

**Actions Speak Louder Than Beliefs: Compassionate Love as a Mediator of the
Relationship between Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction**

by

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Abstract

Research has generally supported the positive association between religiosity and marital satisfaction, whereby more religious individuals are more satisfied with their marriages. However, it remains unclear why religiosity benefits marriage. Addressing this gap in the literature, the current study tests whether compassionate love is a potential mechanism underlying this link. Drawing upon proximal measures of religiosity and self-reported, spouse-reported, and observed compassionate love, this study tests the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and whether compassionate love explains that relationship in a sample of older couples (N=48). Results provided minimal support for the hypothesized associations. For wives, religiosity (i.e., Sacred Qualities) positively related to her marital satisfaction and that relationship was indeed explained by her self-reported compassionate love. For husbands, on the other hand, their experiences of religion within their marriage were not associated with their marital satisfaction. Possible explanations of these findings and future directions are provided.

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Introduction

Religiosity is positively related to marital satisfaction in the United States (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). For example, couples who attend church together frequently, share the same religious beliefs, or experience religion as having personal relevance in their daily lives report being more satisfied with their marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001). In an effort to determine how religion contributes to the quality of a marriage, researchers have called for an investigation of the possible underlying mechanisms that may explain why greater religiosity is associated with greater marital satisfaction (e.g., Mahoney, 2010; Marks, 2006).

One challenge in that investigation is that much of the current research on religion and marriage has assessed religion rather broadly and relied on single-item dichotomous measures (e.g., having a religious affiliation; Mahoney et al., 2001), which does not allow for an exploration of how multiple, specific aspects of religiosity, such as prayer, church attendance, and spirituality are associated with marital functioning (Mahoney et al., 2001). Though more recently, research has examined more specific religious processes in the form of attitudes or cognitive processes, such as sanctification (i.e., a psychological process in which aspects of life are perceived as having spiritual character and significance; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Murray-Swank, 2003) and commitment (Allgood, Harris, Skogrand, & Lee, 2009). Despite this recent progress, there remains a critical gap in our understanding of how a couple's religious beliefs and practices may be manifested in their interactions with an intimate partner. In other words, do religious couples behave differently in their marriage and if so, could it explain why they are more satisfied in their marriage than less religious couples?

In answering these questions, one possibility is that religious couples act more compassionately towards each other than do nonreligious couples. Compassionate love is defined here as the giving of self for the good of the other (Underwood, 2008). Religious couples may show more compassionate love towards their spouse than nonreligious couples, as acting compassionately towards others is a fundamental doctrine of many world religions including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Steffen & Masters, 2005). Indeed, compassionate love has been found to be associated with religiosity (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Steffen & Masters, 2005). Furthermore, compassion is an important aspect of meaningful intimate relationships (Stosney, 2004) and has been found to be positively correlated with marital adjustment (Veldorale-Brogan, Bradford, & Vail, 2010). Compassionate love, as seen in a marriage, might consist of a spouse sacrificing one's own desired activities in order to take care of a sick spouse or admitting mistakes and asking for forgiveness even when one feels that their spouse was at least partially at fault.

Research about compassionate love is typically gathered through self-report questionnaires and is generally measured as an attitude or emotion (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Stosney, 2004). Although these data are valuable, self-report questionnaires can be susceptible to cognitive limitations as the individual attempts to recall and summarize all of their past experiences (Schwarz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998). Given the nature of compassionate love and the social expectation to be compassionate towards one's spouse, social desirability may also play a role in reporting positive relationship interactions (see Eisenberg, Miller, Schaller, Fabes, Fultz, Shell, & Shea, 1989). Consequently, to complement self-report data, observational data are often used to provide additional, more objective information about intimate relationship behaviors (Melby, Ge, Conger, & Warner, 1995; Verhofstadt, Buysse, & Ickes, 2007). In this

study, utilizing this multimethod approach to studying compassionate love thus builds upon and extends the current literature by providing a clearer, more comprehensive picture about the role of compassionate love in marriage.

Given that compassionate love is related to both religiosity (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005) and marital functioning (Veldorale-Brogan et al., 2010), I propose that compassionate love may therefore serve as an underlying mechanism of the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction for couples. In other words, religious couples may be more satisfied in their marriage than nonreligious couples because they demonstrate more compassionate love. Therefore, the present study will examine compassionate love through self-report and observation as a behavioral mechanism of the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in a sample of older adults, as individuals tend to become more religious with age (Wink & Dillon, 2002). Considering that 96% of licensed marriage and family therapists believed that there is a relationship between mental health and spiritual health (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002), research identifying the role of religiosity in marriage can aid therapists in addressing how couples' religious beliefs and practices can function to improve the quality of the couples' relationship.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

The formulation of this study will be guided by the conceptual model of family and religious processes as proposed by Dollahite and Marks (2009; see Figure 1).

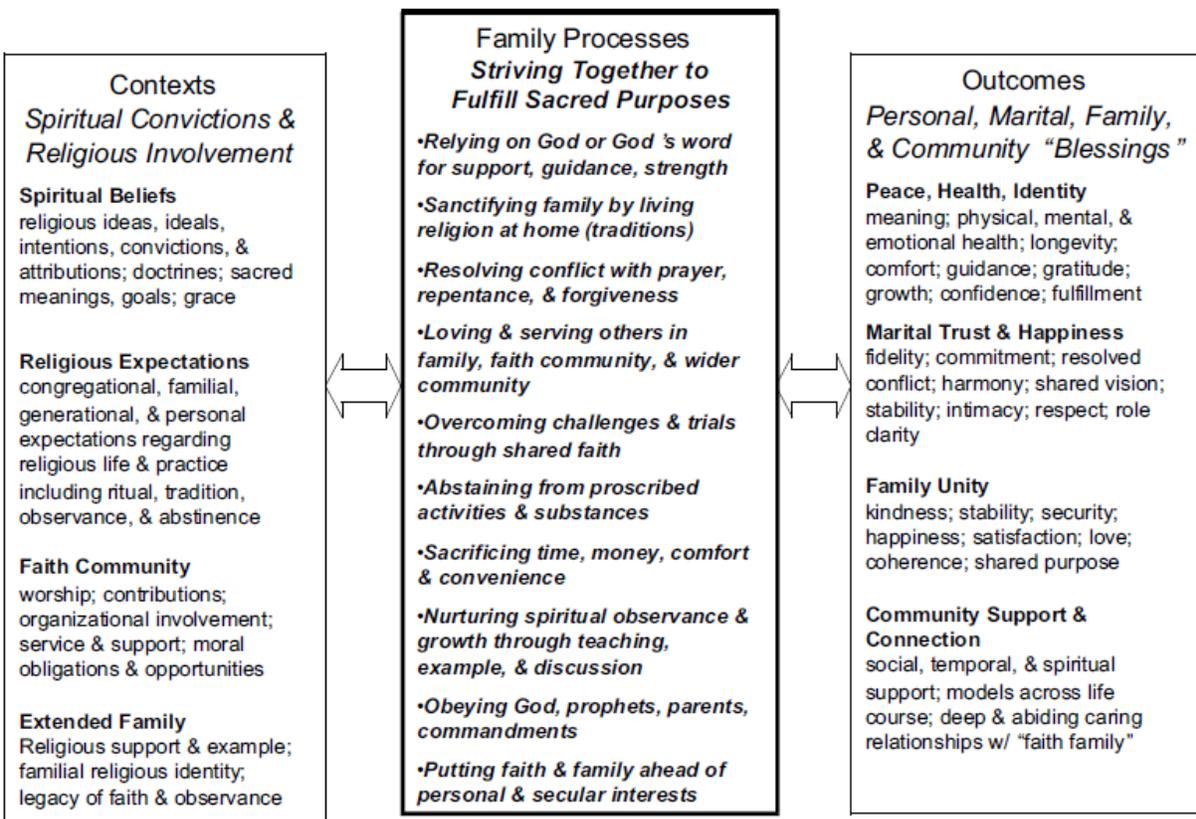


Figure 1. Conceptual model of family and religious processes (Dollahite & Marks, 2009)

For this study, I am interested in using the model to understand how spouses' religiosity is linked to marital quality. Much of the current literature regarding religiosity and marriage focuses on finding a direct relationship between religiosity and marriage; that is, that religiosity

is directly associated with marital quality (Mahoney et al., 2001; Sullivan, 2001). The Dollahite and Marks model suggests that this relationship should not be thought of as a direct relationship but rather that religious contexts and beliefs are related to marital quality through their effects on family processes, or how well couples interact and adapt to challenges. They developed a model of religion and family from qualitative interviews from a sample of 74 highly religious, racially and religiously diverse families (husbands, wives, and adolescents) living in several areas of the United States. The interviews consisted of questions asking about how family members felt their religion and religious convictions influenced their family life and family relationships. Based on these interviews, Dollahite and Marks proposed that family processes bridge the gap between contexts (the spiritual convictions and religious involvement) and outcomes (personal, marital, family, and community “blessings”). Implicit in the model is an assumption of cognitive-behavioral theory with beliefs influencing behaviors which then affect relationship outcomes (see Dattilio, 2005). Their model suggested that religious people rely upon their religious beliefs and activities to directly shape their lives and that this shaping leads to positive family outcomes. For example, they suggested that a belief in God might lead to resolving family conflict with prayer, repentance, and forgiveness. This manner of handling conflict would lead to family unity and peace. Dollahite and Marks’ model supports the possibility that how spouses treat and respond to each other explains the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction.

