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# LOVE + COMPASSION = COMMUNITY

## BEYOND CIVILITY

Growing Compassionate  
Love in Communities

YMCA OF THE USA

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# CONTENTS

- Executive Summary ..... 1**
- Beyond Civility: Growing Compassionate Love in Communities..... 2**
  - Expressing Compassionate Love ..... 5
  - Growing Compassionate Love in Communities ..... 11
  - Conclusions ..... 17
- References ..... 18**
- Appendix A..... 22**
  - Compassionate Love Scale ..... 22
- Appendix B..... 24**
  - Lovingkindness Meditation ..... 24
- Appendix C..... 26**
  - Compassion Meditation ..... 26
- About the Author ..... 28**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A void of loving relationships and feelings of connectedness in our communities is jeopardizing our personal well-being and the well-being of everyone around us. The cultures in our cities, neighborhoods, schools, organizations, and businesses are becoming more detached and individualistic, resulting in less positive engagement between community members and less giving of ourselves to others. More than civility will be required to reverse these trends.

The expression of compassionate love, a revived construct with a growing body of scientific research to support it, is becoming a well-recognized contributor to quality of life and interconnectedness in communities across cultures and faiths. It involves the giving of oneself for the good of another person and can be intentionally expressed and grown. The cultivation of empathy and compassion, among other qualities, can help lead to its expression. Growing compassionate love in communities can result in improved well-being for ourselves and for others, as well as heightened community benefits such as volunteerism and philanthropy.

To enhance our capacity to express compassionate love to others, individuals are encouraged to practice loving-kindness and compassion meditation, participate in empathy and emotional intelligence training, and engage in other contemplative practices. It is recommended that schools and youth organizations integrate love and kindness curricula and meditation training into students' daily activities. Government, nonprofit, and for-profit entities should examine and shift internal cultures to

emphasize and reward compassionate and caring behavior, ensure that training programs explicitly address empathic responding and incorporate compassion cultivation, and hire people who exemplify compassionate behavior in leadership roles. Cities should adopt campaigns, like the Charter for Compassion, to encourage the expression of compassionate love.

In this paper, we examine the study of love over the past century, the need for love and connectedness in our society today, and the identification of compassionate love as a scientific construct that enhances quality of life and interconnectedness. We then review a number of published studies related to compassionate love that demonstrate its foundational elements and the benefits it provides to individuals and communities. Finally, we explore specifically how to grow compassionate love in ourselves, our schools, our organizations and businesses, and our communities.

# BEYOND CIVILITY GROWING COMPASSIONATE LOVE IN COMMUNITIES

*"Sooner or later, all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood... such a method is love... unconditional love will have the final word in reality... we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born."*

— Martin Luther King Jr, 1964 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech

Whom do you love in your life? When you ask yourself this question, who comes to mind? Do you think of your children or parents, your husband or wife, sister or brother, or maybe a pet? Do you love your friends? Often, our love is reserved for the people we feel closest to in our lives, people we consider family or good friends, and usually those we feel are deserving of our love. We may love our children unconditionally but love a significant other only if we feel loved in return. We may love people we don't know that well simply because "they are family," or we may choose not to love relatives anymore because they have wronged us in some way. We may believe that we should "love thy neighbor" but are likely to love some of our neighbors more than others, if we feel a sense of love for them at all.

Psychoanalysts and philosophers since the times of the ancient Greeks have defined love in various contexts, offering an array of distinctions between our loves for different people and objects. Over the past century, Freud (1914), Fromm (1956), Lewis (1960), and many others developed theories about love. For instance, Fromm called love "the answer to the problem of human existence" (1956, p. 7). He suggested that, in our modern culture, we have lost focus on the way in which we love and the function of love, and instead, we have focused on finding the "right object" to love. He defined love by its objects: brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God (Fromm, 1956). Lewis (1960) offered a different look at love through his concepts of Need-love and Gift-love, and "the four loves": affection, friendship, eros, and charity.

He believed that “there is something in each of us that cannot be naturally loved” (Lewis, 1960, p. 99), and therefore, we can love even those people we find “unlovable” by manifesting in ourselves beauty, loving-kindness, wisdom, and goodness. These midcentury theorists raised our sights to the prospect of love as an art that can be refined through practice and intention, and as a gift that can be shared with people in addition to our family and friends.

During the latter half of the last century, social scientists increasingly conducted studies on love, primarily in the field of romantic love. However, research on love for people we are not particularly close to (e.g., neighbors, strangers, or all of humanity) has been “generally overlooked by researchers” (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009). In Fromm’s words, “To love one’s flesh and blood is no achievement” (1956, p. 45). What can be more difficult for us to conjure is love for people we don’t know or for people to whom we have a hard time relating. Further, we may find it necessary, but quite difficult, to sacrifice our convictions in order to love someone we might generally consider unlovable, like a person who has harmed us or our family or friends.

You may ask, why would I want to—or further, how could I—love someone who has hurt me... or has hurt my family? Why should I feel any inclination to love a complete stranger or love someone with whom I vehemently disagree philosophically or politically? Because “love makes the world go round” is hardly a sufficient case in our technologically advanced society, where any notion that

hasn’t been tested and measured within an acceptable level of certainty is claimed not to exist. In our heart of hearts, we may want to believe that “All You Need is Love” (Lennon & McCartney, 1967), but in an age of rampant divorce, in an era when U.S. politics are plagued with partisan sparring and failure to compromise, and in a global climate charged with terrorism, war, and genocide in the news every day, our faith in our own—and the human race’s—capacity to love unconditionally grows fainter.

And so, in our fear and our disillusionment with the world and some of the people in it, and in the absence of an unyielding belief in love and reliable places in our communities where it can be seen and felt, some of us simply retreat into our work and our homes. Sociologist Oldenburg speaks to this sort of contracting when he says, “the structure of a shared experience beyond that offered by family, job, and passive consumerism [in the U.S.] is small and dwindling. The essential group experience is being replaced by the exaggerated self-consciousness of individuals” (1999, p. 13). As we focus on ourselves and devote more of our time and concern to our immediate family, our jobs, and the never-ending process of home improvement (Oldenburg, 1999), we give less of ourselves to others.

