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ENHANCEMENT OF MOOD AND SELF-ESTEEM AS A RESULT OF GIVING AND RECEIVING COMPASSIONATE LOVE

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ABSTRACT

Compassionate love may be the type of love that leads to the most social good for those who are its recipients. However, self-benefits may also occur as a result of experiencing compassionate love for others. Three studies were conducted in which people were asked to recall a specific experience of compassionate love and to indicate how they were affected on several dimensions (mood, self-esteem, closeness to others). In Study 1, participants were asked to recall an experience of compassionate love without specification of target. A manipulation of the context of compassionate love (relational vs. non-relational) was included in Studies 2 and 3. A comparison of compassionate love given versus received was also included in Study 3. Overall, the results indicated that people reap many positive benefits of experiencing compassionate love for others. Differences in perceived outcomes to the self based on relational context and role (giver vs. receiver) were also found and discussed.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Mental health professionals and clinicians have long noted the positive benefits of giving to others or having an altruistic orientation toward others. For example, according to the “helper therapy principle,” identified in social work research done with self-help groups (Reissman, 1965), doing something for others is fulfilling and can increase the self-esteem of the person providing the help. A small amount of research, much of it conducted with older adults and cross-sectionally, indicates that giving to others is associated with life satisfaction, happiness, and self-esteem (e.g., Caprara & Steca, 2005; Simmons, 1991). However, almost no research has examined the outcomes for the self of experiencing pro-social emotions, such as empathy, sympathy, or compassionate love. Feeling an intense pro-social emotion, distinct from engaging in a helping behavior, may also result in many positive benefits to the self, including increased self-esteem, general positive mood, and closeness to the targets of one’s empathy or compassion. Furthermore, when people themselves become the target of another’s compassionate love or empathy, they may experience an increase in self-esteem and good mood.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the small but growing literature on *compassionate love* (e.g., Post, Underwood, Schloss, & Hurlbut, 2002) by examining the perceived consequences to the self of feeling compassionate love for others as well as receiving compassionate love from others. We also consider the influence of relational context on the outcomes that are experienced as a result of compassionate love.

Compassionate Love

Romantic love has been the type of love most frequently examined by social scientists (for a review, see Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000). It is the type of love that is experienced for a partner in a dating or marital relationship, and has also been linked to both passionate love and companionate love (e.g., Sprecher & Regan, 1998). Compassionate love, however, is more encompassing and can be experienced for family, friends, peripheral ties, and all of humanity (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Compassionate love is a central feature in many religious traditions (e.g., Underwood, 2002) and is a self-giving, caring, love that values the other. It is associated, but not synonymous with, related concepts such as empathy, perspective-taking, altruism, social support, volunteerism, romantic love, and familial love. Although empathy has long been viewed as a major factor in promoting prosocial behavior toward others (e.g., Davis, 1996; Dovidio & Penner, 2001), compassionate love can be considered to be a more long-lasting, pro-social, emotion directed toward others, and thus may be more likely to lead to altruistic behavior (e.g., Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Sprecher and Fehr (2005) have defined compassionate love as: “an attitude toward other(s), either close others or strangers or all of humanity; containing feelings, cognitions, and behaviors that are focused on caring, concern, tenderness, and an orientation toward supporting, helping, and understanding the other(s), particularly when the other(s) is (are) perceived to be suffering or in need.” Although compassionate love may be experienced for someone to whom love is not reciprocated, it should not be confused with unrequited love, which is described in the literature as a one-sided obsessive type of love (e.g., Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993).

Recently, a call has been made for more scientific study of compassionate (or altruistic) love (e.g., Post et al., 2002). In a recent set of studies, Fehr and Sprecher (2004), using a prototype analysis (e.g., Fehr, 1988), examined the key features of compassionate love reflected in laypeople's conceptions. Through various studies, including social cognition tasks such as reaction times to features of love, it was found that compassionate love is a complex and multi-faceted concept. The features that laypeople regard as most central to the concept are those that are considered to be central to love in general – trust, caring, honesty. The researchers concluded that what is unique to compassionate love is the inclusion of features that depict selflessness, putting the other ahead of oneself, making sacrifices for the other, and so on (Fehr & Sprecher, 2004).