Accordingly, for the purposes of this study, I am interested in exploring how a family process (acting compassionately towards one’s spouse) might explain the relationship between religious convictions and a marital outcome (marital satisfaction). Acting compassionately towards one’s spouse (i.e., compassionate love) falls under three of the descriptions under family processes as seen in Figure 1: loving and serving others in the family; sacrificing time, money,

comfort, and convenience; and putting family ahead of personal and secular interests. Thus, to begin to understand how the associations might play out, the literature on both religiosity and compassionate love will be reviewed in the following sections, highlighting whenever possible the work that has discussed how these two constructs are related to each other and to marital satisfaction.

Religiosity

For this study, I make the distinction between religion and religiosity with the former referring to a set of beliefs common to certain religions such as Christianity or Islam and the latter referring to the personal behavioral, emotional, or cognitive manifestations of those beliefs or the incorporation of those beliefs into one's life. For example, religion might refer to an individual identifying themselves as Christian while religiosity might refer to how often that individual attends church to worship. In addition, the term "religious" when describing an individual or couple may refer to either religion or religiosity. Most of the literature on religion makes this distinction without explicitly stating so or uses distinguishing terms such as religious involvement, affiliation, or activity (Mahoney et al., 2001; Mahoney, 2010). Another important distinction to be made is between religiosity and spirituality. Hill and Pargament (2003) state that religiosity and spirituality are similar in that they are both focused on the search for the sacred but that religiosity tends to be more institutionalized and formal while spirituality is typically more individualized and informal. For this study, the term "religiosity" is intended to capture both the institutional and informal aspects of the search for the sacred using Mahoney's Sanctification of Marriage and Joint Religious Activities (Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott, Emery, & Rye, 1999) as described below.

Religion is important in the lives of many American adults. As of 2003, approximately 90% of American adults reported believing in God (Harris Interactive Inc., 2003). Older adults, in particular, tend to be more religious and in fact become more spiritual with age (PEW, 2010; Wink & Dillon, 2002). Koenig (2006) suggested that as people grow older, they face many related changes and challenges such as health decline, changing roles as parents, and retirement that lead them to need new sources of meaning. This will cause them to draw upon religious and spiritual beliefs as a resource to deal with those often dramatic changes that naturally occur as people age. For example, as one's health declines, an older adult may feel a desire to understand the meaning of death and/or the continuation of some spiritual life after their physical one, which many religions provide. Ellison (1991) analyzed four dimensions of religious involvement (i.e., denominational ties, social integration, divine relations, and existential certainty) and offered that this new religiosity of older adults can also compensate for the inevitable negative consequences of the aging process, specifically the psychosocial challenges often seen in older adulthood such as increased loneliness (Dykstra, van Tilburg, & de Jong Gierveld, 2005) and cognitive declines (Mather & Carstensen, 2005).

In this and other ways, religion and religiosity are generally considered positive aspects of people's lives and are considered beneficial to one's mental health, particularly for older adults (Seybold & Hill, 2001; Larson, Sherrill, Lyons, Craigie, Thielman, Greenwold, & Larson, 1992). Ellison (1991) concluded that strongly held religious beliefs positively affect subjective ratings of life quality and this effect becomes stronger with age. In addition to religiosity being a positive part of individual adults' lives, religiosity has also been thought to have critical importance for the quality of individual's relationships, and research is beginning to show how these two domains are connected (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; Mahoney, 2010).

Religiosity and Marriage

Religiosity is positively related to marital satisfaction in the United States such that couples who are more religious also report being more satisfied with their relationship (Mahoney et al., 2001; Dollahite & Marks, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999; Vaalar, Ellison, & Power, 2009). For example, in a study of 57 middle-aged and older couples in long-term marriages, Kaslow and Robison (1996) found that many cited various aspects of religiosity as important factors in the success and stability of their relationship. For example, 65% of couples endorsed *corresponding religious beliefs* as essential for marital satisfaction and 31% selected *religious convictions about the sanctity of marriage* as why they stayed in their marriage.

Research has found various religious processes that may be responsible for these positive associations. For example, religious affiliation, frequent church attendance, and religious beliefs of the divine nature of the Bible were negatively related to the frequency of self-reported infidelity in their marriage in a sample of over 7,700 adults controlling for age, race, gender, children, divorce, and education (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat, & Gore, 2007). These religious variables were also positively related to marital stability of 4,587 married couples after controlling for age at marriage, marital duration, race/ethnicity, employment, education, number of children, and prior experience with divorce (Call & Heaton, 1997), although results were somewhat mixed. For example, some associations were only significant when couples were homogeneous in their religiosity, suggesting that gender may play a role in the relationship between religiosity and marriage. Finally, in their review of the literature between 1980 and 2000, Mahoney and colleagues' (2001) concluded that marital satisfaction was associated with religious affiliation, religious involvement (e.g., church attendance), and religion having personal relevance although to various degrees. Although these findings shed light on the connection

between religiosity and marriage, Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott, Emery, and Rye (1999) argued that much of the research concerning religiosity and marriage has been “from a distance” and that research needs to be more closely or proximally connected to the two constructs. Furthermore, Mahoney and her colleagues (1999) argued that it has been a mistake that past social scientists have typically associated an individual’s religiosity solely with doctrines and formal religious practices because religiosity is much more than these religious formalities. For most people, religiosity deals with more practical matters and provides values and meaning for day-to-day life and family relationships.

Researchers have offered various religious constructs that take a more proximal approach to understanding the intersection of religiosity and marriage. For example, Mahoney and colleagues (1999) had 97 married couples with young children complete questionnaires about various aspects of their religious experience in the marriage. From their responses, they developed a multi-faceted construct thought to capture the ways individuals actually integrate religion into their lives as a couple. The more behavioral indicator of this construct is Joint Religious Activities, which consists of both formal (e.g., attending church) and informal (e.g., reading holy texts) activities that are done together as a couple. Joint Religious Activities were positively related to marital satisfaction, such that couples who engage in more religious activities together were happier with their marriage. The second more cognitive and emotional piece of their construct was sanctification of marriage. Sanctification is defined as a psychological process in which aspects of life are perceived as having spiritual character and significance (Mahoney et al., 2003). Sanctification of marriage refers to perceptions of one’s marriage having spiritual character and significance which they measure through two indices: couples viewing their marriage as being endowed with sacred qualities (e.g., holy, heavenly,

blessed, everlasting) and couples actually experiencing God being manifest in their marriage (e.g., “God is present in my marriage”, “My marriage is symbolic of God and what I believe about God”). Mahoney’s (1999) research revealed that almost half (42%) of the variance of husbands’ and wives’ ratings of marital satisfaction was related to viewing their marriage as having sacred qualities and about 14% of the variance was related to higher Manifestation of God scores. These results remained significant even after controlling for spouses’ general religiosity (e.g., global, single items of religiosity, spirituality, church attendance). Sanctification of marriage was also found to be a unique aspect of religion that is associated with marital functioning such that couples who viewed their marriage as more sacred were more satisfied in their marriage.

Other more proximal aspects of religiosity have been found to be significant for marriage such as prayer, in-home religious activities, and finding meaning in religious holidays (Fincham, Beach, Lambert, Stillman, & Braithwaite, 2008; Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010; Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Fincham and colleagues (2008), drawing from a sample of 183 mostly female college students in a romantic relationship, found that praying for one’s partner and praying together as a couple predicted later relationship satisfaction, even after controlling for other positive relationship behaviors (e.g., having positive conversations together). In possible explanation of this link between prayer and relationship satisfaction, Dudley and Kosinski (1990) had suggested that praying together helps each spouse think more about the other in a loving, caring, and forgiving way. Fincham and colleagues (2008) also suggested that prayer might function as a time out when a couple is fighting, giving each partner time and space to “cool off” and think about the conflict and possible solutions more logically and cooperatively. Another offered possibility is that prayer is typically considered to be an intimate experience with a

peaceful and loving God that could potentially dispel hostility and encourage peace and empathy in a relationship. Finally, the authors found that commitment explained the positive relationship between prayer and relationship satisfaction. They speculated that praying to God about one's marriage might lead to an individual seeing their relationship as more sacred, which in turn might lead to seeing the relationship in longer terms than he/she might otherwise. This might make a couple feel more secure in their relationship and thus they may be more willing to put forth a greater effort towards their marriage. Several other researchers have provided support for this line of reasoning as commitment to a spouse has been strongly linked to both religiosity (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008; Allgood et al., 2009) and marital satisfaction (Givertz, & Segrin, 2005; Stanley, Markman, & Witton, 2002).

