moderate the association between perceived partner commitment and selfishness? Because I operationalized our outcome in two different ways, I estimated two models. The first model examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for the *noise blast task* by estimating a two-level model using the HLM 7.03 computer program (Raudenbush et al., 2013) that regressed participants' volume choice onto condition (-1 = low commitment condition, 1 = high commitment condition), mean-centered agreeableness scores, and their interaction. The non-independence of couples' data was controlled in the second level of the model, which allowed for a randomly varying intercept. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 8. As shown, the PPC Condition \times Agreeableness interaction significantly predicted the volume that participants chose (see Figure 8). In particular, tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment condition was significantly negatively associated with volume choice, which indicates less selfish behavior, among people who were one standard deviation above the mean in agreeableness, $\beta = -5.69, SE = 2.17, t(120) = -2.62, p = .010, r = .23$, but significantly positively associated with volume choice, which indicates more selfish behavior, among people who were one standard deviation below the mean in agreeableness, $\beta = 5.64, SE = 2.15, t(120) = -2.62, p = .010, r = .23$. Further, this interaction remained significant when estimating an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) that controlled for their partners' agreeableness, $t(119) = -3.75, p < .001, r = .33$.

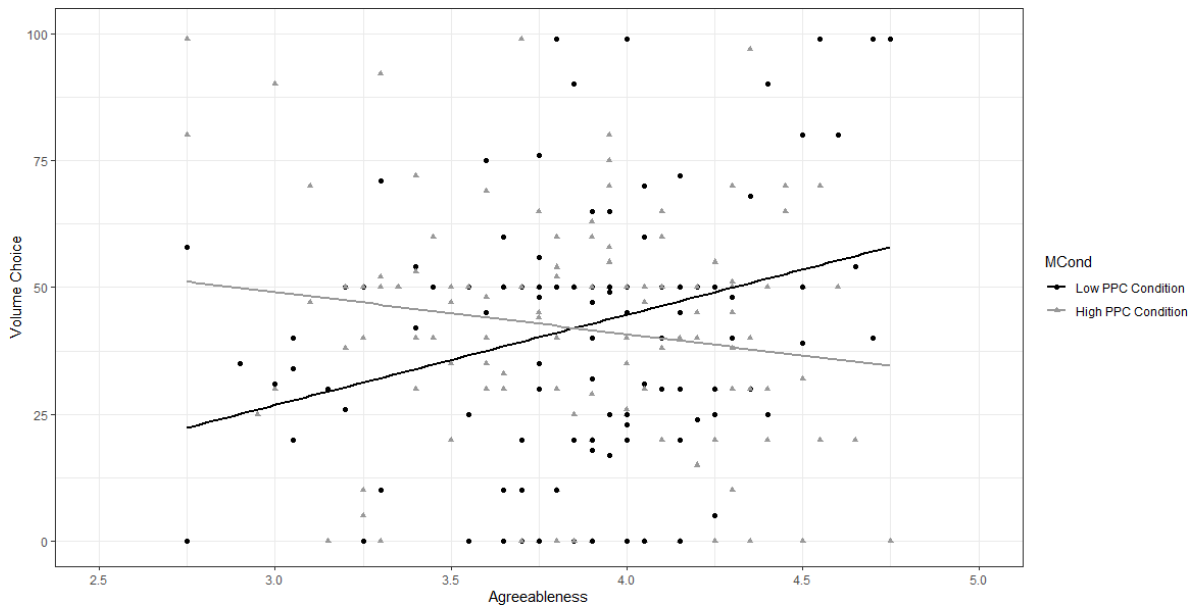
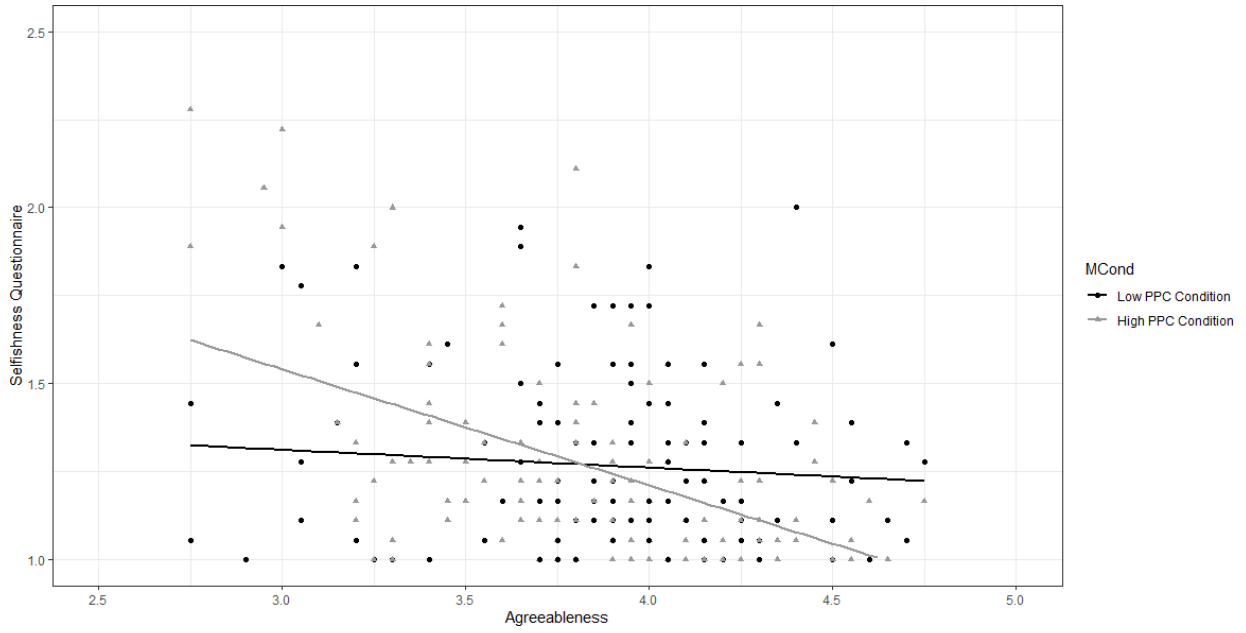
Table 7. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables in Study 3