Scientists also have recently measured compassionate love, as an attitude directed toward others, in order to examine the correlates of the experience. Sprecher and Fehr (2005) developed a compassionate love scale that can be used, in different versions, to measure compassionate love for humanity/strangers, close others (family and friends), and a specific close other. They found that people experience compassionate love to a greater degree for close others than for strangers/humanity, that scores on the compassionate love scale are correlated positively with providing social support for others and with volunteerism, and that spirituality and religiosity are associated positively with experiencing compassionate love, particularly for humanity and strangers. In addition, Sprecher and Fehr (2005) found that women reported experiencing compassionate love for others to a greater degree than men, regardless of the target of compassionate love.

In the present set of studies, we extend research on compassionate love by examining another important issue about this giving love – how do people believe they have been affected by a specific experience of compassionate love? For example, do they believe that their self-esteem and positive mood have been enhanced as a result of the experience?

Consequences for the Self of Giving and Receiving Compassionate Love

Although people may not always be cognizant that they are the target of someone's compassionate love, if they do become aware that others feel compassionate love for them, they are likely to experience several positive self outcomes, including an increase in self-worth. There are many rewards to the self of feeling loved by others (Sedikides, Oliver, & Campbell, 1994). However, it should be noted that there could also be negative consequences to one's self-esteem or mood of becoming a recipient of compassionate love, especially if it becomes difficult to reciprocate (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983) or if self-efficacy is diminished (Bandura, 1997).

Feeling and giving compassionate love to others can also have positive benefits for the self. Social psychological theories suggest that under certain conditions, people are motivated to have an emotion or experience that will help alleviate a negative emotional state, such as sadness or distress. For example, according to the negative state relief hypothesis (e.g., Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973), people can feel good when focusing on another, which can reduce pre-existing distress. In other words, a positive mood can result from being other-focused. More generally, a social exchange perspective or cost-benefit analysis (Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaerther, Schroeder, & Clark, 1991) would suggest that people engage in pro-social emotions and behaviors when it is

rewarding to do so. The rewards may be intrinsic, including an increase in self-esteem and an enhancement of good mood. There are also long-term benefits to the self of helping others, especially in communal relationships (e.g., Mills & Clark, 1994). These benefits, in the long-term, can include greater closeness experienced in a relationship. In addition, people are likely to feel better when they can respond to others' needs, which contributes to reciprocity and equity in social interactions and relationships (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983).

In sum, several theoretical perspectives would argue that positive outcomes would accrue to the self as a result of experiencing altruism or being other-focused. We predict that these positive benefits also extend to compassionate love – both when given and when received.

Purposes of this Research

The purpose of this research is to examine how the experience of compassionate love leads to positive outcomes for the self, particularly in self-esteem and positive mood. Although prior literature has focused on the positive effects of other-orientations on good mood and enhanced self-worth (e.g., Davidio et al., 1991), other positive outcomes for the self could include increased self-awareness and spirituality. In addition, feelings of closeness to the target of one's compassionate love may also increase. We are also interested in examining whether the experience of compassionate love differs, depending on the relational context (i.e., close others versus strangers/humanity), as well as depending on whether one is in the giver versus the recipient role.

STUDY 1

Introduction to Study 1

Study 1 was designed to determine how people believed that an experience of compassionate love, namely compassionate love directed toward others, had led them to change on several dimensions, including mood (feeling good vs. feeling bad), the self (self-esteem, self-awareness, spirituality) and closeness to the other(s). The particular dimensions were selected to represent several ways in which the self may be intrinsically affected by the compassionate love experience, as reflected in the social psychological literature on helping (e.g., Dovidio & Penner, 2001) and writings on compassionate love (e.g., Underwood, 2002).