Block (2009) calls this an “individualistic culture,” where people are concerned primarily with their own survival and where the absence of high-quality relationships between members of a community causes the well-being of that community to be at risk. Baumeister and

Leary state, “deficits in belongingness... lead to a variety of ill effects... both psychological and physical health problems are more common in people who lack social attachments” (1995, p. 520). Human beings have a need to feel connected, to give love, and to receive love in return (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This research implies that as our focus narrows, we experience a void of loving relationships and feelings of connectedness among people in our community, and this jeopardizes our well-being and the well-being of everyone around us.

How then does love contribute to our quality of life and the well-being of our community? The United Nations (UN) set out to answer this very question. The World Health Organization (WHO), the international public-health arm of the UN, assembled a group of experts from all over the world, representing all major religious and nonreligious sects, to work on the development of a cross-cultural assessment tool to measure “quality of life” (Underwood, 2002, 2009; WHOQOL SRPB Group, 2006). The following describes the group’s discussion about the inclusion of the concept of love in a module of the assessment:

*There was considerable discussion of the appropriate wording for this aspect. The Buddhists were not happy with the word “love” but wanted “compassion” to be used, which for them fit the concept. The Muslims in the group (from Indonesia, India, and Turkey) were adamant that compassion was too “cold” and that “love” needed to be*

*there as it brought in the feeling of love, and element of affect. As others weighed in from various cultural, religious, and atheist positions, “compassionate love” was the compromise phrase arrived at to portray this aspect of quality of life. “Altruistic love” was a close second. (Underwood, 2009, p. 8–9)*

This concept of “compassionate love” has become the basis for a growing body of scientific research around the giving of oneself for the good of another (Underwood, 2009). Though Sorokin, a Harvard sociologist, investigated the concept of compassionate love more than 50 years ago, it didn’t resurface as a construct to be studied by the scientific community again until near the turn of the 21st century (Oman, 2010). According to the PsychInfo database, compassionate love was not used in the title of a psychological article until 2001 (Perlman & Sánchez Aragón, 2009). A quick Google Scholar search for articles referencing the exact phrase now yields almost 3,000 results, and a general Google search of the exact phrase returns 120,000 results. Millions of dollars in grant funding have been awarded by private foundations and public agencies—including the Fetzer Institute, the Templeton Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation—to the study of compassionate love (Fehr, Sprecher, & Underwood, 2009; Oman, 2010). A revived construct with research studies progressively underway, compassionate love is emerging as a well-recognized contributor to quality of life and interconnectedness in communities across

cultures and faiths, and it can be intentionally expressed and grown.

## EXPRESSING COMPASSIONATE LOVE

Scientific scholar and past vice president of the Fetzer Institute, Lynn G. Underwood, PhD, worked with the WHO to develop the quality of life assessment module and also developed a model to describe the concept of compassionate love. For clarity, it is not romantic love or familial love, neither erotic nor based in friendship. This is the kind of love that is at the core of many religious traditions and involves a “giving of the self for the good of the other” through five basic elements (Underwood, 2002, 2009):

1. *Free choice for the other*—this love is given freely and intentionally, not simply instinctive or given out of obligation, and not given with the expectation of receiving anything in return
2. *Valuing the other at a fundamental level*—recognition and respect for the other person as an equal human being with infinite value and strengths and imperfections just as we have, not pity toward the person in any sense
3. *Openness and receptivity*—an awareness of being part of something greater than oneself and an openness to receiving inspiration, perhaps divine inspiration
4. *An accurate understanding of the other, oneself, and the situation*—high self-awareness, including knowledge of our own tendencies and agendas,

along with correct knowledge of the other person’s needs and feelings in the situation, so that we can freely choose how to best enhance the other person’s well-being, not simply give how we are inclined to think they need us to

5. *A “response of the heart”*—a heartfelt quality that reflects emotional engagement and understanding in our attitude or actions; may be an expression of warmth, compassion or loving-kindness

Compassionate love is very similar to the concepts of “unconditional love,” “agape,” and “unlimited love,” and is also referred to by some experts in the field as “altruistic love” (Post, 2002). It is distinct from “altruism” in that we can perform an altruistic act out of obligation or habit while compassionate love involves our deliberate choosing and emotional engagement. Though the phrase includes the word “compassionate,” it is not synonymous with compassion, as we can feel compassion for people but remain detached from them. Also, we often exclusively associate compassion with people who are suffering in some way, whereas compassionate love can be expressed toward anyone. While related to the concepts of empathy, forgiveness, and caregiving, these concepts are not broad enough to encompass the richness and depth of compassionate love, although research in these areas informs our understanding of the construct. In sum, compassionate love is “centered” on the good of another person *and not on ourselves*. We must be intentional about it and be emotionally engaged in it. With it,

we can both help alleviate human suffering and enhance human flourishing (Underwood, 2009).

## **OUR CAPACITY TO EXPRESS COMPASSIONATE LOVE**

When it comes to our capacity to express compassionate love, we do not all start from the same place. A variety of factors influence our likelihood to demonstrate this behavior, from inherited disposition and family and cultural environments to cognitive ability, physical and emotional conditions, situational factors, and levels of social support (Underwood, 2009). A 21-item measurement tool called the Compassionate Love Scale (CLS) was designed by Fehr and Sprecher (2009) to assess compassionate love for other people, including family and friends, strangers or all of humanity, and a specific person (see appendix A). This tool was created based on social science and ongoing research on love, items from existing love scales related to compassionate love, and other sources. Its validity was demonstrated by correlating scores from this scale with scores from scales measuring empathy, social support, helping behavior, including volunteering, and altruistic love, as these concepts are all related to compassionate love (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009). Empathy and family environment, cognitive ability, compassion and attachment systems, and situational factors influence our capacity to love compassionately as follows:

**Empathy.** Scores on the CLS were positively associated with empathy, demonstrating that empathy is related to compassionate love (Fehr & Sprecher,

2009), though it is not a requirement of it as previously discussed. Empathy can help facilitate the expression of compassionate love (Underwood, 2005) and can be both inherited and developed over time. In a study of more than 800 sets of twins, Davis, Luce, and Kraus (1994) found that “empathic concern,” a specific aspect of empathy defined as a “dispositional tendency to experience feelings of sympathy, compassion, and concern for unfortunate others,” (p. 2) is an inheritable characteristic. Volling, Kolak, and Kennedy (2009) consider conscience development and positive discipline childhood precursors to compassionate love (Perlman & Sánchez Aragón, 2009), and they report that empathic concern in toddlers has been found to be related to the parents’ level of empathy, their reports of love in their marriage, and an older sibling’s modeling of helping behavior with the younger sibling. In essence, toddlers can be influenced by their parents’ and older siblings’ behaviors in a way that can increase (or decrease) their empathic responding, and thus, their likelihood to express compassionate love.

An analysis of the 2002 and 2004 General Social Survey data revealed that women are found to be more empathic than men, while men are more likely than women to express feelings of altruistic love; no gender difference was found in a person’s tendency to perform altruistic acts (Smith, 2009). But empathy can be grown, leading to the possibility of more compassionate love among people of any gender. As Goleman (2006) writes, “empathy... leads to caring, altruism, and compassion. Seeing things from another’s perspective breaks down biased



stereotypes, and so breeds tolerance and acceptance of differences. These capacities are ever more called on... allowing people to live together in mutual respect” (p. 285). Goleman advocates for programs that develop emotional literacy, including the improvement of empathy skills through better perspective-taking, listening, and heightened sensitivity to others’ feelings. In sum, greater empathy can increase our capacity to love compassionately by strengthening our understanding of other people’s needs and feelings, and it is something that we can grow and further develop.

**Cognitive ability.** A study of compassionate love in early marriage revealed that newlyweds who value each other unconditionally at a fundamental level and love each other compassionately have healthier marriages (Neff & Karney, 2009). In these cases, their love is founded on each partner accurately understanding the other partner’s specific strengths and weaknesses, combined with an overall feeling of adoration and true concern for their well-being. It is also a selfless love where the other person is valued regardless of the cost to the self. Cognitive complexity may be required in order to achieve this: a person must be able to maintain a positive global perception of another person and minimize any specific negative perceptions they hold that are tied to that person’s faults or weaknesses. It may also require a higher level of self-awareness and recognition that we, too, have faults and weaknesses that others acknowledge in us, and we desire to be loved unconditionally and compassionately in spite of them. This study may have

implications for a broader application to people we do not know, people who belong to other groups or hold different viewpoints, or people who have harmed us. Could we discover the capacity within ourselves to know and understand someone who has hurt us deeply well enough to value them at a fundamental level and love them anyway?

Imagine the cognitive complexity needed to express compassionate love the way Linda Biehl (mother of Amy Biehl, the Stanford University graduate and U.S. Fulbright scholar who was murdered in South Africa in 1993 by four South African men) and her husband, Peter, did. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a restorative justice body established by Nelson Mandela after apartheid, granted the men amnesty in 1998, and Linda and Peter supported this action. Then Linda and Peter hired two of the men who killed their daughter, Mzikhona "Easy" Nofemela and Ntobeko Peni, to work with them at the Amy Biehl Foundation in Cape Town, an organization that helps to educate youth and establish antiviolence programs. Linda said to Greater Good Editor Jason Marsh in an interview, “I had to get outside of myself and realize that these people lived in an environment that I’m not sure I could have survived in. What would you do if you had been oppressed for generations? What would you do? I think you have to ask yourself these questions” (Biehl, 2004). This is an example of valuing another human being at a fundamental level and minimizing their faults, of trying to truly understand someone else’s needs and their situation, and of compassion, openness, and freely choosing to give life

to another person. Forgiveness of this kind is an act of compassionate love.

**Compassion.** Social scientists have formally studied human attachment and caregiving behavioral systems for decades, dating back to theories developed by psychoanalyst Bowlby (1982). In brief, human beings develop attachments as a means of protection by maintaining proximity to people who care for them. Humans are also born with a caregiving instinct to provide protection to others in need, particularly their children and other family members (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Gillath, 2009). Attaining positive attachments gives people a sense of “attachment security,” while negative interactions with attachment figures in people’s lives may cause them to avoid attachments or have a high level of anxiety in relationships, rendering them less effective in cultivating empathy and compassion and in providing effective caregiving. A series of studies conducted by Mikulincer et al. (2009) found that using various priming methods with participants to induce security-enhancing feelings, such as envisioning a person who they knew would always be there for them, caused participants to report higher levels of compassion toward others and more willingness to help when needed. Participants were more than twice as likely to help someone they didn’t know at a cost to themselves when they received security priming versus those who were not security primed. Additionally, increasing a person’s sense of security, regardless of attachment style, increased his or her tendency to provide effective care and exhibit compassionate, altruistic behavior (Mikulincer et al., 2009). These

findings indicate that attachment security supports compassionate love and a kind of concern and caregiving that can be extended outside of family to other people we know and to all of humanity, and this sense of security can be intentionally induced in ourselves and others.

Richard J. Davidson, PhD, professor of psychology and psychiatry and director of the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Waisman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior, was awarded a \$2.5 million dollar grant to conduct a five-year study on the neuroscience of compassion, love, and forgiveness (Mattmiller, 2008). He and his research team have found that the insula region of the brain shows activity when a person is experiencing compassion (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). Further, studies on this particular region of the brain have shown that cultivating compassion through meditation techniques can enhance empathic responding to social stimuli and increase sensitivity to the suffering of others (Lutz et al., 2008). In other words, compassion activates the brain in a way that can be observed and measured by neuroscientists, and cultivating compassion through meditation can help us better recognize when someone is suffering and increase our capacity to respond empathetically to that person. Compassion, then, broadly defined as kindness and warmth coupled with a desire to relieve another person’s suffering (Gilbert, McEwan, Matos, & Ravis, 2010), can be heightened through security priming and specific meditation techniques, thus setting the stage for the expression of compassionate love.