Variable	1	2	3	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1) Agreeableness	.14	.38**	-.34**	-.07	-.24**	-.40**	-.26**	-.28**	.09	3.89	0.42
(2) Honesty-Humility	.51**	.15	-.45**	-.20*	-.50**	-.32**	-.29**	-.26**	.07	3.59	0.52
(3) Dark Tetrad Total Scale	-.53**	-.62**	.10	.66**	.63**	.78**	.75**	.21*	-.09	2.53	0.47
(3.1) Narcissism	-.17	-.33**	.55**	.15	.26**	.38**	.22**	.04	-.18*	3.07	0.69
(3.2) Machiavellianism	-.34**	-.41**	.66**	.15	.12	.28**	.28**	.12	.01	3.13	0.62
(3.3) Psychopathy	-.50**	-.49**	.70**	.24*	.33**	.10	.56**	.26**	-.02	1.81	0.63
(3.4) Sadism	-.42**	-.46**	.79**	.21*	.38**	.38**	.05	.17*	-.06	2.12	0.73
(4) Selfishness Questionnaire	-.41**	-.38**	.29**	.09	.29**	.14	.25**	.04	.28**	1.27	0.28
(5) Noise Blast Volume Choice	-.03	-.02	.12	.15	.16	-.09	.10	.16	.04	46.63	22.39
<i>M</i>	3.82	3.55	2.82	3.05	3.26	2.10	2.85	1.26	33.78		
<i>SD</i>	0.43	0.53	0.47	0.61	0.61	0.63	0.88	0.24	23.36		

Note. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented above the diagonal for women and below the diagonal for men; correlations between partners appear on the diagonal in bold.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 7. Scatterplots of Correlations Between Variables of Interest in Study 3.



Similar to Study 2, the second model examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for participants' *self-reported selfishness* by regressing participants' scores on the selfishness questionnaire onto condition, mean-centered agreeableness scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 8. As shown, agreeableness was significantly negatively associated with scores on the selfishness questionnaire. However, this main effect was qualified by a PPC Condition \times Agreeableness interaction that significantly predicted participants' selfishness questionnaire scores (see Figure 9). In particular, tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment condition was significantly associated with less self-reported selfishness among people who were high in agreeableness, $\beta = -0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(120) = -3.29$, $p < .001$, $r = .29$, but only marginally significantly associated with more self-reported selfishness among people who were low in agreeableness, $\beta = 0.05$, $SE = 0.3$, $t(120) = 1.83$, $p = .069$, $r = .16$. Further, this interaction remained significant when estimating an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) that controlled for their partners' agreeableness, $t(119) = -3.30$, $p = .001$, $r = .30$.

Do similar variables also moderate the association between perceived partner commitment and selfishness? To assess whether similar variables also determine the implications of perceived partner commitment, I conducted two supplemental sets of analyses. The first addressed the role of honesty-humility. The first model assessing honesty-humility examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for the *noise blast task* by estimating a two-level model that regressed participants' volume choice onto condition, mean-centered honesty-humility scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 9. As shown, honesty-humility did not predict volume choice and the PPC Condition \times Honesty-Humility interaction did not significantly predict volume choice. The

Table 8. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment Condition, Agreeableness, and Their Interaction on Selfishness in Study 3

Measure	Volume Choice (Noise Blast Task)				Selfishness Questionnaire			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
PPC Condition	-0.03	-0.02	.00	.986	-0.01	-0.35	.03	.728
Agreeableness	5.30	1.40	.13	.164	-0.19	-4.46	.38	<.001
PPC × Agreeableness	-13.38	-3.60	.31	<.001	-0.14	-3.16	.28	.002

Note. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. For the noise blast task, *df* = 120. For the selfishness questionnaire, *df* = 120.

Figure 8. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Agreeableness on Selfishness, as measured by the Noise Blast Task, in Study 3.

