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## Abstract

It is customary to test Coser's greedy marriage thesis by comparing marital status groups. We propose a new approach that uses the marital dyad as the unit of analysis and examine whether investments in the marital relationship discourage community involvement through formal volunteering. Data from a U.S. national sample of 1,368 married couples revealed mixed support for the proposed relationship. Consistent with the greedy marriage thesis, wives' soulmate view of marriage was negatively associated with their own and their husbands' reports of volunteering. Although these associations were attenuated by religious service attendance, wives' soulmate view had a more dampening effect than husbands' soulmate view on their own and their husbands' volunteering. However, the time couples spend alone together was positively associated with husbands' reports of volunteering, which counters the greedy marriage thesis. These findings suggest that the greedy nature of marriage is, in part, determined by its participants—how they define and manage their marriage.

## Keywords

greedy marriage, marital investment, community, volunteering, dyadic data

## Introduction

Although marriage confers many benefits upon its participants (Waite and Gallagher 2001), it might provide little benefit to people outside of marriage. More than 40 years ago, in his classic study *Greedy Institutions*, Lewis A. Coser (1974) offered insights into why the institution of marriage is greedy. Coser argued that marriage makes exclusive demands on the participants' time and energy, thereby making it hard to spread out these resources over other people and institutions. If marriage indeed exerts such isolating forces, couples who invest the most in their relationship—whether in belief or behavior—should invest the least in their communities. This study sought to test this claim—specifically, whether a couple-centered view of marriage, the time couples spend alone together, and generosity toward spouse inhibit each spouse's community involvement through formal volunteering.

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Our approach to testing the greedy marriage thesis is novel in that we use the couple as the unit of analysis and evaluate the role of the marital dyad in contributing to a greediness in marriage. The customary approach has assessed the greediness of marriage by comparing marital status groups (e.g., Sarkisian and Gerstel 2008). Rather than ask whether or not married individuals are greedier than unmarried counterparts, we examine what kinds of beliefs and behaviors within marriage characterize the greediness of marriage. Our approach also sets us apart from most research in the field, which has tested the greedy marriage thesis with a narrowly defined concept of community—an individual's personal network. Because formal volunteering provides opportunities for expanding social horizons in the public sphere (Van Ingen and Kalmijn 2010), we are able to determine whether marriage not only weakens kinship and nonkin ties but also dampens "the vibrancy of public life" (Gerstel 2011:11).

To examine whether spouses' investments in the marital relationship constrain each other's commitment to the larger society, we used data from the Survey of Marital Generosity (SMG), which is a recent U.S. national sample of married couples aged 18 to 45 ( $N = 1,368$  dyads). To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the greediness of marriage focusing on the dyadic relationship between spouses.

## Background

### *The Greedy Marriage Thesis*

The theoretical roots of the greedy marriage thesis lie in conflict theory, which assumes that (1) "Human beings are essentially self-oriented, and therefore inclined . . . to pursue their own interests at the expense of others" and (2) "human societies operate under conditions of perpetual scarcity for most resources needed for the lives of [their] members" (Sprey 1979:132). In reality, however, deep conflicts stemming from limited time and energy are constrained because most modern institutions claim only limited demands on these resources. Yet Coser observed that some institutions are greedier than others in that they make exclusive claims on their members' time and energy while pressing them to cut ties to other people and institutions (Coser 1974).

One such institution is the family, particularly the male breadwinner and female homemaker family. Although such marriage is not as dominant today as it was 40 years ago (Raley, Mattingly, and Bianchi 2006), it exemplifies the ways in which the greediness of marriage is produced and reproduced by the marital dyad. As argued in a chapter written with Rose Laub Coser, the greedy family is sustained by the cultural mandate that presumes the homemaking wife invests more time and energy into the family than the breadwinning husband. The more wives invest their time and energy, the more they are attached to the family. The consequence of the asymmetry in this investment is the asymmetric weakening of the ties to the broader community (Coser and Coser 1974).

### *Previous Research and Its Limitations*

Sociologists who view marriage through Coser's lens have examined whether marriage weakens personal network ties and whether gender differences exist. Naomi Gerstel and Natalia Sarkisian's work perhaps represents the current state of affairs in the empirical literature on the greediness of marriage. Using the second wave of the National Survey of Families and Households, Gerstel and Sarkisian (2006) found married individuals to be less likely to socialize with neighbors and friends or give emotional support or practical help to neighbors than never married and previously married individuals. Focusing on kinship ties, Sarkisian and Gerstel (2008) further found married individuals to be less likely than unmarried counterparts to interact with or give emotional support to their parents and siblings. Contrary to the authors' expectations, little support

was found for the notion that marriage is greedier for women than for men. Rather, the authors found evidence that marriage is even greedier for men as it reduces their contact with their parents more than it does for women. However, largely echoing Coser's view, they concluded that marriage—at least contemporary American marriage—is a greedy institution because it weakens community ties.