**Situational factors.** Other factors have been found to influence our likelihood to love compassionately, such as 1) level of closeness, 2) spirituality, 3) motivation, and 4) discernment. As might be anticipated, our levels of compassionate love tend to be significantly higher for people we are close to than for strangers and all of humanity, possibly due to the fact that people we are closest to have a more direct role in ensuring our survival. However, the association between spirituality or religiosity and compassionate love was found to be strongest when expressed toward strangers or all of humanity, which could be a result of the focus many religious teachings place on having compassion toward people in need (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009).

Two key components of the compassionate love model are motivation and discernment (Underwood, 2009). To know if we are truly performing an act of compassionate love, we must know what our motivation is. Are we “centered” on the good of the other person—or on ourselves? Are we performing the act because we want to receive love in return? Are we doing it out of guilt, fear, or a need to feel accepted or important? Would we do it if no one were around to see or if no one would ever know that we did it? Interviews with Trappist monks revealed that contemplative practices, or processes by which a person fully examines his or her motives in each situation or develops a compassionate approach into an intuitive way of life, can increase self-awareness, diminish self-deception, and help ensure other-centered

motivation for expressing compassionate love (Underwood, 2005).

But what if we were pressed for time? How does this influence our discernment around compassionate love? Darley and Batson conducted a Good Samaritan study in 1973 to assess the effects of time pressures on helping behavior. Seminary students were asked to prepare a sermon on the story of the Good Samaritan, and on the way to deliver these sermons, they each encountered a man who was clearly suffering in pain and in need of help. Half of the students had been led to believe they were running late to the sermon, and the other half believed they were ahead of schedule. While most of the students who were ahead of schedule stopped to help the man in need, only 10 percent of the students who were running late stopped to help (Bertrand, Mullainathan, & Shafir, 2006). This is a scenario for the discernment component of the model. Sometimes it is hard to determine what is most appropriate to do in a particular situation, even if we have spent considerable time contemplating how to be a “good Samaritan.” We find ourselves weighing our own needs against the needs of others, or the needs of our families against the needs of people we don’t know (Underwood, 2009). The highest outcome of practicing good discernment will maximize the benefits both for other people and for ourselves.

## **BENEFITS OF EXPRESSING COMPASSIONATE LOVE**

Compassionate love offers benefits to us personally, to other people, and to our communities at large. People who give

compassionate love report heightened self-esteem, mood, self-awareness, and spirituality, in addition to feeling closer to the person they have expressed it toward. When on the receiving end of compassionate love, people feel similar, reporting increased self-esteem and positive mood (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009). People who have expressed compassionate love in the context of forgiveness have reported a release of unexpressed anger and feelings of gratitude for the experience of healing (Roberts, Wise, & DuBenske, 2009). Compassionate caregiving, as an expression of compassionate love, has been found to be a facilitator of self-transformation, promoting self-acceptance, authenticity, affirmation of life, greater intimacy in relationships, and spiritual growth (Giesbrecht, 2009). All of these attributes contribute to our personal quality of life, which extends well beyond the absence of illness or disease to encompass complete physical, mental, and social well-being (Saxena, O'Connell, & Underwood, 2002).

Volunteerism can be considered a manifestation of compassionate love, depending on our motivation to do it and whether the volunteer act meets other criteria for the model (e.g., free choice, valuing the people being helped at a fundamental level, accurately knowing how best to help). In a study of 228 people over the age of 54, volunteerism was perceived by all participants to be an indication of compassionate love, regardless of whether the volunteering was done in a religious or nonreligious setting, and it was more strongly correlated to compassionate love when

“other-focused” rather than “self-focused,” referring back to our motivation for helping (Omoto, Malsch, & Barraza, 2009). Volunteering has benefits both to the self and to others in the community. Omoto et al. (2009) cite a number of studies that link volunteering to health benefits that include lower mortality rates, lower levels of anxiety and depression, higher morale and life satisfaction, more positive emotions, and higher general well-being. By volunteering, we also help meet a community need by providing direct assistance or care to people who need our help. Alternatively, we may provide indirect assistance to others by being part of a volunteer workforce for a community organization, as nonprofits and schools often rely on the support of people who are willing to give time and energy to help carry out their mission. In another study, people who scored higher on the compassionate love scale, particularly in their responses regarding love for strangers or all of humanity, gave more money to charity than those who scored lower (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009).

As mentioned, compassionate love can also increase our feelings of social connectedness by helping us feel closer to the people who receive it from us (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009). Research implies that the more people we express it to, the more people we will feel closer to and the more connected we will feel in our communities, thus increasing our social well-being. In a time of rising societal isolation and distrust, methods and techniques are needed to help us cultivate these positive feelings for other people (Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008). In a study of adolescents, empathy was

related to more positive views of “outgroup members,” a phrase used to describe people who are not part of one’s own group (Vaughan et al., 2009). In this study, empathy is a first step toward connectedness. In a Stanford University study, Hutcherson et al. (2008) determined that a short (7-minute) session of loving-kindness meditation (LKM), a technique from the Buddhist tradition that can also be used to increase feelings of compassion toward others, significantly increased feelings of social connectedness in participants. In fact, after experiencing the LKM session, participants were found to respond more positively—even on an automatic or involuntary level—to people they did not know. This may have significant implications if, through the practice of LKM, we can increase both our natural inclination to feel a positive regard for other people and our level of compassion for others, making fully expressed compassionate love more likely.

## **GROWING COMPASSIONATE LOVE IN COMMUNITIES**

We have explored the history of compassionate love, along with the case for its expression and what it requires of us, the conditions that influence our capacity to express it, and some of the benefits of its expression to ourselves, to others, and to our community. We will now explore how to grow compassionate love—along with some elements that can lead to its expression—in ourselves, our schools, our community organizations and businesses, and our cities.