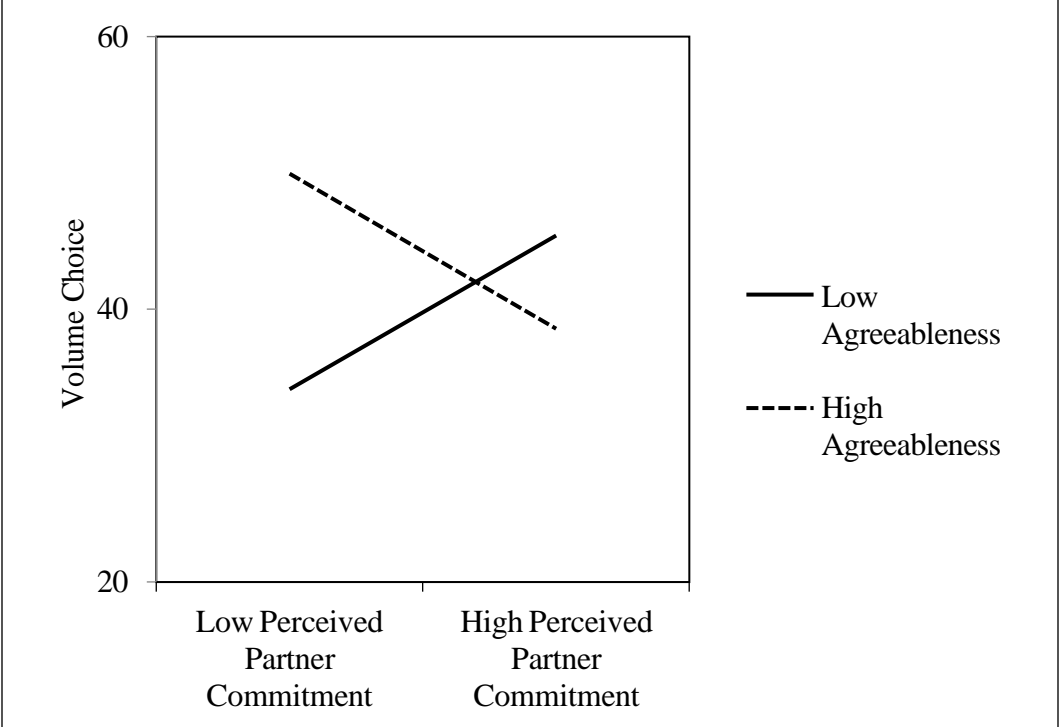


Figure 9. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Agreeableness on Selfishness, as measured by the Selfishness Questionnaire, in Study 3.

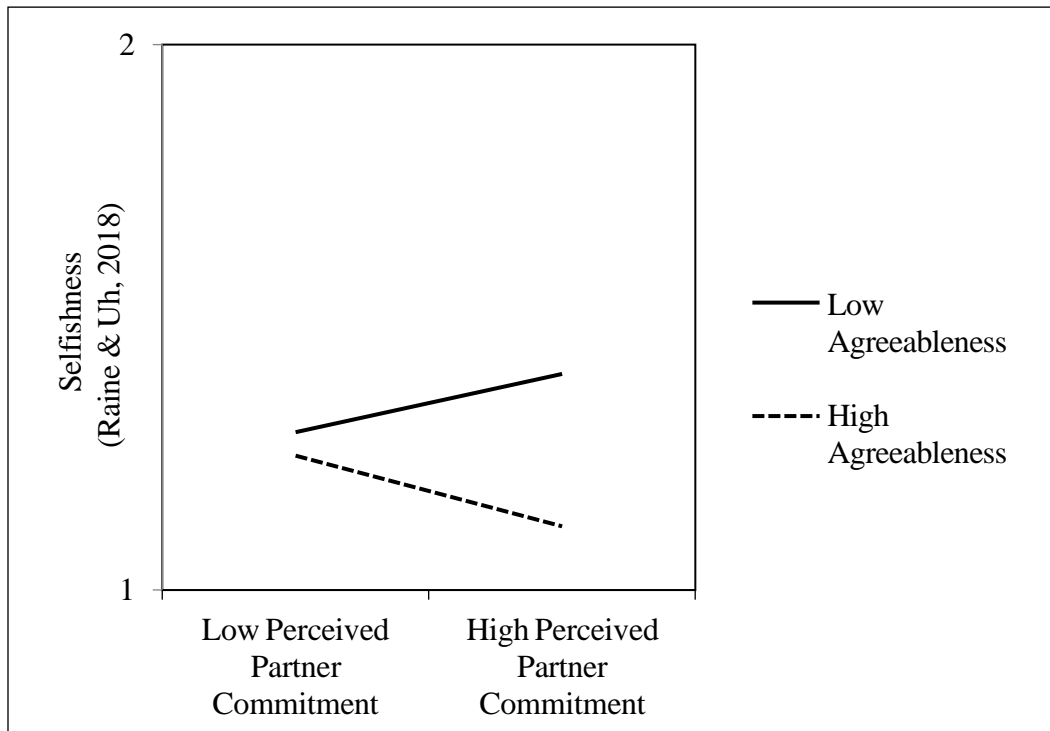


Table 9. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment Condition, Honesty-Humility, and Their Interaction on Selfishness in Study 3

Measure	Volume Choice (Noise Blast Task)				Selfishness Questionnaire			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
PPC Condition	-0.20	-0.13	.01	.894	-0.00	-0.07	.01	.943
Honesty-Humility	1.92	0.69	.06	.493	-0.15	-5.21	.43	<.001
PPC × Honesty-Humility	-5.28	-1.81	.16	.073	-0.05	-1.61	.15	.110

Note. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. For the noise blast task, *df* = 120. For the selfishness questionnaire, *df* = 120.

second model addressing honesty-humility examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for participants' *self-reported selfishness* by regressing participants' scores on the selfishness questionnaire onto condition, mean-centered honesty-humility scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 9. As shown, honesty-humility did predict self-reported selfishness, but, similar to the noise blast task, the PPC Condition \times Honesty-Humility interaction did not significantly predict self-reported selfishness.