Having in-home family devotional activities (e.g., prayer and scripture study; Ellison et al., 2010) and meaningful religious holiday rituals (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001) have also been positively associated with relationship satisfaction. Participation in in-home family devotional activities remained significantly linked to relationship satisfaction even after controlling for other dimensions of religiosity such as frequency of church attendance and religious homogamy, as well as age, race, gender, education, children, and income (Ellison et al., 2010). Similarly, Fiese and Tomcho (2001) found that middle-aged married couples with children who reported attaching more meaning to religious holidays were more satisfied in their marriage. This association between meaningful religious holiday rituals and marital satisfaction remained significant even after controlling for overall religiosity and marital duration. The meaningfulness of the religious holiday was assessed from four questions in the Family Ritual Questionnaire asking about the individual's perception of the occurrence, affect, symbolic significance, and deliberateness of religious holiday rituals. The authors proposed that the religious rituals

benefitted the marriage by providing the couple with a unique meaning that is shared by both spouses and only exists in their relationship. This unique meaning was proposed to strengthen the connection between spouses and create more intimacy in a couple. Further, the authors proposed that religious rituals connect behaviors with values. Religious rituals are often passed down through generations and through time, have become associated with certain family-of-origin values. Religious rituals then become more than just behavioral routines. Although family-of-origin rituals were not directly related to marital satisfaction, they were related to current religious rituals which were positively related to marital satisfaction.

Although the studies described above attempt to describe the relationship between religiosity and marriage using a more proximal approach and even examine specific religious behaviors, they can only speculate about how religiosity is related to marriage in terms of the marital interaction. Some suggest that religiosity is related to marriage through having certain and similar values and others suggest that it might be the structure of religion (e.g., institutional support, encouraging societal norms) that supports a marriage (Ellison et al., 2010; Robinson, 1994). However, as is suggested by the Dollahite and Marks model (2009), the relationship between religiosity and marital functioning should be explained by the couples' family processes, or how well couples love and serve each other; sacrifice time, money, comfort, and convenience; and put family ahead of personal and secular interests. In fact, in offering up potential explanations for their findings, several of the researchers seemed to suggest a behavioral mechanism between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Ellison et al., 2010; Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Therefore, in an effort to determine how religiosity is associated with marital satisfaction, researchers have called for an investigation into the possible underlying relational

mechanisms that may explain why greater religiosity is associated with greater marital satisfaction (e.g., Mahoney, 2010; Marks, 2006; Ellison et al., 2010).

One promising line of research along this vein has found that the more husbands attended church and viewed their marriage as sacred, the less frequently they reported fighting with their spouse (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Mahoney et al., 1999). In addition, Lambert and Dollahite (2006) reported how the religiosity of 57 highly religious, middle-aged married couples (*M* of marital duration = 21 years) allowed them to better prevent problems in the relationship and resolve conflict when problems did arise. These couples were jointly interviewed about how their religious experiences were linked to their marriage with one question being directly about religion and conflict (i.e., “All couples have some conflict. Are there ways that your religious beliefs or practices help avoid or reduce marital conflict?”). The couples cited various religious themes that aided them in preventing and resolving conflict such as couple prayer, shared sacred vision and purpose, willingness to forgive, and commitment to relationship permanence. Since frequent, more hostile conflict in a marriage is generally related to lower marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), positive conflict management (i.e., frequency, prevention, and resolution) represents one likely underlying mechanism of the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. However, Ellison and colleagues (2010) suggested that religiosity may not only prevent negative interactions but inspire positive interactions. Therefore, we need to examine how religiosity may promote positive interactions between couples, as positive interactional adaptive processes are likely to vary based on individuals’ religious beliefs and practices.

Compassionate Love as a Potential Mechanism

In line with the Dollahite and Marks model (2009), Mahoney and colleagues (2001) suggested there may be a set of psycho-religious mechanisms that explain or underlie the relationship between religiosity and marital functioning, and one promising adaptive process that may function in this manner is compassionate love. For example, Steffen and Masters (2005) found that a compassionate attitude partially explained the link between religiosity (self-reported church attendance, private religious activities, and intrinsic religious attitudes) and positive psychosocial health status (depressive symptoms and stress) for both younger and middle-aged adults. Compassionate love, therefore, may also function as a mechanism in the link between religiosity and marital functioning.

Compassionate love is a distinct and fairly new research construct and is defined here as the giving of self for the good of the romantic partner (Underwood, 2008). Although much of the past research related to compassionate love refers to terms such as altruism, compassion, and empathy, compassionate love is not synonymous with those terms (Oman, 2011). For example, compassionate love differs from compassion in that compassion is often referenced as the motivation and action to alleviate the suffering of others (Stosny, 2004; Steffen & Masters, 2005) and compassionate love includes a broader motivation and actions towards others that may not be limited to alleviate suffering. Further, compassionate love can be conceptualized as both behaviors or as an attitude or perception towards one's spouse (Neff & Karney, 2008). In attempting to define compassionate love more specifically, Underwood (2008) described an individual, subjective exercise. The exercise is to "reflect on a time in the past when you personally felt truly loved, loved for who you truly are, beyond the momentary circumstances, beyond what was expected of you. Pick a time that still holds particular importance for you. What was the relationship context and what were the circumstances? Close your eyes and try to

relive it” (Underwood, 2008, p. 6). This exercise was intended to capture a subjective, emotive experience of compassionate love.

Research about compassionate love is typically gathered through self-report questionnaires and is generally measured as an attitude or emotion (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Stosney, 2004). Although these data are valuable, self-report questionnaires can be susceptible to cognitive limitations as the individual attempts to recall and summarize all of their past experiences (Schwarz et al., 1998). Given the nature of compassionate love and the social expectation to be compassionate towards one’s partner, social desirability may also play a role in reporting positive relationship interactions (see Eisenberg et al., 1989). Consequently, to complement self-report data, observational data are often used to provide additional, more objective information about intimate relationship behaviors (Verhofstadt et al., 2007). For example, Melby and colleagues (1995) suggested that self-reports, spousal reports, and observations should all be gathered and included to more accurately capture a marital interaction or process such as compassionate love. As support for the importance of observing couples for demonstrations of compassionate love, Underwood (2008) believed that an attitude such as compassionate love can be expressed in subtle ways such as a facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. Furthermore, Neff and Karney (2008) proposed that general positive relationship behaviors can be evidence of compassionate love. These positive behaviors could be showing positive affect towards a partner or demonstrating support. Therefore, although self-report data can be useful, observational data may capture a different and important aspect of compassionate love.

There is ample research linking compassionate love to religiosity. From the literature, compassionate love has been found to be associated with religiosity and spirituality (Sprecher &

Fehr, 2005; Steffen & Masters, 2005). Hendrick and Hendrick (1987) found that religious college students reported higher levels of agapic (i.e., selfless) love. Conceptually, religion may provide individuals with a framework for morals and values such as compassionate love. Showing compassionate love towards others is a fundamental doctrine of many world religions including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Steffen & Masters, 2005). Regardless of the different theological explanations or reasons for acting compassionately towards others, most religions recognize other people as important and worthy of being shown compassionate love. Typically, religious institutions prescribe an ideal of spouses sacrificing and giving for the good of their spouse (i.e., showing compassionate love) with the intent of strengthening the marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Compassionate love is also an important part of healthy and happy family relationships. Compassionate love is considered a necessary characteristic of positive and healthy relationships (Stosney, 2004) and has been found to be positively correlated with relationship adjustment (Veldorale-Brogan et al., 2010). Veldorale-Brogan, Bradford, and Vail (2010) assessed 422 individuals in a committed relationship (i.e., married or cohabiting for at least one year) for their other-centeredness (i.e., a person's ability to be fair and understanding and to make sacrifices for the relationship), generosity (i.e., the willingness to give of oneself freely to the partner) and relationship adjustment which includes relationship consensus/agreement, relationship satisfaction, and relationship cohesion using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Although their measures were not labeled compassionate love, their descriptions of the meaning of other-centeredness and generosity are closely related to the above definition of compassionate love. They found that the marital virtues of other-centeredness and generosity (compassionate love)

were associated with higher relationship adjustment after controlling for age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, education, income, and perceived financial status.

Similarly, Sprecher and Fehr (2006) completed two separate studies in which they had college students provide a detailed account of a specific experience of compassionate love with a handful of follow-up questions surrounding that experience. They found that experiencing compassionate love was associated with feeling closer in a close relationship in a sample of 108 college students. In a different sample of 156 college students, they found compassionate love experienced in a close relationship was related with feeling closer than compassionate love experienced with someone less well known. Finally, they found compassionate love was linked with individuals' experience of a variety of positive outcomes, including increased self-worth and an overall good mood. Steffen and Masters (2005) pointed out that "compassion, by definition, involves being aware of the needs of others and wanting to help others in their needs. This may lead to both an increase in quantity of interpersonal relationships as well as the quality of those relationships" (p. 222).