Method to Study 1

Overview and Sample

The data were obtained from a sample of young adults in a psychology class at a public Midwestern U.S. University (fall of 2001). The first author was a guest speaker and distributed the brief questionnaire during the class. A section of a questionnaire asked the participants to write about a specific occasion in which they experienced compassionate love for another person or a group of people and then to respond to a set of questions about this experience. Almost all the students attending the day of the class participated, but 17 respondents did not provide an account even though they turned in the remainder of the questionnaire completed; they are

eliminated from the analyses. Therefore the sample for analysis consisted of 108 participants (31 men and 77 women; mean age = 20.64, *s.d.* = 3.02).

Measurement

We first asked the participants to provide a detailed account of a specific experience of compassionate (or altruistic) love before they responded to follow-up questions that asked how they were affected by the experience. (Other than using the terms “compassionate” and “altruistic”, we did not provide a further definition of compassionate love so as not to influence their responses to the items.) After they wrote their account, the participants were asked to rate the experience on *intensity* (“...please rate the intensity of the compassionate love you experienced during the particular episode you described”) and *typicality* (“To what degree do you believe that your compassionate love experience described above is typical of compassionate love experiences?”). Each of these two items was followed by a 9-point response scale that ranged from 1 = *not at all (intense/typical)* to 9 = *extremely (intense/typical)*.

Participants were then asked to assess the degree to which they had been affected or changed on several dimensions because of their compassionate love experience. To measure mood, participants responded to the items, *made me feel good* and *made me feel bad*. Two items assessed change in the self: *increased my self-esteem* and *made me more self-aware*. To measure how closeness changed as a result of the compassionate love experience, participants were asked the degree to which the experience *made me feel closer to the other(s)*. Participants were also asked the degree to which the experience *led to self-sacrifice* and *made me more spiritual*. Participants responded to each of these items on a 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal* response scale.

Results and Discussion to Study 1

Participants rated the compassionate love experience as intense ($M = 6.69$, *s.d.* = 1.86) and as moderately typical of compassionate love experiences ($M = 5.50$, *s.d.* = 1.99), both scored on a 9-point scale, with 9 = *extremely*.

As predicted, the compassionate love experience was associated with positive outcomes for the self. For example, the participants reported that the experience made them feel good ($M = 6.05$, *s.d.* = 1.36; this item and the subsequent items were rated on a 7-point scale, with 7 = *a great deal*) and boosted their self-esteem ($M = 5.02$, *s.d.* = 1.68). The experience also made them feel closer to the other(s) ($M = 5.94$, *s.d.* = 1.42) and made them more self-aware ($M = 5.14$, *s.d.* = 1.61). In addition, the participants believed that the experience had contributed to a moderate level of self-sacrifice ($M = 4.63$, *s.d.* = 1.91) and to a slight increase in feelings of spirituality ($M = 3.76$, *s.d.* = 1.90). Participants generally did not feel bad as a result of the compassionate love experience ($M = 2.56$, *s.d.* = 1.90).

The participants’ accounts in Study 1 indicated that most of the participants wrote about an experience of compassionate love directed to close others. An important, unanswered question is whether similar positive benefits to the self occur when the targets of compassionate love are people who are less well-known (e.g., strangers). In other words, is compassionate love

beneficial to the self only when extended to those with whom we already have a close relationship or do we also reap benefits when we experience this kind of love toward strangers or perhaps even all of humanity? These issues were examined in Study 2.

STUDY 2

Introduction to Study 2

Study 1 indicated that people believe that an experience of compassionate love for others leads to many benefits to the self, including increases in self-esteem, good mood, spirituality, and self-awareness. What we do not know from Study 1, however, is whether these benefits occur only when the target of the compassionate love is a close other. Do people also experience benefits to the self when the experience of compassionate love is for someone less well known? While it may be easy for people to recognize the benefits of giving compassionate love to close other(s), do they also perceive benefits to the self when giving compassionate love to non-close others (e.g., strangers)? In Study 2, we asked some of the participants to recall and write about an experience of compassionate love for close others and asked the other participants to recall and write about an experience of compassionate love for non-relational other(s).