Given that little empirical evidence has been accumulated in the last 40 years, these studies have continued to provide insights into the tension between marriage and community. However, Coser's insights have not been fully exploited. The first oversight is related to the conceptualization and operationalization of the community concept. Most of the previous research fixates on a particular notion of community—"dense and demanding ties" (Brint 2001:4). Marriage, in this line of research, is understood as a greedy institution in the sense that married individuals become more self-reliant and independent as their priority shifts from socializing with extended families and friends to fulfilling their own family needs. In another sense, however, married individuals may just "switch the focus of their social investment" (Saramäki et al. 2014:946) by trading old ties for new ties with members of the larger community (Berdik 2007).

Only recently have sociologists begun to test the greedy marriage thesis by considering another notion of community—"social attachments to and involvement in institutions" (Brint 2001:3). One study focusing on involvement in voluntary associations provided mixed evidence for the greedy marriage thesis. Using the first and second waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, the study found that women's transition into first marriage reduced involvement in secular voluntary associations, whereas men's continuous marriage increased involvement in religious voluntary associations (Kim 2010). More recently, similar evidence was obtained in two other types of community involvement: volunteer work and charitable giving. Using data from the Philanthropy Panel Study, Christopher Einolf and Deborah Philbrick (2014) compared individuals' volunteering and giving before and after marriage, finding that newly married women were less likely to volunteer and volunteered fewer hours after marriage. However, newly married men were more likely to give as well as give larger amounts of money to voluntary organizations following marriage. A transition into marriage also increased the likelihood of men's religious volunteering. Taken together, the findings from these studies suggest that marriage can either inhibit or encourage community involvement, depending on the ways in which married men and women contribute to the community. Our study builds on this line of research by focusing on volunteering, thereby providing a more nuanced view of marriage that recognizes both benefits and costs to the broader society.

The second oversight is more substantive in nature. The existing approach looks at the greediness of marriage from outside the couple, downplaying intracouple dynamics that might contribute to greedy characteristics in marriage. Instead, we conceptualize the greediness of marriage as a dyadic relationship whereby husbands and wives participate together to determine the extent to which their marriage is greedy. In other words, instead of asking whether married individuals are greedy vis-à-vis unmarried counterparts, we ask which characteristics *inside* a marriage contribute to the greediness of marriage. We believe this approach is more akin to the approach taken by the originator of the greedy marriage thesis, who emphasized the role of the marital dyad, especially the wife, in producing the greediness of marriage (Coser 1974). In this spirit, we investigate whether withdrawal from community involvement is related to relationship characteristics such as how couples view marriage, how much quality time they spend alone, and how frequently they express affection to each other. By adopting a dyadic approach to studying the greediness of marriage, we are better able to answer the question of why some marriages are more inward-looking than others.

In addition to the contribution to the greedy marriage literature, our dyadic approach makes an important contribution to the literature on marriage and volunteering. Existing research has largely neglected the role of conjugal relations when examining volunteering behavior among

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics (*N* = 1,368 Couples).

Variables	Range	Wives		Husbands	
		<i>M</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>SD</i>
Volunteering	1–7	2.55	1.79	2.25	1.71
Soulmate view of marriage <sup>a</sup>	Binary	53%		55%	
Averaged spousal time <sup>b</sup>	1–6	4.17	1.39	4.17	1.39
Generosity toward spouse	1–5	3.96	0.72	3.90	0.74
Years of education	1–14	11.15	1.58	11.06	1.67
Weekly employment hours	0–90	19.40	19.16	39.19	14.84
Household income <sup>b</sup>	1–19	13.05	3.43	13.05	3.43
Socializing with other couples	1–5	3.54	1.15	3.49	1.15
Number of 0- to 5-year-olds in home <sup>b</sup>	0–4	0.63	0.83	0.63	0.83
Number of 6- to 17-year-olds in home <sup>b</sup>	0–8	1.07	1.18	1.07	1.18
Religious attendance	1–6	3.19	1.83	2.97	1.83
Marital duration <sup>b</sup>	0–26	10.35	5.98	10.35	5.98
African American <sup>c</sup>	Binary	3%		5%	
Hispanic American <sup>c</sup>	Binary	9%		8%	
Other race/ethnicity <sup>c</sup>	Binary	8%		7%	

Note. Unweighted values are shown.

<sup>a</sup>Comparison category is neoinstitutional view of marriage.

<sup>b</sup>Variable measured at the couple level.