Due to its cross-sectional nature, most previous work on compassionate love has been unclear regarding the direction of effects of the relationship between compassionate love and positive relationship outcomes. However, Neff and Karney's (2008) study of 82 newlywed couples provides evidence that it is indeed compassionate love that leads to positive outcomes in marriage. They defined compassionate love as being demonstrated by a spouse having a positive view of their partner combined with an accurate understanding of their partner's specific strengths and weaknesses. Although the couples were almost uniformly satisfied at the beginning of their marriage, there was variability in the number of couples engaging in compassionate love. The authors found that the wife's compassionate love was associated with providing more

support, feeling greater marital efficacy during conflict (i.e., the feeling that one can execute the necessary behaviors in order to resolve relationship conflicts) and greater marital stability over the first four years of marriage. These associations remained after controlling for how positive the wives viewed their husband's specific qualities—or in other words, wives' compassionate love was positively related to positive marital outcomes beyond simply the wives' attitudes about the husband's qualities. The authors concluded that love in a relationship may be stronger and lead to more positive marital outcomes when partners have a more accurate understanding of their partner's specific qualities—that is, when partners engage in compassionate love, as opposed to partners who solely view or think positively of each other. In order to flourish, spouses need to go beyond just liking each other to demonstrating compassionate love by putting their spouse's needs and wants ahead of their own.

Though these studies reveal that compassionate love plays an important role in marriage in the first half of life, Roberts, Wise, and DuBenske (2008) suggested that couples may have more opportunities for and the need to develop and demonstrate compassionate love as they get older. Older adults typically have more health and social concerns and need more caring for physically, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. These concerns and needs provide an ideal context for a spouse to engage in compassionate love. When one spouse is suffering or needs special care, the other spouse has many opportunities for acts of compassionate love, such as caring for their spouse and healing and forgiving. These demonstrations of compassionate love would seem to be related to greater relationship satisfaction (Roberts et al., 2008). Thus, older adults are an ideal population in which to study compassionate love.

Current Study

Despite the strong evidence linking religiosity to marital satisfaction, there remains a need to better understand the behavioral mechanisms of the relationship underlying this link (Mahoney, 2010; Marks, 2006; Ellison et al., 2010). Separate studies have shown that compassionate love is positively related to both satisfying relationships (Veldorale-Brogan et al., 2010) and religiosity (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005); however, there is no research looking at both associations simultaneously. Furthermore, methodological limitations mentioned above in both the religiosity and compassionate love research have prevented a more nuanced understanding of how religion might inspire couples to behave towards one another (Mahoney et al., 1999). Finally, older adults are an ideal population in which to study both religiosity and compassionate love as older adults are more religious (PEW, 2010) and have more opportunities to be compassionate (Roberts et al., 2008). Therefore, I hypothesize first that a positive association will exist between religiosity, as assessed through Mahoney et al.'s (1999) Sanctification of Marriage and Joint Religious Activities scales, and marital satisfaction in a sample of older adults. Second, in line with the Dollahite and Marks model of religious and family processes (2009), I hypothesize that self-reported, spouse-reported, and observed compassionate love will explain the positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction.

This study will be an important contribution to the literature on religiosity and marriage and will have practical implications. Understanding more about the relationship between religiosity and marriage will allow therapists and other practitioners to incorporate religiosity into more effective interventions with couples (Hoogestraat & Trammel, 2003). For example, if compassionate love does explain the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, therapists who assess for or intervene with religious references should be asking about and encouraging compassionate love to be shown in the marriage. This understanding is important

considering that approximately 65% of therapists reported using religious concepts in therapy (Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004). Even for those therapists who may be less religious or nonreligious themselves can use this information because many people wish that counseling would include their personal values and beliefs (Patterson, Hayworth, Turner, & Raskin, 2000).

Method

Participants

A total of 49 couples (49 wives and 49 husbands) for this study were a part of the larger Marriage and Retirement Study (PI: Amy Rauer), a study examining how compassionate love and other positive aspects of marriage are related to individual and relationship well-being in older adulthood. The couples were recruited from the local community through health and other community organizations in the Southeast United States. In order to be eligible to participate, the couples needed to be married, be at least partially retired (i.e., working less than 40 hours a week), and be able to drive to the on-campus research center.

The average age of husbands was 71.7 years ($SD= 8.00$; range = 59-93) and 69.5 years ($SD= 7.5$; range = 56-89) for wives. For the wives, 45 (92%) were European American, 3 (6%) were African American, and 1 (2%) was Asian American. For husbands, 46 (94%) were European American and 3 (6%) were African American. In terms of education for husbands, 1 (2%) did not finish high school, 2 (4%) had a high school education, 2 attended some college (4%), 14 had college degrees (29%), and 30 had post-college education (61%). In terms of education for wives, 1 (2%) did not finish high school, 5 (10%) had a high school education, 11 attended some college (22%), 14 had college degrees (29%), and 18 had post-college education (37%). Thirty-eight couples (78%) were in their first marriage and couples were married for an average of 42.9 years ($SD= 13.6$; range = 7-68). On average, the couples reported having 2.5

children ($SD = 1.3$; range = 0-6). Couples' average annual income was \$86,469 ($SD = \$68,089$; range = \$9,000-500,000) and the average total wealth (i.e., property, pensions, IRAs, and income) was \$1,077,093 ($SD = \$1,390,401$; range = \$9,500-8,500,000). In 14 couples (28.6%), at least one spouse was currently working for pay and 35 couples (71.4%) were fully retired. In 45 couples (91.8%), at least one spouse reported a religious affiliation with 96% of them reporting being Christian.

For the final analyses, one couple was excluded as their compassionate love task was not recorded which resulted in a final N of 48 couples (48 husbands and 48 wives).

Procedures

Participation in the study included an approximately two to three-hour onsite interview at the research laboratory, during which couples were interviewed about a variety of topics, including a task designed to capture compassionate love, called the Good Memory Task (described below). At the end of the interview, each spouse was given a questionnaire packet which they were asked to complete and mail back within a reasonable time period. The self-report questionnaire contained various assessments including assessments for marital satisfaction, compassionate love, and religiosity (all described below). Couples were paid \$75 for their participation in the interview and upon completion of the questionnaire packet.

Measures

The measures that were used to assess religiosity, compassionate love, and marital satisfaction are described below and included in Appendix A.

Religiosity. The religiosity of each individual was assessed using Mahoney's et al.'s (1999) Sanctification of Marriage and Joint Religious Activities measures. Two scales were used

to assess the sanctification of marriage: the Perceived Sacred Qualities of Marriage Scale and the Manifestation of God Scale. The Perceived Sacred Qualities of Marriage Scale assessed whether spouses view their marriage in spiritual or sacred terms. Spouses used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very closely describes sacred term and 7 = very closely describes antonymic term) to evaluate how well nine pairs of antonymic spiritual terms (e.g., heavenly-earthly, holy-unholy) described the marriage. The Manifestation of God Scale, comprised of 14 questions with a scale of 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree, asked about the degree to which spouses experience God in their marriage (e.g., “God is present in my marriage”, “I experience God through my marriage”). The reliabilities for both the Sacred Qualities (husbands: $\alpha=.86$; wives: $\alpha=.93$) and Manifestation of God (husbands: $\alpha=.99$; wives: $\alpha=.99$) scales are good. The Joint Religious Activities measure assessed the frequency that a couple participates in religious activities together (e.g., praying, attending church, and discussing religious beliefs). Eight items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = never to 7 = very often). Reliability was good (husbands: $\alpha=.91$; wives: $\alpha=.87$) for this assessment.

Compassionate love. Compassionate love was measured through both a self-report questionnaire and through observations of each couple as they discussed a good memory of each other. To assess participants’ reports of their own compassionate love for their spouse, participants completed the Compassionate Love Scale (Fehr & Sprecher, 2008). This 21-question measure assessed the willingness, desire, and frequency of putting a partner’s needs above one’s own (e.g., “I spend a lot of time concerned about the well-being of my partner”). This measure has shown high levels of internal consistency and good convergent and discriminant validity

(Fehr & Sprecher, 2008). Reliability for this measure was excellent (husbands: $\alpha=.93$; wives: $\alpha=.95$).

To capture compassionate love during the Good Memory Task, each partner was asked to “share a time when you felt your partner put your needs ahead of their own.” More specifically, participants were asked to describe when this happened, what their partner did, how it made them feel, and if they had told their partner how they felt. No other directions were given. The task was video and audio recorded and later coded for each spouses’ compassionate love – both spouse-reported and observed. Two coders were trained on a subsample of video recordings until interobserver agreement was at least 80%.

First, a score was given for the spouse-reported compassionate love based on the content of the spouse’s memory for their spouse. In other words, this code answered the question: How compassionate does the participant *sound* according to the good memory shared by their spouse? Compassionate love is defined by the kindness, sensitivity, and love that an individual shows toward his/her partner, especially as placing their spouse’s needs above his/her own. Participants often commented on both the frequency and meaningfulness of compassionate love shown by their spouse and both of these aspects were considered for this code. A score of 1 to 4 was given for this code (spouse-reported CL). A score of one represented that the individual sounded minimally or not at all compassionate meaning that the individual rarely to never shows compassionate love towards their spouse and if they did, it was not meaningful. A score of two indicated the individual sounded modestly compassionate. The individual sounded like they occasionally show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or it was a less meaningful memory (e.g., she does some of the yard work). A score of three represented that the individual

sounded compassionate from the story shared by their spouse. The individual sounded like they regularly show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or it was a somewhat meaningful memory (e.g., he really helped take care of the kids while they were growing up and it was really special). A score of four represented that the individual was extremely compassionate. The individual sounded like they always show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or it was an extremely meaningful memory (e.g., she gave up so much to move around the country for my job. She never complained and did so much for our family. It meant everything to me and I am so thankful for her). Interrater reliability for spouse-reported compassionate love was $r = .72$ ($p < .001$) for husbands, and $r = .86$ ($p < .001$) for wives.