Method to Study 2

Overview and Sample

A questionnaire was distributed to two sociology classes at a public Midwestern U.S. University and to a sociology class in a local community college (late fall 2001). Similar to Study 1, the questionnaire was completed by the students during classtime. As part of a longer questionnaire distributed for multiple research purposes, one section directed the participants to recall a specific compassionate love experience in some detail and then respond to follow-up questions about the experience. The analyses are based on the 156 participants (48 men and 108 women; mean age = 21.37, *s.d.* = 5.9) who completed this portion of the questionnaire. (A total of 221 respondents were given a copy of the questionnaire; however, due to the length some students did not complete the entire questionnaire; we also eliminated those who did not follow directions as for whom they should provide the account.)

Measurement

The questionnaire included two versions of directions. The participants were instructed to recall an experience of compassionate love for either *close others* or *strangers and non-close others*. The two versions of the questionnaire were distributed randomly to students in the classroom settings. 89 completed the questionnaire in the close other(s) condition and 67 completed the questionnaire in the non-relational other(s) condition.

After the participants wrote about a specific experience of compassionate love, they were asked to respond to the same items described in Study 1: intensity, typicality, and several other ways in which one may be affected or changed as a result of the compassionate love experience (“made

me feel good,” “led to self-sacrifice,” “made me feel bad,” “increased my self-esteem,” “made me feel more spiritual,” “made me more self-aware,” and “made me feel closer to the other(s)”.)

Results and Discussion to Study 2

As was found in Study 1, the compassionate love experience was judged to be intense ($M = 6.40$, $s.d. = 2.05$) and somewhat typical ($M = 5.32$, $s.d. = 1.98$), both items scored on a 9-point scale. On the 7-point response scale provided for the other items, the results indicated that the experience made the participants feel good ($M = 5.77$, $s.d. = 1.51$) and resulted in an increase in self-esteem ($M = 4.81$, $s.d. = 1.83$). The experience also led to an increase in self-awareness ($M = 5.00$, $s.d. = 1.56$) and slight increases in spirituality ($M = 3.73$, $s.d. = 1.96$). The experience led to some self-sacrifice ($M = 4.05$, $s.d. = 2.01$), but a low level of feeling bad ($M = 2.42$, $s.d. = 1.76$).

Participants who were asked to recall a compassionate love experience in a relational context, as compared to those who were asked to recall an experience in a non-relational context, believed that the experience was more intense ($M = 7.03$ [$s.d. = 1.83$] vs. 5.56 [$s.d. = 2.03$], $t = 4.72$, $p < .001$). They also believed that the experience was more typical of compassionate love experiences ($M = 5.88$ [$s.d. = 1.87$] vs. 4.58 [$s.d. = 1.90$], $t = 4.24$, $p < .001$). In addition, those in the relational context were more likely to believe that the experience made them feel good ($M = 6.06$ ($s.d. = 1.25$) vs. 5.38 ($s.d. = 1.73$), $t = 2.79$, $p < .01$) and contributed to greater closeness to the other ($M = 5.78$ ($s.d. = 1.53$) vs. 4.89 ($s.d. = 1.80$), $t = 3.31$, $p < .01$). However, there was no difference between the two conditions in perceived changes in feelings of self-sacrifice, feeling bad, self-esteem, spirituality, and self-awareness.

In sum, Study 2 found some differences in the consequences of compassionate love for close others versus less well known others. First, the experience of compassionate love for close others was rated to be more intense and more typical of compassionate love experiences than was the experience of compassionate love for those less well-known. The difference in typicality is consistent with the anecdotal finding from Study 1 that when participants were not provided directions about the selection of the target, they most often referred to a compassionate love experience in a relational context.