## **GROWING COMPASSIONATE LOVE**

**In ourselves.** Whether we intend to or not, we can influence the attitudes and behaviors of our children and other people around us. Underwood’s model describes a “feedback loop” by which our expression of compassionate love actually helps us further develop our capacity and desire to continue expressing it. Each time we express it, we may receive feedback from others or assess our own level of success and decide to make needed adjustments, often feeling encouraged to do it again (Underwood, 2009). While we may not be able to change factors like our inherited disposition or our family environment, one of the best ways identified thus far to heighten our level of compassion and enhance our empathic responding is through specific meditation and meditation-derived techniques. As mentioned previously, loving-kindness meditation (LKM) can help us do this, as can compassion meditation (CM) (Hofmann, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011). LKM begins with the cultivation of warm, loving, and kind feelings toward the self, and then it progressively expands those feelings to a person we are close to and care about, to a neutral person, to a person we are having difficulty with, and ultimately to all of these people equally and to the entire universe. Similarly, CM has an expanding process where we wish for other people freedom from hostility, sparing of mental and physical suffering, and joy in taking good care of themselves. We can wish this first for ourselves and then expand this to others, as in LKM (Hofmann et al., 2011). The specific language and a process for practicing LKM and CM are included in appendices B and C, respectively. As Hutcherson et al.

(2008) demonstrated in their study, even 7 minutes of these meditations can produce very positive results.

Engaging in formal training or self-study around the concepts of empathy, including listening skills, perspective-taking, and sensitivity to other people's feelings, as recommended by Goleman (2006), can also expand our personal capacity to respond to others empathetically and thus help lay the foundation for expressing compassionate love. Some employers provide emotional intelligence and empathy training for their employees, and related training programs can be found at some universities and online. Simple but powerful self-priming techniques, like envisioning a person we feel will always be there for us, can also help strengthen our sense of attachment security and increase our level of compassion at times when it is needed.

Beyond formal training and self-study, we must look deeply within ourselves and come to see that every single human being brings infinite value to our world, whether a president or a person who is homeless, a CEO or a worker at minimum wage, a volunteer peace officer or a member of a gang, a child or a parent, whether American, African, European, Asian, or Middle-Eastern, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. We must free ourselves from any delusions of superiority (Fromm, 1956; Underwood, 2009), and put aside any beliefs we hold that we are better than other people for these reasons or because we possess certain talents, are a member of a particular family or group, have heightened physical or mental

attributes, earn a lot of money, or are the boss or an expert in a particular field. We must seek to fully know and understand others and ourselves by becoming acutely aware of our respective strengths and weaknesses and by cognitively minimizing the faults we see in other people so that we can adopt feelings of global adoration for them. Religious scholar Armstrong described it this way in her 2008 TED Prize video, "...in compassion, when we feel with the other, we dethrone ourselves from the center of our worlds and we put another person there. And once we get rid of ego, then we are ready to see the divine" (Armstrong, 2008). A participant in a compassionate clinicians exemplar study (Graber & Mitcham, 2009) expressed to the interviewer, "the only way you can share your humanity with people is to show your vulnerability" (p. 355). To truly love compassionately, we must "dethrone" ourselves and reveal our humanity to the world. Contemplative practices, such as meditation, prayer, and reflection, can help us adopt this attitude of fundamentally valuing all other people (Underwood, 2005).

**In our schools.** As we have discussed, as toddlers, children can begin to learn and demonstrate empathic concern for others. The University of Wisconsin–Madison's Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, located within the Waisman Center, has developed a preschool kindness curriculum that has been shown to increase attention span and prosocial behaviors in four- and five-year-olds (Boyce, 2012). The eight-week curriculum consists of three 20- to 30-minute lessons per week (approximately 10 total hours of instruction) and includes activities that

help develop self-awareness, kindness, and caring behaviors through breathing and movement exercises, readings related to kindness and caring, and role-playing. This innovative curriculum can be replicated in preschools and community organizations.

As part of its Campaign for Love and Forgiveness, the Fetzer Institute, a private foundation located in Michigan that has led and supported love, compassion, and forgiveness research and advocacy since the 1950s—including extensive compassionate love research—has developed resources for use in middle- and high-school classrooms and other informal education settings. These resources include a PBS-produced documentary, *The Mystery of Love*, which is available on DVD, and an accompanying teaching guide, along with detailed lesson plans that explore love and forgiveness in the context of a novel and short story. Educators and other program leaders for these age groups can access these resources online for application with middle- and high-school students ([www.fetzer.org/loveandforgive](http://www.fetzer.org/loveandforgive)).

Lead researchers from the Emory–Tibet Partnership at Emory University and the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, both advocate for meditation training with children (Ozawa-de Silva & Dodson-Lavelle, 2010; Simon-Thomas, 2012). In an Emory University study, a cognitive-based compassion training (CBCT) meditation program was piloted with 5- to 8-year-olds in a private school setting and with 13- to 16-year-olds in a foster care setting. In both groups, the

youth experienced increased empathy, compassion, and connectedness toward others. The results of this study were anecdotal but powerful and led to a full-scale study funded by the Georgia Department of Human Services and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control which scientifically measured the effectiveness of this meditation program with children.

Teachers, school and district administrators, parent organizations, and afterschool and summer program directors should begin to explore how to integrate these practices and programs into the students' daily curriculum, as the benefits are far-reaching. Teaching our children to have greater empathy, compassion, and social connectedness can help foster their expression of compassionate love for a lifetime.

### **In our organizations and businesses.**

Whom in your organization or business would you consider a model of compassion and caring for others? Can you think of someone who demonstrates this consistently with everyone from clients and vendors to colleagues and staff? Compassionate love and business are not incompatible concepts, though the cultures in some organizations and businesses may not welcome or be designed to support compassionate behaviors. Graber and Mitcham (2009) conducted an exemplar study to identify and investigate hospital clinicians (physicians, nurses, etc.) who were considered by multiple sources to be exemplary in their level of compassionate care for patients. Through the interviews, they discovered that these clinicians' expressions of compassionate love to their

patients were founded in the clinicians' ability to have empathy and feel compassion for the patient. Additionally, the clinicians were not "too busy" to respond to the patients' needs and feelings; rather, they

- were attentive;
- communicated with a friendly, warm, and interested tone (even during brief interactions);
- did not limit their conversations to superficial topics;
- shared personal information and stories;
- personally held a strong spiritual orientation; and
- did not adopt a demeanor of professional detachment (Graber & Mitcham, 2009).