The second code was the observed compassionate love code. It answered the question: How compassionate does the participant *appear* to be in listening to their spouse sharing their good memory? This code is based on Neff and Karney's (2005) use of emotional support as a proxy for compassionate love (see also Neff & Karney, 2008). This observed compassionate love code included sensitive listening to their spouse, perceiving and interpreting feelings and signals accurately, and responding appropriately. Coders considered the frequency, latency, and the appropriateness of responses to the spouse including visual regard, nodding, and sensitive comments. Behaviors needed to go beyond listening, as all couples were instructed to listen to one another. A scale of 1 to 7 was used to rate observed compassionate love. A score of 1 described irritation or annoyance by the partner. There was no regard or consideration for the other. Expressed desires or comments of the other got no response, or a very delayed or a negative response, which may have created distress. A score of 2 was given when a partner simply listened without any irritation but made no effort to be sensitive. More often than not,

they seemed oblivious to each other's needs and comments, though they may very occasionally have responded to very obvious signals in a neutral manner. A score of 3 represented minimal sensitivity. Although some comments went unheeded, there were some signs of sensitivity such as moments of visual regard or nodding. A score of 4 meant that the spouse showed moderate sensitivity. Some comments were responded to fairly often, sometimes neutrally and sometimes sensitively. High visual regard, frequent nods, or a sensitive response were typical. A score of 5 included high visual regard, frequent nodding and at least one sensitive response. Most other comments made were fairly neutral. A score of 6 represented high sensitivity. The spouse paid high visual regard, nodded or touched appropriately, and made several sensitive responses; however, there were noticeable lapses in responding or offering support. A score of 7 meant that the individual was very highly sensitive. Sensitive comments, touches, and high visual regard were constant during the task. Interrater reliability for individual observed compassionate love was $r = .75$ ($p < .001$) for husbands, and $r = .77$ ($p < .001$) for wives.

Marital satisfaction. Participants' satisfaction with their marriage was assessed using the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (Haynes et al., 1992). This 24-item questionnaire measured various dimensions of marital satisfaction thought to be more developmentally appropriate for older adults (e.g., how satisfied are you with your spouse's physical health) in addition to more standard questions on specific topics such as satisfaction with conflict management and time spent with spouse, as well as their overall satisfaction with their marriage. Questions were rated on a scale of either four to one, five to one, or six to one with one being very dissatisfied or negative responses (e.g., "0-25% positive attention", "much less satisfied than 5 years ago") on all of the scales and the highest number on the scale (four,

five, or six) being very satisfied or positive responses (e.g., “76-100% positive attention”, “much more satisfied than 5 years ago”). Reliability for this measure was excellent (husbands: $\alpha=.92$; wives: $\alpha=.93$).

Plan of Analysis

First, I examined the descriptive statistics for all of the study variables (i.e., mean, standard deviation, range, skewness) in order to have a better understanding of the characteristics of my sample. I also conducted paired *t*-tests to examine gender differences between spouses in the variables of interest. Finally, I conducted bivariate correlations to examine preliminary associations between the variables of interest.

Second, to test the proposed hypotheses, I utilized a hierarchical linear regression model for each spouse to determine both the unique contributions of an individual’s religiosity (Joint Religious Activities, Manifestation of God, and Sacred Qualities) to their own marital satisfaction and whether these associations might be explained by their self-reported, spouse-reported, and observed compassionate love. Age and current annual income will be used as control variables. Age has been shown to be related to both religiosity (Wink & Dillon, 2002) and marital satisfaction (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2000), with religiosity increasing with age and marital satisfaction decreasing with age. Current annual income has also been found to be important for marital satisfaction, with higher income linked to greater marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). I first hypothesized that a positive association would exist between each measure of religiosity—Joint Religious Activities, Manifestation of God, and Sacred Qualities—and marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Second, I hypothesized that self-report, spouse-report, and observed measures of compassionate love would act as

mechanisms of the positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction by reducing the significance of that relationship.

Results

I first examined the descriptive statistics for all of the study variables, including the mean, range, standard deviation, and skewness statistics (see Table 1). On average, the sample reported being highly religious, as indicated by the high means for all three religiosity variables (i.e., Joint Religious Activities, Manifestation of God, and Sacred Qualities) for both husbands and wives. For example, on a 1 to 7 Likert scale for the Manifestation of God measure, husbands had a mean of 5.19 and wives had a mean of 5.53. The sample was also highly compassionate as evidenced by the high means for both self-reported (husbands had a 4.47 and wives had a 4.44 out of a possible 5) and spouse-reported compassionate love (husbands had a 3.08 and wives had a 3.10 out of a possible 4). The mean for observed compassionate love was slightly below the scale's midpoint (husbands mean was 2.79 and wives was 3.33 out of a possible 7) demonstrating that self and spouse-reported compassionate love tended to be higher than observed compassionate love. Means for marital satisfaction revealed that husbands and wives were generally highly satisfied in their marriages (husbands had a 117.33 and wives had a 115.92 in a possible range of 24-139). Skewness statistics were acceptable for almost all variables, indicating that all study variables besides wives' self-reported compassionate love were normally distributed in this sample. The negative skewness statistic (-2.26) for wives' self-reported compassionate love indicated that the majority of the scores were near the highly compassionate

end of the scale. Paired t-tests indicated that there were no significant differences between husbands and wives for all variables.

Next, I examined the intercorrelations between the study variables both within and between spouses (see Table 2). Looking first at the within spouse correlations, the three religiosity variables were all significantly and highly correlated with one another for both husbands and wives. For husbands, Joint Religious Activities was positively correlated with Manifestation of God ($r = .63, p < .001$) and Sacred Qualities ($r = .50, p < .001$) and Manifestation of God was positively correlated with Sacred Qualities ($r = .41, p < .01$). For wives, Joint Religious Activities was positively correlated with Manifestation of God ($r = .65, p < .001$) and Sacred Qualities ($r = .66, p < .001$) and Manifestation of God was positively correlated with Sacred Qualities ($r = .57, p < .001$). These correlations indicate that individuals that scored high on any of the religiosity measures tended to be high on the others.

Further, the within spouse correlations revealed that one measure of wives' religiosity was related to their compassionate love and marital satisfaction. Wives who believed their marriage to be more sacred reported more compassionate love for their spouse ($r = .45, p < .01$) and were more satisfied with their marriages ($r = .33, p < .05$). Wives who reported engaging in more joint religious activities, however, showed less compassionate love for their spouse during the good memory task ($r = -.26, p < .10$), although this association was only marginally significant. Correlations also revealed that wives who reported and demonstrated greater compassionate love were described as more compassionate by their husbands (self-reported: $r = .32, p < .05$; observed: $r = .45, p < .01$). Finally, wives' who reported being more compassionate and described as more compassionate by their spouse were more satisfied with their marriage

(self-reported: $r = .63, p < .001$; spouse-reported: $r = .43, p < .01$). For husbands, on the other hand, none of their religiosity measures were associated with their marital satisfaction, but husbands who reported more compassionate love for their wives and who were described as more compassionate by their wives were more maritally satisfied ($r = .39, p < .05$; $r = .38, p < .01$). Correlations between spouses indicated all variables were significantly correlated except for observed compassionate love, indicating that husbands' and wives' religiosity, compassionate love (except observed), and marital satisfaction are all positively associated.

Correlations involving the control variables revealed only marginally significant results. Husbands' age was marginally significantly correlated with Joint Religious Activities ($r = .25, p < .10$) and Sacred Qualities ($r = .29, p < .10$), and wives' age was marginally significantly correlated with Manifestation of God ($r = .27, p < .10$) and self-reported compassionate love ($r = .25, p < .10$). Current annual income was marginally significant with only wives self-reported compassionate love ($r = .27, p < .10$).

Although there was not strong evidence for links between religiosity, compassionate love, and marital satisfaction from the correlational results, I proceeded with the hierarchical linear regressions as the control variables (age, income) may have masked significant associations between the study variables. The hierarchical linear regressions were examined separately for husbands and wives to test the proposed hypotheses that a positive association would exist between each measure of religiosity—Joint Religious Activities, Manifestation of God, and Sacred Qualities—and marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives and that self-report, spouse-report, and observed measures of compassionate love would act as mechanisms of this association between religiosity and marital satisfaction controlling for both age and current

annual income. First, Model 1 included both age and current annual income as control variables in predicting marital satisfaction. Second, to test whether religiosity explained significant variance in marital satisfaction, Model 2 added the three religiosity variables (i.e., Joint Religious Activities, Manifestation of God, and Sacred Qualities) to the two control variables (i.e., age and current income) to predict marital satisfaction. Finally, to determine whether compassionate love explained a potential relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, Model 3 added the three compassionate love variables (i.e., self-report, spouse-reported, observed) to predict marital satisfaction.