In addition, and not surprisingly, compassionate love experienced for close other(s) in a relational context made people feel closer to the other(s) than compassionate love experienced for those less well-known others (e.g., strangers, peripheral ties). However, even within the nonrelational context, an experience of compassionate love was found to increase closeness to the others (i.e., mean rating was above the midpoint of the scale). Research conducted in other contexts also indicates that feelings of closeness can be developed for unacquainted others when relational processes (e.g., self-disclosure) are engaged in (e.g., Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001). Experiencing compassionate love in a relational context was also associated to a greater degree with “feeling good” than was experiencing compassionate love in a non-relational context. This may occur because of the various implications of feeling a pro-social emotion for another when one is in an ongoing relationship and future interactions are anticipated.

STUDY 3

Introduction to Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 established that people recalled that they experienced positive outcomes as a result of a specific incident of compassionate love for others. However, do people also report similar benefits to the self when they *receive* compassionate love from others? Or, are the benefits possibly even greater for receiving than for giving? The social support literature (e.g., Cunningham & Barbee, 2000) indicates many positive benefits to the self of receiving social support, although less research has been done on the ways that the self may grow, such as in self-awareness and self-esteem, as a result of *receiving compassionate love*. The receipt of compassionate love should make people feel good and esteemed, although the effect may not be identical to the benefits accrued in giving compassionate love. For example, people's spirituality may not be as enhanced from receiving than from giving compassionate love. In addition, there is some evidence in the helping literature that under some circumstances, others' offers to help are not welcomed (e.g., Nadler & Fisher, 1986), which also may occur when one is aware of being the target of someone's compassionate love.

Study 3 once again asked people to recall an experience of compassionate love. We manipulated whether the participants were requested to think of a compassionate love experience in a *relational context* or a *non-relational context* (as we did in Study 2), but also manipulated whether the focus was on *giving* or *receiving* compassionate love.

Method to Study 3

Overview and Sample

A questionnaire that served multiple research purposes was distributed to two general education classes over two semesters at a public Midwestern U.S. University (in 2002). A section at the end of the questionnaire asked the participants to provide an account of a compassionate love experience and to respond to several follow-up measures about the experience. The analyses are based on questionnaire data provided by 178 participants (49 men and 129 women; mean age of 19.61). Unfortunately, this section was at the end of the questionnaire and inadvertently not enough classtime was allocated for all participants to complete the questionnaire. A total of 350 participants began the questionnaire, but only 178 were able to complete the final section who also followed the directions exactly (eliminated also were those who did not comply with the directions and completed the account for an incorrect target, usually this was someone who been assigned the non-relational condition but who completed it for someone who they knew).

Measurement

Similar to the procedure in Studies 1 and 2, the participants were asked to think about a specific compassionate love experience. Similar to Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to think of compassionate love in either a *relational situation* or a *non-relational situation*. Furthermore, the participants were asked to think of either *giving* or *receiving* compassionate love. Therefore,

the study employed a 2 (relational vs. nonrelational context) x 2 (giving vs. receiving) factorial design.

The number of participants (of the 178) in each of the conditions, respectively, were: 47, 52, 47, and 32. After the participants had written about the experience, they were asked to respond to the same set of dependent variables used in Studies 1 and 2: intensity, typicality, and the seven ways in which one may change as a result of the experience (made me feel good, led to self-sacrifice, made me feel bad, increased my self-esteem, made me feel more spiritual, made more self-aware, made me feel closer to the other(s)).

Results and Discussion to Study 3

As found in Studies 1 and 2, the passionate love experience was judged to be relatively intense ($M = 6.26$, $s.d. = 1.86$) and typical ($M = 5.69$, $s.d. = 1.99$). Participants believed that the experience increased their good mood (feeling good) ($M = 5.58$, $s.d. = 1.62$), self-esteem ($M = 4.85$, $s.d. = 1.71$), self-awareness ($M = 4.84$, $s.d. = 1.64$), and closeness to others ($M = 4.84$, $s.d. = 1.64$). Spirituality was viewed to increase slightly as a result of the experience ($M = 3.88$, $s.d. = 2.01$). Participants perceived moderate self-sacrifice ($M = 4.76$, $s.d. = 1.99$) as a result of the experience, although did not perceive that feeling bad increased as a result ($M = 2.28$, $s.d. = 1.79$).