The second set of supplemental analyses addressed the role of the Dark Tetrad traits. First, I chose to treat the Dark Tetrad measure as a total score of all four traits. The first model addressing the Dark Tetrad examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for the *noise blast task* by estimating a two-level model that regressed participants' volume choice onto condition, mean-centered Dark Tetrad scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 10. As shown, Dark Tetrad scores did not significantly predict volume choice, and the PPC Condition \times Dark Tetrad interaction did not significantly predict volume choice. The second model addressing the Dark Tetrad examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for participants' *self-reported selfishness* by regressing participants' scores on the selfishness questionnaire onto condition, mean-centered Dark Tetrad scores, and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 10. As shown, Dark Tetrad scores were significantly positively associated with self-reported selfishness. However, the PPC Condition \times Dark Tetrad interaction did not significantly predict self-reported selfishness.

To further break down potential associations between the Dark Tetrad traits and selfishness, I ran two models (one for each operationalization of selfishness) for each Dark Tetrad trait. The first models examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for the

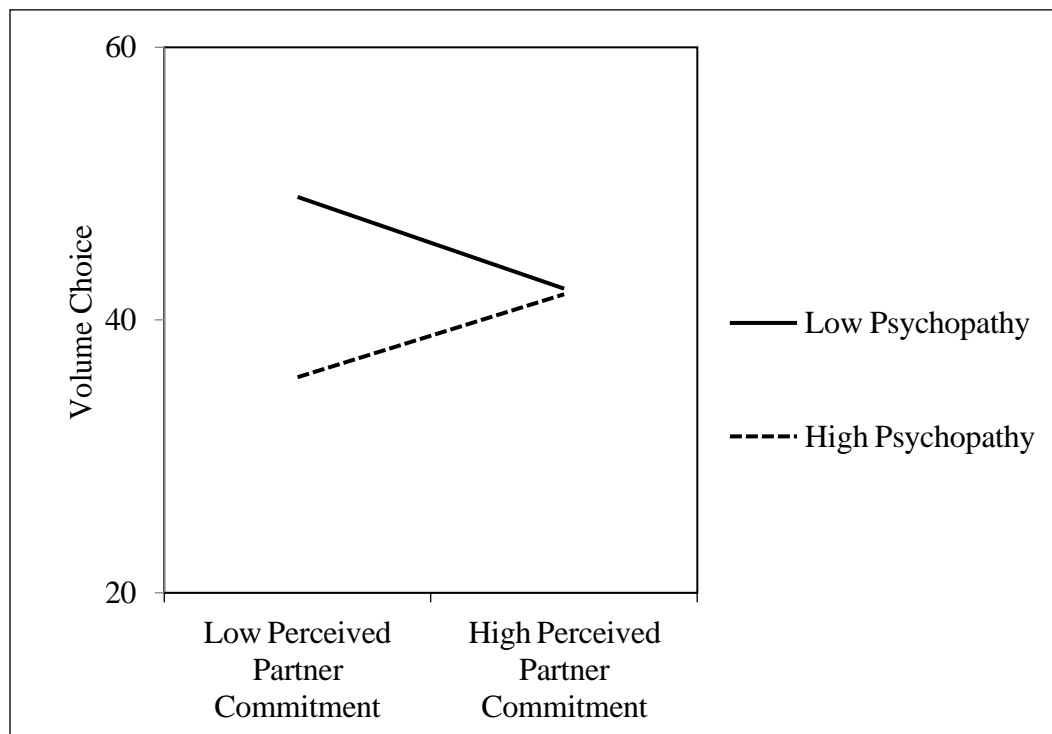
Table 10. Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment Condition, Dark Tetrad Traits, and Their Interactions on Selfishness in Study 3