Even with the time demands of modern day hospital and clinic operations, where financial imperatives reduce the amount of time spent with each patient, these clinicians maintained high patient satisfaction levels and were able to express compassionate love.

In the conclusion of their study, Graber and Mitcham (2009) recommend strategies for developing a compassionate workforce that include 1) cultural shifts that place emphasis on, measure, and reward compassionate and caring behavior; 2) required educational programs for employees that incorporate simulation and emotion-provoking experiences that leave a lasting impression that alters future behavior; 3) explicit empathic responding training that provides language for employees

around reflection, legitimation, support, partnership, and respect; 4) emotional intelligence training; and 5) hiring people who exemplify and model compassionate and caring behavior in leadership roles. These recommendations can be applied to a wide array of organizations and businesses.

In another study of compassionate love in residential health care settings, Giesbrecht (2009) explored the influence of two different sociocultural models on compassionate caregiving behavior in 594 support staff. The independent model was characterized by a culture that encouraged residents' autonomous decision-making, being treated as an equal, and receiving help only when requested. In contrast, the interdependent model encouraged the building of interpersonal relationships, recognition that all people are bound together in a common humanity, and mutual affection and support in warm, genuine relationships. Participants (support staff) in the interdependent model had significantly higher scores on measures of altruistic (or compassionate) love and empathy than the participants in the independent model. In the independent model, participants were more likely to avoid attachments and keep a "professional distance" from their residents. Reports of positive self-transformation as a result of caregiving interactions were also much higher in participants from the interdependent organization. This may lead us to ask: what type of culture does our organization or business promote? Is it one that endorses detachment and autonomy or warm relationships, connectedness, and



self-transformation? How can we shift from an independent culture to an interdependent culture within our staff teams, between our staff and clients, and among our clients to help foster compassionate love?

Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE), in conjunction with the university's Department of Psychology and School of Medicine, released a report in July 2012 that assessed the effectiveness of compassion cultivation training (CCT) in three orientations: 1) increasing compassion for others; 2) receiving compassion from others; and 3) increasing self-compassion (Jazaieri et al., 2012). The CCT program consists of a two-hour class that meets weekly for eight weeks. The class curriculum includes a guided group meditation; formal instruction on meditative techniques; and exercises related to loving-kindness, compassion, shared common humanity, and interconnectedness. Participants also practiced a 15- to 30- minute compassion meditation at home daily. The CCT program was found to significantly increase compassion in all three orientations, and the amount of weekly meditation practice was associated with greater compassion for others.

Through programs like this one at Stanford University, and the CBCT program at Emory University, we can be trained to personally cultivate compassion, and organizations and businesses can engage key staff and volunteers in teacher training programs to develop compassion in staff and members of our local communities.

**In our cities.** City and other political and community leaders must assume the challenge of determining how to best integrate philosophies and establish programs that advance compassionate love within our school systems, our cities, our nation, and around the globe. A deliberate focus on—and commitment to—growing compassion in individuals, schools, businesses, and community organizations will serve as a foundation for amassing expressions of compassionate love and bringing these powerful benefits to our society.

In February 2008, Karen Armstrong, a renowned religious scholar who has written numerous books on what Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have in common, won the prestigious TED Prize (awarded to one exceptional speaker each year) for her compelling speech on compassion (Charter for Compassion, n.d.). She was granted "One Wish to Change the World," and wished to establish a "Charter for Compassion" that would be adopted and propagated worldwide. The charter was drafted by people representing multiple faiths, traditions, and nations, and was launched in November 2009. Since its launch, cities like Seattle, WA, and Louisville, KY, have had their mayor and city council sign and approve the charter and proclaim their support for a 10-year Compassionate City campaign. As part of the Compassionate Seattle campaign, innovative programs have been developed such as the 2012 Compassion Games: Survival of the Kindest! to engage city residents in the personal cultivation of compassion.

## **CHALLENGES FOR COMPASSIONATE LOVE**

Though scientific evidence is mounting in support of compassionate love and the myriad of benefits it brings to us as individuals and to our communities, researchers unequivocally note limitations to their studies and areas for future research that will better inform us of other factors that may contribute to their findings, as well as other sources and outcomes of compassionate love expression. As compassionate love is a relatively new construct with a small but growing body of research available from which to draw, we must look to studies on its antecedents or foundational elements—like compassion and empathy—for supplemental evidence for our discussions, plans, and actions around the concept. More research must be conducted specifically on compassionate love, particularly related to the testing and outcomes of models that can be used by individuals, schools, organizations, businesses, and cities to foster its expression.

Our personal fears of intimacy and attachment, of being held to a higher standard, of being misunderstood (i.e., mistaken for romantic love), and of appearing “too soft,” among others, may prevent us from wanting to fully express compassionate love to other people. Quite recently, research has been conducted specifically on the fears of expressing compassion (Jazaieri et al., 2012), and perhaps not surprisingly, compassion meditation can help to alleviate those fears.