A 2 (relationship type) x 2 (given vs. received) ANOVA was conducted on each item. Similar to the results in Study 2, those responding about a passionate love experience in a relational context, compared to those in a non-relational context, perceived the experience to be more intense ($M_s = 6.86$ [$s.d. = 1.71$] vs. 5.53 [$s.d. = 1.77$], $F = 24.50$, $p < .001$) and more typical ($M_s = 6.28$ [1.79] vs. 4.97 [1.99], $F = 21.51$, $p < .001$). In addition, those who responded about passionate love in a relational context, as opposed to a non-relational context, perceived more self-sacrifice ($M_s = 5.27$ [$s.d. = 1.84$] vs. 4.13 [$s.d. = 2.01$], $F = 12.09$, $p < .01$), greater self-awareness ($M_s = 5.10$ [1.55] vs. 4.52 [1.71], $F = 5.56$, $p < .05$), greater closeness ($M_s = 5.97$ [$s.d. = 1.29$] vs. 4.86 [$s.d. = 1.58$], $F = 25.76$, $p < .05$), and a more positive mood ($M_s = 5.82$ [$s.d. = 1.64$] vs. 5.28 [$s.d. = 1.56$], $F = 4.04$, $p < .05$).

A significant main effect was found for the manipulation of giving versus receiving passionate love for four of the reaction items. The means for the items within the two conditions are presented in Table 1. Those who focused on an experience of *receiving* passionate love, compared to those who focused on *giving* passionate love, rated the experience higher on “increased my self-esteem,” “made me feel good,” and “led to self-sacrifice.” Ratings on “made me feel bad” were higher for the giving condition than the received condition. However, there were no differences on the other ratings, including on typicality and intensity, between those assigned to the relational condition and those assigned to the non-relational condition.

Table 1. Mean (and Standard Deviations) to Reactions to Compassionate Love Experiences for Giving versus Receiving; Study 3

	Giving Compassionate Love	Receiving Compassionate Love	F
Intensity of Experience	6.14 (1.84)	6.40 (1.88)	.15
Typicality of Experience	5.58 (1.88)	5.81 (2.10)	.97
“made me feel good”	5.26 (1.69)	5.94 (1.47)	6.23 *
“led to self-sacrifice”	3.88 (1.94)	5.73 (1.56)	43.89***
“made me feel bad”	2.61 (1.96)	1.92 (1.51)	6.08*
“increased my self-esteem”	4.46 (1.67)	5.27 (1.67)	8.80**
“made me feel more spiritual”	3.80 (1.97)	3.96 (2.06)	.07

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

In sum, similar to the findings of Study 1, the experience of compassionate love in a relational context was perceived to be more intense and more typical than the experience of compassionate love in a non-relational context, and more likely to lead to closeness. Greater self-awareness and self-sacrifice were also associated with compassionate love in a relational context, as compared to a non-relational context. More generally, the experience of compassionate love in a relational context may be more vivid and have more impact than an experience of compassionate love in a non-relational context. The new manipulation in this study, giving versus receiving, also yielded some interesting results. Generally, there were more positive benefits to the self (in positive mood and self-esteem) noted for receiving than for giving compassionate love. However, there was also the potential for self-sacrifice.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Not surprisingly, people reported experiencing positive benefits to the self as a result of experiencing compassionate love for others (Studies 1 - 3). They perceived that their self-esteem, positive mood, self-awareness, and spirituality increased as a result of feeling compassionate love for other(s). They also believed that the experience contributed to greater closeness to the other(s). In other words, there are real benefits to the self of having an altruistic or compassionate orientation toward others. Although there may be a dark side (in bad mood, feeling of sacrifice) to some experiences of compassionate love, our participants perceived only a moderate amount of sacrifice and did not believe that “feeling bad” was increased by a compassionate love experience.