Measure	Volume Choice (Noise Blast Task)				Selfishness Questionnaire			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Composite DT</i>								
PPC Condition	-0.23	-0.15	.01	.881	0.00	-0.05	.00	.962
Dark Tetrad	-4.81	-1.61	.15	.111	0.12	2.93	.26	.004
PPC × Dark Tetrad	3.98	1.29	.12	.200	0.02	0.45	.04	.654
<i>Narcissism</i>								
PPC Condition	-0.16	-0.10	.01	.918	0.00	-0.17	.02	.866
Narcissism	-1.20	-0.52	.05	.605	0.02	0.81	.07	.418
PPC × Narcissism	-0.33	-0.15	.01	.885	0.00	-0.16	.01	.872
<i>Machiavellianism</i>								
PPC Condition	-0.12	-0.08	.01	.940	0.00	0.00	.00	.999
Machiavellianism	1.39	0.55	.05	.584	0.08	2.40	.21	.018
PPC × Machiavellianism	3.31	1.26	.11	.211	0.03	1.05	.10	.297
<i>Psychopathy</i>								
PPC Condition	-0.16	-0.11	.01	.916	0.00	-0.14	.01	.886
Psychopathy	-5.24	-2.39	.21	.019	0.08	2.70	.24	.008
PPC × Psychopathy	4.93	2.27	.20	.025	0.01	0.44	.04	.665
<i>Sadism</i>								
PPC Condition	-0.15	-0.10	.01	.920	0.00	-0.16	.01	.871
Sadism	-3.37	-1.99	.18	.049	0.05	2.95	.26	.004
PPC × Sadism	1.16	0.64	.06	.523	-0.01	-0.31	.03	.754

Note. DT = Dark Tetrad. PPC = Perceived Partner Commitment. For the noise blast task, *df* = 120. For the selfishness questionnaire, *df* = 120.

noise blast task by estimating four two-level models that regressed participants' volume choice onto condition, mean-centered subscale scores (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism), and their interactions. Results of these analyses are presented in the left columns of Table 10. As shown, sadism and psychopathy were significantly negatively associated with volume choice. However, the PPC Condition \times Psychopathy interaction was significant (see Figure 10), but tests of the simple slopes revealed that perceived partner commitment did not

Figure 10. Interactive Effects of Perceived Partner Commitment and Psychopathy on Selfishness, as measured by the Noise Blast Task, in Study 3.



predict volume choice for participants one standard deviation above the mean, $\beta = 3.04$, $SE = 2.04$, $t(120) = 1.49$, $p = .139$, $r = .13$, and below the mean in psychopathy, $\beta = -3.36$, $SE = 2.10$, $t(120) = -1.60$, $p = .112$, $r = .14$. There were no significant main effects for narcissism or

Machiavellianism, and there were no significant interactions for narcissism, Machiavellianism, or sadism. The second models examined the implications of perceived partner commitment for participants' *self-reported selfishness* by regressing participants' scores on the selfishness questionnaire onto condition, mean-centered subscale scores (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism), and their interaction. Results of these analyses are presented in the right columns of Table 10. As shown, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism were significantly positively associated with self-reported selfishness. However, there were no significant interactions for narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, or sadism for self-reported selfishness.

Discussion

Study 3 provided further evidence that perceived partner commitment interacts with agreeableness to predict selfishness. Specifically, Study 3 experimentally manipulated perceived partner commitment and assessed selfishness with both a self-report measure of selfishness and a behavioral task. Results from both operationalizations of selfishness revealed that, among participants low in agreeableness, those who were led to believe that their partners were highly committed behaved more selfishly than those who were led to believe their partners were relatively less committed. However, among participants high in agreeableness, the opposite pattern emerged (i.e., increased perceived partner commitment was associated with *less* selfishness). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the simple effect of perceived partner commitment condition for selfishness among intimates low in agreeableness was only marginally significant on the self-report measure of selfishness.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Does perceiving that a romantic partner is committed influence selfishness? Previous research can be used to suggest conflicting arguments, such that perceiving a partner to be committed might increase or decrease selfishness. On the one hand, people may behave less selfishly if they perceive their partners to be highly committed because they should be more satisfied with those partners, expect longer relationships with those partners, and expect those partners to reciprocate such selfless acts, compared to people who perceive their partners are less committed. On the other hand, people may behave more selfishly if they perceive their partners to be highly committed because high commitment may signal that a partner is less likely to end the relationship as a result of their selfish behavior. The present studies aimed to address this conflict by examining the role of agreeableness in the relationship between perceived partner commitment and selfishness in romantic relationships in three studies. Study 1 was a dyadic, observational study that revealed that intimates who believed their partners were more committed, compared to intimates who believed their partners were less committed, were more likely to be selfish if they were low in agreeableness, but not if they were high in agreeableness. Study 2 was a correlational study that revealed that perceived partner commitment was associated with greater self-reported tendencies and greater selfishness in a trade-off task among intimates who were low in agreeableness but associated with less selfishness among intimates who were high in agreeableness. Finally, Study 3 was a dyadic, experimental study that revealed that, among intimates low in agreeableness, those who were led to believe that their partners were more committed behaved more selfishly than those who were led to believe that their partners were less committed. However, the opposite pattern emerged among intimates high in agreeableness.