For wives (see Table 3), Model 1 did not significantly predict marital satisfaction. After adding the religiosity variables, Model 2 was significant ($R^2 = .26, p < .05$) in predicting marital satisfaction. It revealed that Sacred Qualities significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($\beta = .59, p < .05$) when controlling for age and current annual income indicating that the more sacred the wife viewed her marriage, the more satisfied she was in her marriage. The other two religiosity variables (i.e., Joint Religious Activities and Manifestation of God) were not significant in predicting marital satisfaction. This result partially supported the first hypothesis. After adding the compassionate love variables, Model 3 accounted for a significant amount of variance in marital satisfaction ($R^2 = .51, p < .01$). In Model 3, only self-reported compassionate love emerged as a significant predictor of marital satisfaction ($\beta = .49, p < .05$). Wives who reported more compassionate love towards their spouse were more maritally satisfied. In addition, Sacred Qualities no longer predicted marital satisfaction indicating that self-reported compassionate love appears to have explained the positive association between Sacred Qualities and marital satisfaction from Model 2, providing minimal support for the second hypothesis.

For husbands (see Table 4), Model 1 or Model 2 revealed no significant results for the control and religiosity variables predicting marital satisfaction and the R^2 statistics were not significant. Including the compassionate love variables in Model 3 did not significantly capture sufficient variance in marital satisfaction ($R^2 = .27$) either. Again, although preliminary correlations indicated some significant links between two compassionate love measures and marital satisfaction, religiosity and compassionate love variables failed to explain significant variance in husbands' reports of marital satisfaction thus failing to find support for either hypothesis.

Discussion

Research has generally supported the association between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Mahoney et al., 2001), whereby the more religious an individual is, the more satisfied they are with their marriage. However, researchers have called for an investigation to better understand the specific behavioral processes underlying this positive association (e.g., Mahoney, 2010; Marks, 2006). Dollahite and Marks' (2009) conceptual model of family and religious processes proposes that religiosity is related to marital quality through its effects on family processes (e.g., conflict resolution, sacrificing personal interests). Therefore, in the current study, we focused on one family process in particular, compassionate love, as it has been linked to both greater religiosity (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005) and greater relationship satisfaction (Neff & Karney, 2008). Drawing upon self-reported, spouse-reported, and observed compassionate love, this study is the first to date to test compassionate love as a mechanism of the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in a sample of older couples.

Results provided minimal support for a positive association between religiosity and marital satisfaction in this sample. For wives, viewing one's marriage as sacred was associated with higher marital satisfaction; however, no other religiosity measure was significantly associated with marital satisfaction for either spouse. Regarding compassionate love, preliminary correlations offered promising results, revealing that both self-reported and spouse-reported compassionate love were positively related to marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives. However, given the lack of a positive relationship between most of the religiosity measures and marital satisfaction, it was difficult to test whether compassionate love acted as a mechanism.

Nevertheless, a regression analysis revealed that for wives, self-reported compassionate love explained the relationship between Sacred Qualities and marital satisfaction. Our efforts at understanding the links between religiosity and marriage in older adulthood suggest that compassionate love may act as a mechanism, although a potential gender difference exists in that link.

Gender Differences in the Links Between Religiosity and Marriage

Despite a lack of strong evidence linking religiosity and marriage for husbands, there were some significant results in support for the link between religiosity and marital satisfaction for wives. Wives' Sacred Qualities was significantly related to her marital satisfaction with the more sacred she viewed her marriage, the more satisfied she was with her marriage. This evidence for the positive relationship between religiosity and marriage supports Mahoney and colleagues' (1999) assertion that we need a more proximal approach to studying religion in marriage. However, the other proximal measures, Manifestation of God and Joint Religious Activities, were not significantly related for wives. Sacred Qualities is the less theistic measure and refers more to the spiritual or sacred nature of one's marriage—viewing one's marriage as sacred does not necessitate inclusion of a higher being. One possible explanation for only finding evidence of the influence of Sacred Qualities and not the other religiosity measures is that perhaps women draw more influence from the spiritual and less formal aspects of religion than the more theistic or formal aspects. Viewing their marriage as sacred may imply that wives simply place more value on their marriages, which they are typically socialized to do (Strazdins, & Broom, 2004). Perhaps religiosity matters for women to the extent that religion places extraordinary emphasis or importance on their marriage which is in line with their socialized

feeling of being primarily responsible for their relationships (see McFarland, Uecker, & Regnerus, 2011).

Furthermore, wives' self-reported passionate love explained the relationship between wives' Sacred Qualities and her marital satisfaction—meaning that the positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction for wives was explained by the passionate love she reported for her spouse. Therefore, for wives, proximal religiosity (i.e., Sacred Qualities) in marriage does seem to be related to marital satisfaction through its effects on how one feels towards their spouse, which is in line with Dollahite and Marks' (2009) conceptual model of family and religious processes. It is possible that as women are socialized to place more significance on their marriages, they tend to identify themselves as keepers of the relationship. Wives may see themselves in this role as they view their marriage as more sacred and therefore are more willing to feel and demonstrate passionate love for their spouse and give of themselves for the good of their marriage. Wives' religiosity, it seems, may both confirm and encourage the sacredness of marriage and the need to sacrifice or act selflessly, which may be what matters for their marital satisfaction. Perhaps wives' are more satisfied in their marriages as they fulfill their religious and social obligations to care for their marriages.

Interestingly, even though there were no mean-level differences between husbands and wives on any of the study variables, wives' Sacred Qualities and marital satisfaction were significantly related yet husbands' religiosity and marital satisfaction were not. These findings suggest that the association between religiosity and marriage may operate differently for husbands and wives. Past research regarding gender differences in the link between religion and marriage has produced somewhat mixed results. Although some researchers have not found any gender differences in these associations (Ellison et al., 2010; Mahoney et al., 1999), others have

found evidence that religion can play a different role in a marriage for men and women (Call & Heaton, 1997; Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Fowers, 1991). For example, in their large study of younger to middle-aged married and unmarried couples, Wolfinger and Wilcox (2008) found that men's more frequent religious attendance, but not women's, was linked to higher relationship quality for both partners. The authors took this to indicate that the effects of religiosity on husbands' marital satisfaction may be more institutional than wives'. Institutional religiosity refers to the structured doctrine, formalized practices, and social networks that are associated with a formal church organization. Wolfinger and Wilcox (2008) discussed that as men are socialized to focus less on relationships in general, that involvement in religious institutions that encourage a focus on relationships may matter more for men than for women. For example, churches typically encourage marital fidelity through commitment to one's spouse and this greater commitment may be what is associated with marital satisfaction for husbands.

Therefore, given that the religiosity measures used in this study focused more on the informal or private religious experience (i.e., Sacred Qualities and Manifestation of God) rather than on the institutional religious experience, this may explain the lack of findings linking husband's religiosity with his marital satisfaction. The Joint Religious Activities measure that included more formal aspects of religiosity was mixed with informal and personal experiences as well, possibly making the measure insufficiently "institutional" to capture the effects of husbands' religiosity on his marriage. Or perhaps for husbands, it may be more important to examine his commitment towards his spouse as a potential marital outcome instead of his marital satisfaction. As a final possibility, institutional religiosity is a private or individual experience and thus the dyadic nature of the Joint Religious Activities measure may not have truly captured

how a husbands' religious experience positively influences his marriage. Investigating more institutional religiosity with a measure solely focused on the private, institutional religious experience of husbands as well as assessing his marital commitment, could better reveal how religiosity impacts husbands' marriages.

A Developmental Explanation for the Nonfindings

Besides the positive association between wives' Sacred Qualities and her marital satisfaction, no other indicator of religiosity was significantly related to marital satisfaction for husbands or wives. Although the link between greater religiosity and higher marital satisfaction is well-supported (Mahoney et al., 2001), there are a few possible explanations as to why the current study failed to find support for this link that have to do with where couples were developmentally, both as individuals and as a couple. First, a potential explanation for not finding a significant relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction may be due to the focus on older adults as opposed to younger adults. Mahoney et al. (1999) acknowledged that the findings supporting the link between these indicators of religiosity and marital satisfaction may not necessarily generalize to older adults and their marriages as their original sample did not include older adults. As religiosity typically increases with age (Wink & Dillon, 2002), the role of religion in a couple's life may change as they get older. For example, Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1993) found that the topic of religion became less of a source of conflict in older adults as compared to middle-aged adults. Further, several researchers (Koenig, 2006; Ellison, 1991) have suggested that older adults have different reasons for their religiosity than they did when they were younger, leading them to need new sources of meaning and ways of dealing with the dramatic changes that often accompany getting older, such as increased loneliness (Dykstra et al., 2005) and cognitive declines (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). Given that most research on

religion and marriage has been done with younger couples, it seems likely that the relationship between religion and marriage differs in some way. It may be that the influence of religion on marriage dims with age or possibly that the proximal measures used in this study (e.g., Joint Religious Activities, Sacred Qualities, and Manifestation of God) influence a marriage differently in older adulthood. Thus, it may be harder to detect a link in this population.