Our results suggest that as people reflect on a positive emotional experience (compassionate love), they are likely to associate it with other positive emotional experiences and outcomes. In future research, daily diary or interaction studies could be conducted to determine whether days or portions of days with interactions involving compassionate love actually are associated with more positive moods and enhanced self-esteem relative to interactions that do not involve

feelings of compassionate love. In addition, it would be interesting to determine whether the benefits to the self derive from the feeling of compassionate love or from an action (helping behavior) that may occur as a result of that feeling.

Does the relational context matter?

Do people benefit more from an experience of compassionate love for close others than for someone less well-known? Studies 2 and 3 explored this by manipulating the target of the compassionate love experience. Compassionate love in a relational context was viewed to be more intense and more typical of compassionate love experiences. In addition, good mood was believed to be enhanced to a greater degree by compassionate love in a relational context than by compassionate love in a non-relational context. Furthermore, closeness to the other was reported to have increased more in a relational than in a non-relational context. One reason that an experience of compassionate love for close others may result in more self-benefit is that it may lead to more opportunities of mutuality in the exchange of love and other benefits. Another explanation is that more diverse acts of compassionate love may take place in a relational context. What is perhaps more surprising is that there were not greater differences found between the two groups.

Giving versus Receiving

Study 3 explored the differential effects of giving versus receiving compassionate love. Those who thought about an incident of receiving compassionate love reported the experience led to a greater level of self-esteem and feeling good than those who reported about an experience of giving compassionate love. Interestingly, however, those who reported on an experience of receiving compassionate love also scored higher on “led to self-sacrifice” than those who reported on an experience of giving compassionate love – a finding on the face of it that seems somewhat perplexing. However, participants may have been thinking of sacrifices that they later made for the other(s) in the process of fulfilling the norm of reciprocity, a norm that is prevalent in helping contexts (e.g., Whatley, Webster, Smith, & Rhodes, 1999). It is also possible that being the recipient of others’ acts of sacrifice or compassion motivates people to behave similarly in the future due to observational learning (e.g., Bandura, 1977).

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this research was that several studies, with some consistency across the designs, were conducted to examine outcomes to the self of experiencing compassionate love. We asked how compassionate love affected good mood, self-esteem, and so on, rather than examining the reverse causal direction. It is, of course, possible that people would report that good moods, for example, enhance their experience of compassionate love.

As is true of any study or set of studies, there are limitations of this research that can be addressed in future research. First, the studies were all conducted with young college adults. Perhaps people of other backgrounds and ages would have different reactions to compassionate love experiences and acts. Second, the design focused on recalled data, which can be influenced by biases, such as social desirability responses or implicit theories about human behavior. The

retrospective nature of the data collection may result in participants being biased in recalling only those passionate love experiences that had a positive effect on the self. In future research, it will be important to gather data on passionate love experiences as they occur in daily life (e.g., diary studies, online studies) to determine whether such experiences actually have the positive effects that our participants reported. It would also be interesting to gather data on people's perceptions of those same experiences over time to examine whether the consequences of passionate love became more positive in people's memories with the passage of time. What we do know from the present studies is that people perceive that passionate love experiences have a positive impact on the self. This is an important finding giving that such perceptions are likely to play an important role in determining how people respond to future opportunities to give or receive passionate love.

Furthermore, there are various additional ways that one or more of our studies could be modified in future research; specific examples of non-relational others that could be a target of one's passionate love could be provided, for example.

However, science proceeds in a series of small, incremental steps, with each study or set of studies advancing the knowledge base on a topic. The present studies offer at least a preliminary contribution to the knowledge base on passionate love by examining how passionate love affects the self, the role of relational context, and, finally, whether it is more beneficial to give rather than receive, this kind of love.

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APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS TABLES

In the descriptive tables below, the first two items were completed on 1 (low) to 9 (high) response scales, whereas the other items were completed on 1 (low) to 7 (high) response scales.