Some people might believe that our hierarchal systems and methods of negotiation and accountability in business and government cannot coexist with the expression of compassionate love. Additionally, people working within these organizational cultures may lack the courage, skill set, or self-assurance to resist organizational and cultural expectations and exhibit compassionate behaviors, even if they know it is the right thing to do ethically or feel uncomfortable about not being compassionate. This type of obedience behavior was demonstrated in the 1974 Milgram experiment where 65 percent of participants increasingly issued electric shocks to another person at the maximum voltage (not knowing that the experiment was a simulation) because they were directed to do so by the facilitator, even though the other person was screaming in severe pain (Milgram, 1974). To realize adoption of compassionate love in all environments, we must create, test, and demonstrate models where compassionate love is expressed fully and effectively in the context of disputes, difficult situations, and governance.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we are being called to expand our vision of love in a time in our history when it is needed urgently. Our communities lack interconnectedness as we become more and more isolated in our daily lives, focus largely on our own immediate families and jobs, and give little attention to the needs of others. Many workplaces and neighborhoods feel cold and suffer from cultures of indifference and detachment. Feelings of love are noticeably absent between members on opposite sides of the field, the courtroom, and battle lines. As a result of these conditions, our quality of life is suffering, and our personal well-being and the well-being of our communities face considerable risk.

To solve these problems, we will need to reach deep within ourselves to extend our love beyond our circle of family and close friends, to acquaintances and people we do not know, to people we find difficult, and to all of humanity. We will need to become fully aware of our own strengths, limitations, and tendencies and acknowledge them openly; and in doing so, our vulnerability will unite us in our common humanity with the rest of the world. We will need to recognize and embrace that there is much we can learn from every human being on this planet and freely choose to step outside of our homes, jobs, and our egos and engage warmly with them.

Schools, organizations, businesses, and cities will need to determine how to advance compassionate love, and related constructs like empathy and compassion,

in our communities. School curricula; organizational and business philosophies and cultures; employee, volunteer, and community member training programs; and citywide campaigns serve as starting points for making this transformative impact in quality of life. Some organizations may be particularly well positioned to create and test models for teaching compassionate love to employees, volunteers, or community members and to measure and share these outcomes. These organizations should aggressively pursue these opportunities now, as this information is needed for the benefit of communities across the country and around the world.

When we begin to experience warmth and compassion often in our interactions with others, when we truly understand and wholeheartedly embrace the value of every human being we encounter in our lives, and when we are free of any delusions of superiority and are open and centered on giving life to everyone around us, we will realize heightened interconnectedness, increased positive engagement, and improved well-being and quality of life across all cultures and faiths in our communities. Maybe all we need is love after all... compassionate love.

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# APPENDIX A

## COMPASSIONATE LOVE SCALE

	<b>Close others version</b>	<b>Stranger/humanity version</b>	<b>Intimate partner version</b>
1	When I see family members or friends feeling sad, I feel a need to reach out to them	When I see a stranger or other people in the world feeling sad, I feel a need to reach out to them	When I see my significant other feeling sad, I feel a need to reach out to them
2	I spend a lot of time concerned about the well-being of those people close to me	I spend a lot of time concerned about the well-being of strangers or other people in the world	I spend a lot of time concerned about the well-being of my significant other
3	When I hear about a friend or family member going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for him or her	When I hear about a stranger or other people in the world going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for them	When I hear my significant other going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for him or her
4	It is easy for me to feel the pain (and joy) experienced by my loved ones	It is easy for me to feel the pain (and joy) experienced by a stranger or by other people in the world	It is easy for me to feel the pain (and joy) experienced by my significant other
5	If a person close to me needs help, I would do almost anything to help him or her	If a stranger or other people in the world need help, I would do almost anything to help them	If my significant other needs help, I would do almost anything to help him or her
6	I feel considerable compassionate love for those people important in my life	I feel considerable compassionate love for strangers or other people in the world	I feel considerable compassionate love for my significant other
7	I would rather suffer myself than see someone close to me suffer	I would rather suffer myself than see a stranger or other people in the world suffer	I would rather suffer myself than see my significant other suffer
8	If given the opportunity, I am willing to sacrifice in order to let the people important to me achieve their goals in life	If given the opportunity, I am willing to sacrifice in order to let strangers or other people in the world achieve their goals in life	If given the opportunity, I am willing to sacrifice in order to let my significant other achieve his or her goals in life
9	I tend to feel compassion for people who are close to me	I tend to feel compassion for strangers or other people in the world	I tend to feel compassion for my significant other
10	One of the activities that provides me with the most meaning to my life is helping others with whom I have a close relationship	One of the activities that provides me with the most meaning to my life is helping strangers or other people in the world	One of the activities that provides me with the most meaning to my life is helping my significant other



11	I would rather engage in actions that help my intimate others than engage in actions that would help me	I would rather engage in actions that help strangers or other people in the world than engage in actions that would help me	I would rather engage in actions that help my significant other than engage in actions that would help me
12	I often have tender feelings toward my friends and family members when they seem to be in need	I often have tender feelings toward strangers or other people in the world when they seem to be in need	I often have tender feelings toward my significant other when he or she seems to be in need
13	I feel a selfless caring for my friends and family	I feel a selfless caring for strangers or other people in the world	I feel a selfless caring for my significant other
14	I accept friends and family members even when they do things I think are wrong	I accept strangers or other people in the world even when they do things I think are wrong	I accept my significant other even when he or she does things I think are wrong
15	If a family member or close friend is troubled, I usually feel extreme tenderness and caring	If a stranger or other people in the world are troubled, I usually feel extreme tenderness and caring	If my significant other is troubled, I usually feel extreme tenderness and caring
16	I try to understand rather than judge people who are close to me	I try to understand rather than judge strangers or other people in the world	I try to understand rather than judge my significant other
17	I try to put myself in my friend's shoes when he or she is in trouble	I try to put myself in a stranger's or in other people in the world's shoes when they are in trouble	I try to put myself in my significant other's shoes when he or she is in trouble
18	I feel happy when I see that loved ones are happy	I feel happy when I see that a stranger or other people in the world are happy	I feel happy when I see that my significant other is happy
19	Those whom I love can trust that I will be there for them if they need me	Strangers and other people in the world can trust that I will be there for them if they need me	My significant other can trust that I will be there for him or her if they need me
20	I want to spend time with close others so that I can find ways to help enrich their lives	I want to spend time with strangers and other people in the world so that I can find ways to help enrich their lives	I want to spend time with my significant other so that I can find ways to help enrich his or her life
21	I very much wish to be kind and good to my friends and family members	I very much wish to be kind and good to strangers and other people in the world	I very much wish to be kind and good to my significant other