Another explanation for the lack of findings is that most of the couples in this sample were in long-term, satisfying marriages. This characteristic of the sample may be due to the aim of the overall Marriage and Retirement Study, which is to study long-term, successful couples. These long-term, successful couples are more satisfied in their marriages, which differs from what would be expected as most marriages become less happy over time (VanLaningham et al., 2000). Relatedly, not only may the marriages of older adults in this sample be unique in their high levels of satisfaction, their extremely high levels of compassionate love may also have muted any possible effects of the variables making it difficult to find evidence in the regression models supporting a positive relationship between compassionate love and religiosity. The high levels of compassionate love in this sample of couples in long-term, successful marriages are not surprising as Grauerholz (1988) found that the more serious a romantic relationship was, the more altruistic both partners tended to be towards each other. This suggests that compassionate love may be more common among those in longer marriages as longer marriages usually imply a more serious romantic relationship. This relationship between being in a more romantic relationship and demonstrating more altruism/compassionate love would seem to be reciprocal in nature. The more compassionate love that is present in the relationship, the more likely one is to stay in the relationship and, in turn, the longer an individual is in a romantic relationship, the more compassionate they become towards their partner. Furthermore, as Roberts and colleagues

(2008) suggested, as couples get older, they may have more opportunities for and the need to develop and demonstrate compassionate love for one another given the health and social concerns and need for more care that arise as one ages. Therefore, because the couples in the sample were in long-term, successful marriages, it may explain why they reported to be highly compassionate towards one another and why we had difficulty capturing variability in their behaviors.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths that enhance confidence in the results of the study. First, as most marital research is gathered from young to middle-aged couples, this sample of older adults in long-term relationships provides a different perspective on compassionate love and its associations in a marriage. Given that almost all of the current literature on compassionate love is from newlyweds (Neff & Karney, 2008) and college students (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Steffen & Masters, 2005), the nature of compassionate love and its association with religiosity among older adults and long-term couples is not well-understood. This study, therefore, provides one of the first glimpses into that relationship for older couples.

Second, as research about compassionate love has typically been gathered solely through self-report (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Stosney, 2004), this study significantly contributes to the literature by gathering data from self-report, spouse-report, and observed compassionate love measures in one study for the first time. As valuable as self-report measures of compassionate love can be, they are both susceptible to cognitive limitations (see Schwarz et al., 1998) and social desirability bias (see Eisenberg et al., 1989). Consequently, spouse-report and observational data were gathered to complement the self-report data to provide a clearer, more comprehensive picture about the role of compassionate love in marriage.

Despite these strengths, the limitations of this study suggest these findings should be interpreted with caution. First, the sample is comprised of mostly Caucasian, highly educated, and financially well-off older adults. Considering that race (Broman, 1993), income (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and education (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) have been linked with marital satisfaction, these sample characteristics may not represent the general population of marriages, or even of older adults in long-term marriages in the United States. For example, given that religiosity plays a larger role in African American marriages (Allen & Olson, 2001), the relationship between religiosity and marriage may be more significant in a sample including more African American couples. As a result, this study cannot be generalized to a more diverse population in terms of ethnic make-up and socio-economic status. In addition, the sample was highly religious and highly maritally satisfied. The highly religious nature of the sample is most likely not representative of the larger population in the U.S., as the South has been found to be much more religious (based on self-reports of religion being important and attending religious services) than other parts in the country (Newport, 2012). The highly religious nature of the sample may have made it difficult to detect an effect of religiosity on marital satisfaction. Mahoney et al. (1999), who found strong initial support for Joint Religious Activities, Manifestation of God, and Sacred Qualities being positively associated with marital satisfaction, did acknowledge that a homogenous sample in terms of religiosity could produce different results. Finally, the high levels of marital satisfaction in the sample may not represent the larger population of long-term marriages, as marital happiness typically declines with duration (VanLaningham et al., 2000). Therefore, although this study has produced significant findings, there must be caution taken with generalizing the findings to different populations.

Another limitation of this study concerns the observational paradigm used to capture compassionate love. As this paradigm was developed for the current study, it may be that compassionate love was not elicited to the extent expected. Though the spouse reports of compassionate love that were generated by this task revealed high levels of compassion, observed compassionate love, which was measured through observations of support and sensitivity during the task (e.g., sensitive comments, nodding, and visual regard), was relatively low in comparison. Given the directions given to the couples during the task (i.e., to simply share a good memory and allow your spouse to do the same), it is possible that the participants were not sufficiently prompted to demonstrate compassionate love in their sharing of their stories. Future work should include an observational task specifically designed to elicit greater demonstrations of compassionate love, such as a task that assesses the support provided by each partner when asked to discuss a more stressful topic such as a health concern.

Third, considering the significance of the between-spouse correlations, it is likely that husbands' and wives' religiosity and compassionate love are related to their spouse's marital satisfaction and this study did not acknowledge this possible dyadic nature of the couples' relationship. These possible cross-partner effects were unexamined and therefore may reveal a clearer picture of the relationship between religiosity, compassionate love, and marriage. For example, a husband's religiosity and compassionate love may actually influence his wife's marital satisfaction more than his own. This may be the case as social exchange theory suggests that relationships are satisfying to the extent that the benefits of a marriage (e.g., being shown compassionate love by one's spouse) outweigh the costs of being in the marriage (e.g. sacrificing one's own needs for the other; see Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Therefore, this reciprocity of

compassionate love in a marriage as related to the spouse's marital satisfaction could be significant and should be examined in future research.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the current literature on religion and marriage by examining a potential mechanism through which these constructs may be linked. Although only minimal support was found for compassionate love as a mechanism for husbands, this study does suggest that the positive association between religious beliefs and marital satisfaction could be explained by compassionate love for wives. Further, this study suggests that the relationship between proximal indicators of religiosity and marital satisfaction may operate differently for older adults than it does for younger adults and newlyweds. Future research, therefore, should use a variety of measures (e.g., to focus more on institutional religiosity for husbands and informal, personal religiosity for wives) and a more diverse sample in terms of religious and marital satisfaction levels to further evaluate these developmental and gender differences for older adults. In conclusion, these findings suggest that practitioners should be aware the relationship between religiosity and marriage may differ not only across couples based on their developmental stage but within couples as well as they tailor interventions that seek to help couples draw upon their religious values and beliefs to navigate their relationship challenges.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Religiosity, Compassionate Love, and Marital Satisfaction Variables (N = 48)

Variables	<i>Husbands</i>				<i>Wives</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Skewness	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Skewness
Religiosity								
Joint Religious Activities	4.53	1.65	1-7	-.79	4.77	1.53	1-7	-.71
Manifestation of God	5.19	1.82	1-7	-1.15	5.53	1.74	1-7	-1.51
Sacred Qualities	5.39	1.27	1-7	-1.15	5.37	1.26	1-7	-1.70
Compassionate love								
Self-reported	4.47	.39	1-5	-.41	4.44	.55	1-5	-2.26
Observed	2.79	1.11	1-6	1.21	3.33	1.24	1-6	.16
Spouse-reported	3.08	.96	1-4	-.77	3.10	.81	1-4	-.45
Marital satisfaction	117.33	12.54	87-133	-.77	115.92	15.55	65-138	-1.27

Table 2

Correlations for Study Variables for Husbands and Wives (N = 48)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Joint Religious Activities	.81***	.65***	.66***	.06	-.26†	-.14	.08	-.06	.18
2. Manifestation of God	.63***	.64***	.57***	.13	-.13	-.06	.04	.05	.27†
3. Sacred Qualities	.50***	.41**	.48**	.45**	.09	.19	.33*	-.01	.06
4. Self-reported CL	.22	.14	.20	.43**	.16	.32*	.63***	.27†	.25†
5. Observed CL	.01	.13	.01	-.10	.24	.45**	.15	.11	-.03
6. Spouse-reported CL	.00	-.04	-.19	.20	.18	.39**	.43**	.08	-.14
7. Marital satisfaction	.18	.12	.14	.39**	.19	.38**	.60***	-.15	.12
8. Current annual income	.07	.04	.11	.21	.16	.14	.07	-	.21
9. Age	.25†	.02	.29†	.23	-.23	-.23	-.02	.22	.92***

Correlations below the diagonal represent husbands' correlations; correlations above the diagonal represent wives' correlations;

correlations on the diagonal represent correlations between husbands' and wives'. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Wives' Marital Satisfaction (N = 48)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	95.12	20.89		127.12	24.08		42.90	30.49	
Current annual income	.00	.00	-.29†	.00	.00	-.31*	.00	.00	-.43**
Age	.38	.30	.20	.57	.32	.29†	.45	.27	.23
Joint Religious Activities				-2.22	2.26	-.22	-2.54	2.02	-.26
Manifestation of God				-2.84	1.95	-.30	-1.69	1.69	-.18
55 Sacred Qualities				6.61	2.47	.60*	3.35	2.33	.31
Self-reported CL							16.44	5.07	.50**
Spouse-reported CL							3.73	2.68	.21
Observed CL							-1.31	1.61	-.11
R^2		.10			.26*			.51**	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		2.15			2.52*			4.33**	

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Husbands' Marital Satisfaction (N = 48)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	101.44	18.70		100.08	25.31		47.04	28.92	
Current annual income	.00	.00	.12	.00	.00	.14	.00	.00	.08
Age	.18	.25	.12	.11	.29	.07	.15	.29	.09
Joint Religious Activities				.90	1.88	.11	.93	1.73	.12
Manifestation of God				.48	1.44	.07	.02	1.33	.00
Sacred Qualities				.16	1.81	.02	.48	1.66	.05
Self-reported CL							8.26	5.26	.28
Spouse-reported CL							4.11	2.27	.30†
Observed CL							1.83	1.64	.17
R^2		.03			.05			.27	
F for change in R^2		.52			.44			1.62	

† $p < .10$

Appendix B – Questionnaire Measures

Joint Religious Activities (Mahoney et al., 1999).