Implications and Future Directions

These findings have important theoretical implications and provide several directions for future research. First, these studies contribute to a small but growing body of literature surrounding selfishness (see Carlson et al., 2022), specifically in close relationships (Polman & Lu, 2021; Reis & Clark, 2013). Despite ample research highlighting the role of selfishness in general social settings (for review, see Carlson et al., 2022; Crocket et al., 2017), there is a considerable lack of research on selfishness in romantic relationships. Notably, the dynamic between people in romantic relationships differs strongly from dynamics in other types of relationships. Specifically, people tend to have higher expectations for communal behaviors in romantic relationships than in other relationships (Clark & Mills, 1993; Fuhrman et al., 2009), which should result in less selfishness, and yet these relationships are not exempt from selfish motives (Campbell, 1999; Rohmann et al., 2012). Indeed, interdependence tends to be high in romantic relationships (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), and thus conflicts of interest tend to arise (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), which provide opportunities for selfishness. In addition, given that constraint tends to be high in romantic relationships (Stanley & Markman, 1992) and that constrained relationships are more difficult to leave (Jamison & Beckmeyer, 2020), people may feel more comfortable acting selfishly towards romantic partners, compared to less constrained relationships like friendships, because they believe they will not lose their partner as a result of their selfish behavior. Further, selfishness may be expressed differently in romantic relationships than in other types of relationships. For example, certain selfish behaviors, such as lying (see DePaulo & Kashy, 1998), may be equally or even more present in romantic relationships than in other relationships, and thus future work could examine the different ways selfishness is displayed across relationships. Additionally, although previous work on selfishness has primarily

focused on anonymous situations with unknown others (e.g., anonymous dictator games, Eckel & Grossman, 1996), romantic partners cannot be anonymous with one another, so people may notice when a partner has acted selfishly. Future research could explore the potential implications that learning about a partner's selfishness has for a relationship.

Second, these studies join a growing body of literature that highlights the importance of evaluating partner perceptions (e.g., Arriaga et al., 2006; Itzhakov et al., 2021; Stapleton et al., 2012). Previous work has shown that perceptions tend to guide behavior (see Fazio, 1986) and the current studies provide evidence that partner perceptions influence relational behavior. However, many factors influence the development of such perceptions, such as attachment (e.g., Overall et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2019), depression (e.g., Overall & Hammond, 2013), and perceived similarity (e.g., Luo & Snider, 2009). As such, these perceptions about romantic partners may not be accurate (see Kenny & Acitelli, 2001), and thus future research may also explore the implications of accuracy for partner perceptions. In addition, as an abundance of previous research has focused on other types of perceptions in romantic relationships (e.g., responsiveness, Itzhakov et al., 2022; support, Vowels & Carnelley, 2021; emotional suppression, Impett et al., 2014), the current research joins a small but growing body of work focusing on perceptions of partner's commitment (Arriaga et al., 2006; Black & Reis, 2022; Ito et al., 2021). Indeed, perceived partner commitment is central to many theories (e.g., satisfaction, Bar-Kalifa et al., 2015; relationship quality, Drigotas et al., 1999; trust, Rempel et al., 2001) and several lines of research suggest that expressing (Rusbult et al., 2001; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2014; Weigel et al., 2011) and perceiving (Black & Reis, 2022; Wieselquist et al., 1999) commitment are beneficial for relationships. However, given that it may be equally, or even more important to perceive that a partner is committed to a relationship as it is for oneself to be

committed (e.g., Arriaga et al., 2006), future research may benefit from exploring whether perceived partner commitment is more influential on behavior than actual commitment. Indeed, perceptions of partners' thoughts and behaviors often have unique effects beyond, and are sometimes more important than, what those partners *actually* think or how they act (e.g., Lemay et al., 2007).

Third, these studies highlight a potential drawback of perceiving high commitment. Although people tend to perceive their relationships more positively when they believe their partners are committed (e.g., Kelley, 1979) and should thus engage in more prosocial ways (e.g., Carlson et al., 1988), the current research revealed that commitment may be exploited by certain partners. Specifically, the current studies show that disagreeable people, compared to agreeable people, may be more willing to take advantage of and exploit a partner to the extent that they believe their partner is more committed. Thus, perceiving that a partner is committed may be harmful to some relationships, particularly those that include a disagreeable person. This mirrors previous work highlighting the negative implications of disagreeableness (e.g., Jensen-Campbell et al., 2010; Stead & Fekken, 2014) and adds to a growing body of literature assessing the role of agreeableness in romantic relationships (e.g., Heller et al., 2004; McNulty & Russell, 2016; Watson et al., 2001). However, there may be situations in which a disagreeable person may choose to act selflessly toward a committed partner, or when an agreeable person may choose to act selfishly toward a noncommitted partner. For example, a disagreeable person may choose to act selflessly if they believe their partner may punish them for selfish behavior, such as if they were recently caught exhibiting selfish behavior. Similarly, an agreeable person may choose to act selfishly if they believe they may be taken advantage of by a partner who will not reciprocate

selfless behavior (i.e., an uncommitted partner). Thus, future research may explore other situations in which perceived commitment may backfire on individuals.