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# APPENDIX B

## LOVINGKINDNESS MEDITATION

*You can begin the practice of lovingkindness by meditating for fifteen or twenty minutes in a quiet place. Let yourself sit in a comfortable fashion. Let your body rest and be relaxed. Let your heart be soft. Let go of any plans or preoccupations.*

*Begin with yourself. Breathe gently, and recite inwardly the following traditional phrases directed to your own well-being. You begin with yourself because without loving yourself it is almost impossible to love others.*

*May I be filled with lovingkindness.*

*May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.*

*May I be well in body and mind.*

*May I be at ease and happy.*

*... repeat these phrases over and over again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind. Practice this meditation for a number of weeks, until the sense of lovingkindness for yourself grows.*

*... when you feel you have established some stronger sense of lovingkindness for yourself, you can then expand your meditation to include others. After focusing on yourself for five or ten minutes, choose... someone in your life who has loved or truly cared for you. Picture this person and carefully recite the same phrases:*

*May you be filled with lovingkindness.*

*May you be safe from inner and outer dangers.*

*May you be well in body and mind.*

*May you be at ease and happy.*

*... when lovingkindness for your benefactor has developed, you can gradually begin to include other people you love in your meditation. Picturing each beloved person,*

*recite inwardly the same phrases, evoking a sense of lovingkindness for each person in turn.*

*After this you can include others: Spend some time wishing well to a wider circle of friends. Then gradually extend your meditation to picture and include community members, neighbors, people everywhere, animals, all beings, the whole earth.*

*Finally, include the difficult people in your life, even your enemies, wishing that they too may be filled with lovingkindness and peace. This will take practice. But as your heart opens, first to loved ones and friends, you will find that in the end you won't want to close it to anyone.*

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# APPENDIX C

## COMPASSION MEDITATION

*To cultivate compassion, let yourself sit in a centered and quiet way. Breathe softly and feel your body, your heartbeat, the life within you. Feel how you treasure your own life, how you guard yourself in the face of your sorrows. After some time, bring to mind someone close to you whom you dearly love. Picture them and feel your natural caring for them. Notice how you hold them in your heart. Then let yourself be aware of their sorrows, their measure of suffering in life. Feel how your heart opens to wish them well, to extend them comfort, to share in their pain and meet it with compassion.*

*This is the natural response of the heart. To open still further, being reciting the phrases [inwardly]:*

*May you be held in compassion.*

*May you be free from pain and sorrow.*

*May you be at peace.*

*... after you learn to feel your deep caring for this person close to you, turn your compassionate heart toward yourself and the measure of sorrows that you carry. For a time [inwardly] recite the phrases:*

*May I be held in compassion.*

*May I be free from pain and sorrow.*

*May I be at peace.*

*Now, one person at a time, extend your compassion to others you know. Picture loved ones, one after another. Hold the image of each in your heart, be aware of their difficulties, and wish them well.*

*... now you can open your compassion further: to the suffering of your friends, to your neighbors, to your community, to all who suffer, to difficult people, to your enemies, and finally to... all beings.*

*Let yourself feel how the beauty of every being brings you joy and how the suffering of any being makes you weep. Feel your tenderhearted connection with all life and its creatures.*

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of the YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles***



Wendy Saunders is a tireless, engaging leader dedicated to the ongoing development of the community in the San Fernando Valley, California, through her role as executive director of operations of the East, Mid, and West Valley Family YMCAs. Through her work at the Y and her volunteer leadership with other community organizations, she is providing needed leadership development training, healthy living and anti-obesity programs for children and adults, youth and teen enrichment and character development programs, and high-quality preschool and afterschool programs to a diverse constituency comprising more than 20,000 individuals across the Valley. Her work is building tomorrow's leaders, teaching positive values and helping keep young people out of gangs, and strengthening Valley families.

Wendy began her career with the YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles in 1996 and worked at the Westside and Hollywood branches before eventually becoming the executive director of the Mid Valley branch in Van Nuys, California. In 2010, Wendy and her counterpart at the West Valley Family YMCA initiated a comprehensive merger of three association branches (East Valley, Mid Valley, and West Valley) that included both an administrative and staff merger, in addition to a merger of the three boards. While the three YMCA facilities and their respective community programs continue to meet the unique needs of the communities they reside in, many staff positions are now shared among these branches and one governance structure guides the work of all three. This merger has brought a myriad of benefits to the group and to the association—from significant cost savings to sharing of top talent and best practices.

In her current role, Wendy oversees an annual operating budget of \$8 million and about 250 employees and 600 volunteers. She has helped raise hundreds of thousands of fundraising dollars annually to provide Y scholarships for families in need. She conveys a coaching style of leadership and is continually working to build a foundation and culture of self-awareness, personal responsibility, and open communication within her leadership staff team. Wendy is a faculty trainer for the YMCA of the USA Leading & Coaching Others course

and trains on several other topics for the Los Angeles association, including emotional intelligence and the Y voice.

In her free time, Wendy has developed and served as the chair of the San Fernando Valley Jaycees' Community Leadership Development Program, an 8-month leadership training program launched in May 2010 that provides the tools, resources, and experience for young people in the Valley to become effective nonprofit board members, as they are needed to fill the growing leadership gap as baby boomers retire from their involvement in nonprofit work. She is also a member of the Greater Van Nuys Rotary Club, the Van Nuys Airport Citizens' Advisory Council, and the Jordan Farmar Foundation Board. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry from the University of Maryland and lives in Canoga Park, California.

**YMCA OF THE USA**

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compassion and kindness are literally free! they cost nothing and they give you and someone else an amazing warm feeling. please spread kindness to those around you. wholesome-suggestion. Follow.Â who is a member of any oppressed group. â€|every act of self-care is a radical political statement. In a world that treats you as less than, treat yourself as worthy of care and compassion. Itâ€™s not selfish - in fact, just the opposite. Your self-care creates a better world.