We are interested in activities that spouses do together. Below are several religious activities that spouses may be involved in with each other. Please indicate how often you and your spouse do each of the following, using the scale below:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never					Sometimes	Very often

1. My spouse and I pray for each other.
2. My spouse and I talk about our personal, moral, and spiritual issues.
3. My spouse and I attend church or religious services together.
4. My spouse and I go on spiritual or religious retreats together.
5. My spouse and I read books or articles about religious or spiritual topics.
6. My spouse and I participate in volunteer work through our religious or spiritual organization.
7. My spouse and I celebrate religious holidays together.
8. My spouse and I engage in religious rituals together (e.g., fasting, meditation).

Sanctification of Marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999).

Sacred Qualities.

Please indicate whether your marriage is more closely described by the adjective on the left or right by circling the appropriate number.

	Very closely describes	Closely describes	Slightly describes	Neutral	Slightly describes	Closely describes	Very closely describes	
1. Holy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unholy
2. Inspiring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninspiring
3. Blessed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cursed
4. Everlasting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Temporary
5. Awesome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ordinary
6. Heavenly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Earthly
7. Spiritual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Worldly (Secular)
8. Religious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Nonreligious

9. Mysterious 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Routine

Manifestation of God in Marriage.

We are also interested in the relationship between religious beliefs and marriage. Please read the statements below and indicate whether you agree or disagree. Although many of these statements refer to "God," we hope you can apply them as they would pertain to your religious practices. Each item was rated on the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree

1. God played a role in the development of my marriage.
2. God is present in my marriage.
3. My marriage is a reflection of God's will.
4. My marriage is an expression of my spirituality or religiousness.
5. My marriage is symbolic of God and what I believe about God.
6. God is a part of my marriage.
7. My marriage is consistent with my spiritual or religious identity.
8. I experience God through my marriage.
9. My marriage reflects my image of what God wants for me.
10. My marriage is influenced by God's actions in our lives.
11. My marriage is a holy bond.
12. My marriage represents God's presence in my life.
13. My marriage follows the teachings of my church.

Compassionate Love Scale (Fehr & Sprecher, 2008).

Each item was rated on the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. If my partner needs help, I would do almost anything I could to help him/her.
2. One of the activities that provide me with the most meaning is helping my spouse.
3. I very much wish to be kind and good to my spouse.
4. I would rather suffer myself than see my spouse suffer.
5. I often have tender feelings toward my spouse when he/she seems to be in need.
6. When I see my spouse feeling sad, I feel a need to reach out to him/her.
7. I spend a lot of time concerned about the well-being of my spouse.
8. When I hear about my spouse going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of love for him or her and a desire to help.
9. It is easy for me to feel the pain (and joy) experienced by my spouse.

10. I feel an unselfish love for my spouse.
11. If given the opportunity, I am willing to sacrifice in order to let my spouse achieve his/her goals.
12. I tend to feel compassion for my spouse.
13. I would rather do things that help my spouse than do things that would help me.
14. I feel a caring for my spouse without thinking about myself.
15. I accept my spouse even when he or she does things I think are wrong.
16. If my spouse is troubled, I usually feel extreme tenderness and caring.
17. I try to understand rather than judge my spouse.
18. I try to put myself in my spouse's shoes when he or she is troubled.
19. I feel happy when I see that my spouse is happy.
20. My spouse can assume that I will be there if he/she needs me.
21. I want to spend time with my spouse so that I can find ways to help enrich his/her life.

Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons (Haynes et al., 1992).

	1	2	3	4	5	6			
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied			
1. The amount of time my spouse and I spend in shared recreational activities.				1	2	3	4	5	6
2. The degree to which my spouse and I share common interests.				1	2	3	4	5	6
3. The day-to-day support and encouragement provided by my spouse.				1	2	3	4	5	6
4. My spouse's physical health.				1	2	3	4	5	6
5. The degree to which my spouse motivates me.				1	2	3	4	5	6
6. My spouse's overall personality.				1	2	3	4	5	6
7. The amount of consideration shown by my spouse.				1	2	3	4	5	6
8. The manner in which affection is expressed between my spouse and me.				1	2	3	4	5	6
9. How my spouse reacts when I share feelings.				1	2	3	4	5	6
10. The way disagreements are settled.				1	2	3	4	5	6
11. The number of disagreements between my spouse and me.				1	2	3	4	5	6
12. My spouse's philosophy of life.				1	2	3	4	5	6

13. My spouse's values.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. My spouse's emotional health.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. The frequency of sexual or other physically intimate relationships with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. The quality of sexual or other physically intimate relations with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. The frequency with which my spouse and I have pleasant conversations.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. My overall compatibility with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. How decisions are made in my marriage.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. How well my spouse listens to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Of all the attention you receive from your spouse, what percent is pleasant or positive?	1 0-25%	2 26-50%	3 51-75%	4 76-100%		
22. Overall, how satisfied are you with your marriage right now	1 Very dissatisfied	2 Much less satisfied	3 Less satisfied	4 Satisfied	5 More satisfied	6 Very satisfied
23. In the past year, how often have you had significant problems in your marriage?	1 Very often	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never		
24. Compared to five years ago, how satisfied are you with your marriage?	1 much less	2 less	3 equally	4 more	5 much more	

Appendix C – Compassionate Love Coding System

Compassionate love: Observed (Sensitivity)

Sensitivity refers to listening to the partner, perceiving and interpreting feelings and signals accurately, and responding appropriately. Consider the frequency, latency, and the appropriateness of response to the spouse. At the highest point, quick, warm and sensitive responses are characteristic, but don't require personal expense. At the lowest point, coldness, rejection and ignoring are typical. Sensitivity needs to go beyond listening, as all couples are instructed to listen to one another – try to consider what optimal responding is. The anchor for this code is 2—the listener begins at a score of 2 and then goes up as they demonstrate greater sensitivity or down to a 1 if they demonstrate irritation or insensitivity.

1. Very minimal: This code describes irritation or annoyance by the partner. There is little regard or consideration for the other. Expressed desires or comments of the other get no response, or a very delayed or a negative response, which may create distress. If one seems to enjoy creating distress in the other, score 1.

2. Low: (Anchor) This code is when a partner simply listens without any irritation but makes no effort to be sensitive. More often than not, they seem oblivious to each other's needs and comments, though they may very occasionally respond to very obvious signals in a neutral or occasionally inconsiderate or defensive manner.

3. Moderately low: Responsivity is generally low. Many comments go unheeded but very clear signs of distress or need would likely receive some response. Responses may be neutral, or appropriate but delayed. There is some "coolness" here.

4. Moderate: This spouse shows moderate responsivity and sensitivity. Comments and needs are responded to fairly often, sometimes neutrally and sometimes sensitively. There is nothing blatantly insensitive; however the spouse is not particularly sensitive either.

5. Moderately high: In the context of generally high responsivity and sensitivity, these partners show brief occasions of insensitive disregard. When called for, sensitivity is more likely than not but is not a given.

6. High: This spouse lacks the consistency or harmony of 7. They may be characteristically sensitive and responsive but lack fine-tuning. There may be infrequent and minor but noticeable lapses in responding or offering support.

7. Very high: This spouse is characteristically responsive, sensitive, and supportive. Each spouse is responsive and attentive to the desires and actions of the other, especially to dissatisfaction and distress. Needs and comments are responded to quickly and appropriately, but not at one's own personal expense.

Compassionate love: Spouse-Report (husband & wife code)

This score measures how compassionate the individual *sounds* according to the good memory shared by their spouse. Compassionate love can be defined as the giving of self for the good of the other. Compassionate love includes the kindness, sensitivity, and love that an individual shows toward his/her partner, especially when it is a sacrifice or selfless act. Compassionate love will be scored highly if the coder can easily say that the individual demonstrates that he/she truly cares about the partner and his/her needs above one's own. Consider both the frequency and intensity of the good memory to score each individual.

1. Minimally Compassionate: This individual is not very compassionate. The individual sounded like they rarely to never show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or if they do, it is typically not very meaningful. If the spouse could not think of a memory, the individual would receive a 1.

2. Somewhat Compassionate: This individual is modestly compassionate. The individual sounded like they occasionally show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or it is less meaningful.

3. Compassionate: The individual sounded compassionate from the story shared by their spouse. The individual sounded like they often show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or it is meaningful.

4. Very Compassionate: This individual is highly compassionate. The individual sounded like they frequently show compassionate love towards their spouse and/or it is very meaningful.