Despite these findings, I also explored other variables that might better explain the conflicting arguments surrounding perceived partner commitment and selfishness. Specifically, I included honesty-humility (Studies 2 and 3), altruism (Study 2), and the Dark Tetrad (Study 3). Results for all three alternative moderators were inconsistent. The interaction between perceived partner commitment and honesty-humility was significant for both measures of selfishness in Study 2, but simple effects were inconsistent across measures, such that perceived partner commitment only predicted self-reported selfishness for individuals low, not high, in honesty-humility. Given that the effect only emerged on self-reported, not observed, selfishness among people who are admittedly dishonest reporters, this simple effect should be interpreted with caution. Further supporting the idea that this effect may not be reliable, this interaction was not observed in Study 3. In addition, the interaction between perceived partner commitment and altruism was significant for self-reported selfishness, but not the welfare trade-off task, in Study 2. It may be the case that individuals are over-reporting their altruistic tendencies due to socially desirable responses (see Phillips et al., 2010), and that these tendencies did not outwardly show themselves through the behavioral measures. Further, given the number of exploratory analyses conducted, it is possible that the significant self-reported interaction is simply a spurious result. Finally, the interaction between perceived partner commitment and the Dark Tetrad was not significant for either measure of selfishness in Study 3. This could be due to the nature of the Dark Tetrad traits, such that these traits are not influenced by perceived commitment, or that the presence of these traits influences socially desirable responding (see Womick et al, 2019). Taken together, these patterns of results suggest inconsistent support for the alternative moderators and

offer more support that agreeableness has a unique effect on selfishness. Despite this, future research may benefit from examining other potential factors that may influence selfishness in the context of close relationships.

Strengths and Limitations

The current research has several strengths. First, data collected came from multiple diverse samples that included a community sample (Study 1), college students and MTurk individuals (Study 2), and college-aged couples (Study 3). A similar pattern of results was observed across all three samples and studies, thus increasing confidence in these phenomena (for review, see Maxwell et al., 2015). Second, I similarly used various designs (i.e., correlational, experimental), assessments (i.e., observational, behavioral, self-report), and operationalizations of selfishness (i.e., demanding changes from the partner, prioritizing self-interests), thus further increasing confidence in these results (see Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Goldsmith & Matherly, 1988; Messick, 1981). Finally, supplemental analyses did not support the idea that the results were due to alternative moderators (i.e., honesty-humility, altruism, Dark Tetrad traits), further strengthening confidence in the results.

Despite these strengths, several limitations should be addressed. First, there may be concerns with relying on self-reports of selfishness. In particular, past research suggests that people often inaccurately report their behavioral tendencies (e.g., Catania et al., 1990; Norwood et al., 2016), especially when providing estimates of their undesirable behaviors (see Holtgraves, 2004). Although the rates of selfishness that participants in these samples reported were similar to those reported in other studies (e.g., Raine & Uh, 2018), it is likely that people generally underreport the extent of their selfishness. Importantly, such biases may be associated with other variables in these studies. For example, people who are low in honesty-humility, and thus are

admittedly relatively dishonest, may provide inaccurate reports of their behavior. Nevertheless, confidence in these results is bolstered by the behavioral measures in all three studies that revealed a similar pattern of results. Still, it is worth noting that the behavioral measure of selfishness in Study 2 may not have high ecological validity. Specifically, the welfare trade-off task used in Study 2 was hypothetical; participants were aware that their choices would not affect their relationship or their partner, which may have influenced how they responded. Future research may benefit from using more direct measures of selfishness that provide higher ecological validity. Finally, due to a technical error when programming Study 3, important demographic information relating to the makeup of the sample is missing (i.e., exact age and relationship length), which may limit the generalizability of these conclusions.

Conclusion

What determines whether people prioritize their own or their partner's goals when faced with goal conflict dilemmas? The current studies suggest that a unique combination of perceived partner commitment and agreeableness may influence these decisions. Specifically, the current studies revealed that, contrary to previous literature (Black & Reis, 2022; Wieselquist et al., 1999), perceiving that a partner is highly committed may have drawbacks for some individuals. More specifically, high perceived partner commitment may induce more selfishness in partners who are less agreeable, but less selfishness in partners who are more agreeable. Overall, these results highlight the unique effect that agreeableness has on selfishness and suggest that there may be negative consequences to perceiving that a partner is committed to a romantic relationship.

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APPENDIX A: COMMITMENT MANIPULATION CHECK

Next, we would like you to take the perspective of your partner. Think about how your partner would answer the following questions:

1 = Does not describe my partner at all

7 = Describes my partner completely

How much does your partner see themselves as outgoing?

How much does your partner get easily enthusiastic about things?

How much does your partner care about others?

How dependable is your partner?

How anxious does your partner get?

How quarrelsome is your partner?

How much does your partner care about your relationship?

How quiet is your partner?

How sympathetic is your partner?

How creative is your partner?

APPENDIX B: ATTENTION CHECKS

Attention Check 1 (To be shown during the agreeableness questionnaire):

- Please select the third option.

Attention Check 2 (To be shown during the selfishness questionnaire):

- Please select the second option.

Attention Check 3 (To be shown during the demographics questionnaire):

Which of the following is most likely to fall from the sky?

- Houses
- Pigs
- Printer Paper
- Rain (correct answer)
- Bridges

APPENDIX C: AGREEABLENESS MEASURE

Agreeableness Scale (NEO Domain - IPIP)

For each of the statements below, select which response best describes you.

1 = Very Inaccurate

2 = Moderately Inaccurate

3 = Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate

4 = Moderately Accurate

5 = Very Accurate

1. I hold a grudge.*
2. I have a good word for everyone.
3. I accept people as they are.
4. I insult people.*
5. I am easy to satisfy.
6. I suspect hidden motives in others.*
7. I sympathize with others' feelings.
8. I make people feel at ease.
9. I respect others.
10. I make demands on others.*
11. I trust what people say.
12. I get back at others.*
13. I have a sharp tongue.*
14. I contradict others.*
15. I am out for my own personal gain.*
16. I cut others to pieces.*
17. I believe that others have good intentions.
18. I believe that I am better than others.*
19. I treat all people equally.
20. I am concerned about others.