Study 1

	Mean	St. Dev.
Intensity	6.69	1.86
Typicality	5.50	1.99
Feel good	6.05	1.36
Self-sacrifice	4.63	1.91
Feel bad	2.56	1.90
Self-esteem	5.02	1.68
More spiritual	3.76	1.90
More self-aware	5.14	1.61
Closer	5.94	1.42

Study 2

	Close Other	Non-relational other	t-value
Intensity	7.03 (1.83)	5.56 (2.03)	4.72***
Typicality	5.88 (1.87)	4.58 (1.90)	4.24***
Feel good	6.06 (1.25)	5.38 (1.73)	2.79**
Self-sacrifice	4.09 (2.06)	3.98 (1.97)	.33
Feel bad	2.41 (1.78)	2.42 (1.74)	-.05
Self-esteem	5.06 (1.80)	4.48 (1.83)	1.93
More spiritual	3.63 (2.01)	3.85 (1.90)	-.68
More self-aware	5.01 (1.66)	4.98 (1.44)	.10
Closer	5.78 (1.53)	4.89 (1.80)	3.31**

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Study 3

	Giving	Giving	Receiving	Receiving
	Close	Non-Close	Close	Non-Close
Intensity	6.81 (1.60)	5.48 (1.83)	6.90 (1.83)	5.59 (1.70)
Typicality	6.04 (1.72)	5.15 (1.95)	6.49 (1.84)	4.72 (2.05)
Feel good	5.38 (1.78)	5.13 (1.61)	6.21 (1.41)	5.50 (1.48)
Self-sacrifice	4.39 (1.88)	3.38 (1.88)	6.04 (1.41)	5.22 (1.68)
Feel bad	2.87 (2.08)	2.34 (1.81)	1.83 (1.59)	2.06 (1.39)
Self-esteem	4.57 (1.67)	4.36 (1.67)	5.44 (1.61)	5.00 (1.76)
Spiritual	3.72 (1.88)	3.89 (2.08)	4.21 (1.99)	3.56 (2.12)
Self-aware	4.93 (1.61)	4.57 (1.67)	5.25 (1.49)	4.44 (1.80)
Closer	5.91 (1.24)	4.89 (1.55)	6.02 (1.34)	4.81 (1.66)

APPENDIX B: CORRELATION TABLES

For all tables, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Intensity		.11	.34***	.12	-.06	.27**	.37***	.13	.23*
2 Typicality			.05	-.10	-.04	.08	-.05	.05	.14
3 Feel good				.13	-.52***	.61***	.32**	.11	.41***
4 Self-sacrifice					.24*	.17	.33**	.11	-.06
5 Feel bad						-.20*	-.10	-.02	-.37***
6 Self-esteem							.29**	.43***	.46***
7 More spiritual								.42***	.30**
8 More self-aware									.39***
9 Closer									

Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Intensity		.54***	.34***	.15	.04	.23**	.21**	.21**	.33***
2 Typicality			.31***	.11	.05	.19*	.13	.13	.19*
3 Feel good				.29***	-.36***	.58***	.11	.23**	.39***
4 Self-sacrifice					.09	.21*	.24**	.13	.19*
5 Feel bad						-.19*	.03	.04	-.17*
6 Self-esteem							.29***	.36***	.38***
7 More spiritual								.39***	.33***
8 More self-aware									.32***
9 Closer									

Study 3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Intensity		.48***	.42***	.30***	-.02	.33***	.31***	.35***	.50***
2 Typicality			.38***	.37***	-.08	.33***	.32***	.28***	.37***
3 Feel good				.58***	-.43***	.74***	.31***	.46***	.65***
4 Self-sacrifice					-.24**	.51***	.28***	.34***	.45***
5 Feel bad						-.35***	.03	.07	-.12
6 Self-esteem							.42***	.50***	.53***
7 More spiritual								.57***	.35***
8 More self-aware									.54***
9 Closer									

AUTHOR NOTE

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