* - Reverse coded items.

APPENDIX D: HONESTY-HUMILITY MEASURE

Please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement using the following scale:

5 = Strongly agree

4 = Agree

3 = Neutral

2 = Disagree

1 = Strongly disagree

1. If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it.
2. If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars.
3. Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.
4. I am an ordinary person who is no better than others.
5. I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.
6. I would be tempted to buy stolen property if I were financially tight.
7. I would like to live in a very expensive, high-class neighborhood.
8. I wouldn't want people to treat me as though I were superior to them.
9. If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes.
10. I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.
11. I would like to be seen driving around in a very expensive car.
12. I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.
13. I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
14. I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it.
15. I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods.
16. I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.

APPENDIX E: DARK TETRAD MEASURE

Please rate your agreement with each statement using the 5-point scale.

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

1. It's not wise to let people know your secrets.
2. Whatever it takes, you must get the important people on your side.
3. Avoid direct conflict with others because they may be useful in the future.
4. Keep a low profile if you want to get your way.
5. Manipulating the situation takes planning.
6. Flattery is a good way to get people on your side.
7. I love it when a tricky plan succeeds.
8. People see me as a natural leader.
9. I have a unique talent for persuading people.
10. Group activities tend to be dull without me.
11. I know that I am special because people keep telling me so.
12. I have some exceptional qualities
13. I'm likely to become a future star in some area.
14. I like to show off every now and then.
15. People often say I'm out of control.
16. I tend to fight against authorities and their rules.
17. I've been in more fights than most people of my age and gender.
18. I tend to dive in, then ask questions later.
19. I've been in trouble with the law.
20. I sometimes get into dangerous situations.
21. People who mess with me always regret it.
22. Watching a fist-fight excites me.
23. I really enjoy violent films and video games.
24. It's funny when idiots fall flat on their face.
25. I enjoy watching violent sports.
26. Some people deserve to suffer.
27. Just for kicks, I've said mean things on social media.
28. I know how to hurt someone with words alone.

APPENDIX F: SELFISHNESS MEASURE

The Selfishness Questionnaire (SQ) – REVISED (Rayne & Uh, 2018)

Instructions: We can't always be charitable to others, and there are times when you have to look after your own self-interests. Answer the following questions as honestly as you can by indicating whether you: Disagree (0), Neither Agree nor Disagree (1), or Agree (2) with each statement relative to your current romantic relationship.

1. I have no problem telling “white lies” to my partner if it will help me achieve my goals.
2. I'm not too concerned about what is best for my partner in general.
3. Now and again, I've manipulated my partner to gain an advantage.
4. At the end of the day, I care mostly for myself.
5. I've occasionally put my partner down to achieve my goals.
6. Sometimes you need to take advantage of your partner before they take advantage of you.
7. I'm not always honest with my partner because honesty can end up harming myself and my partner.
8. When it comes to helping myself or helping my partner, I tend to help myself.
9. It's not nice to exploit your partner, but there are times when you simply need to.
10. If there was only one space left on a lifeboat that my partner needed, I'd honestly have to take it for myself.
11. Quite often in life, it is more important to receive than to give.
12. I know I love rewards in life, even if there is a cost to my partner.
13. If I'm honest, there are times when I put myself first, even if it's my partner's loss.
14. I care for myself much more than I care for my partner.
15. I sometimes lie to my partner for my own good, and theirs too.
16. Even when I see my partner is in need, I don't feel the urge to help them.
17. I go out of the way to exploit my relationship for my own advantage.
18. I mostly help my partner only if they will help me later.

APPENDIX G: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Qualification Questions (Asked at the beginning of the study to ensure the participants qualify.)

1. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. How long is your current relationship (in months and/or years)?
 - a. [Free Response]
3. What best describes your relationship with your current romantic partner?
 - a. Dating casually
 - b. Dating exclusively
 - c. Engaged
 - d. Married

Partner Demographics (Asked at the end of the study.)

1. What is your age?
 - a. [Free Response]
2. What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other/Prefer not to say
3. How do you describe yourself?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender Male
 - d. Transgender Female
 - e. Do not identify as male, female, or transgender
 - f. Prefer not to say
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - a. Asian
 - b. American Indian/Alaska Native
 - c. Black/African American
 - d. Hispanic or Latino/a
 - e. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
 - f. White/Caucasian
 - g. Another ethnicity
 - h. Two or more ethnicities
5. What is your sexual orientation?
 - a. Straight/Heterosexual
 - b. Lesbian/Gay/Homosexual
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Other
 - e. Do not know/Do not wish to respond
6. What is your religious affiliation?
 - a. Christian-Protestant
 - b. Christian-Catholic
 - c. Jewish
 - d. Buddhist
 - e. Muslim
 - f. Hindu
 - g. None
 - h. Agnostic
 - i. Atheist
 - j. Other