<sup>c</sup>Comparison category is European American.

married people (Wilson 2000, 2005). This is surprising because married individuals volunteer more than those with other marital statuses (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015a:Table 1), but much less is known about which marital characteristics encourage (or hinder) their volunteering. As John Wilson (2005:12) pointed out, “to fully understand the practice of volunteering, we must take into account the inner dynamics of the household.” Only recently have researchers turned their attention to these dynamics, showing the complementary role of spouses’ volunteering (Nesbit 2013; Rotolo and Wilson 2006). Another study, focusing on partners’ work experience, found that an increase in wives’ work hours is associated with a greater likelihood of husbands’ volunteering for youth organizations but a reduced likelihood of their own volunteering (Brown and Zhang 2013). The study further found that husbands’ work hours tend to increase wives’ likelihood of religious volunteering, but no study to date has examined whether couples’ volunteering is related to investment in the marital relationship itself.

## Marital Investments and Community Involvement: A Dyadic Approach

### *Theoretical Assumptions and Hypotheses*

We draw the concept of marital investment (Lund 1985) into our theoretical framework to examine whether beliefs and behaviors that are committed to the maintenance of marriage compete with involvement in volunteering. We assume that couples—as one marital unit—have the intention to maintain their marriage, prioritizing their relationship over nonconjugal relationships. Thus, when allocating limited time and energy, couples make a decision to maximize their own benefits. These assumptions lead to a general hypothesis: The more investment is made for the couple, the greater withdrawal from the community.

Yet this hypothesis is not authentic to Coser's thesis. Coser took gender seriously in its theorizing: It is the wife, not the husband, who primarily contributes to the sustenance of the greedy family (and perhaps the maintenance of the relationship as well). If the wife is the primary investor of time and emotion for her family, the husband's volunteering should be most affected by the wife's withdrawal to the family, because husbands' volunteering is contingent on wives' volunteering (Gerstel and Gallagher 2001). Thomas Rotolo and John Wilson (2006) found that whereas one additional hour of a husband's volunteering resulted in a 14 percent increase in the wife's volunteer hours, one additional hour of a wife's volunteering resulted in a 29 percent increase in the husband's volunteer hours. If wives play a more important role in encouraging husbands' volunteering rather than vice versa, then couples' volunteering is more likely to be influenced by wives' marital investments. Keeping this gender-specific hypothesis also in mind, we next develop a set of hypotheses regarding the association between volunteering and each component of marital investments.

### *Investments in Marital Beliefs*

Most couples, whether implicitly or explicitly, begin their journey with some belief about how their marriage should be organized. Although such beliefs might not always direct action accordingly, they largely function as a marital paradigm (Willoughby, Hall, and Luczak 2015) guiding couples' approach to relationships inside and outside the marriage. Two schemata of marriage can guide their approach to these relationships: the soulmate versus the neoinstitutional view of marriage (Wilcox and Dew 2010). The former primarily views marriage as an intimate relationship, focusing on the emotional bonds between spouses; the latter places additional values on other functions of marriage, such as raising children and fulfilling financial needs.

Today's marriage culture seems to imbue the idea that these institutional functions of marriage are incompatible with the companionate functions of marriage (National Marriage Project 2003). As Stephanie Coontz (2005:20) observed, "each must make the partner the top priority in life, putting that relationship above any and all competing ties." During the past half-century, the cultural values attached to marriage among American college students have shifted in a more couple-centered direction that places a higher value on mutual attraction and love than on desire for a home and children (Buss et al. 2001). Today, more than ever, couples have high expectations of each other (Finkel et al. 2014), and spouses' emotional well-being is regarded as crucial for a successful marriage (Wilcox and Nock 2006). One consequence of such a marriage is a weakening of couples' ties with the larger community (Amato 2009; Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006). Thus, we can expect that a spouse who views marriage primarily as a bond between two soulmates will be less involved in volunteering than a spouse who puts additional values into institutional functions of marriage. Given that spouses are interdependent, influencing each other's beliefs and behaviors (Thibaut and Kelley 1959), we can also expect that each spouse's soulmate belief will discourage the other's volunteering. Another intriguing question is which spouse's soulmate belief has a more dampening effect on couples' volunteering. If, as Coser argues, wives invest more time and energy in the family than husbands, wives who hold the soulmate view of marriage should demand more of their own and their husbands' time and energy. Thus, wives' soulmate view of marriage should more strongly predict their own and their husbands' volunteering than husbands' soulmate view. These hypotheses are formally stated below:

**Hypothesis 1:** One's soulmate view of marriage will be negatively associated with one's own and one's partner's volunteering.

**Hypothesis 2:** A wife's soulmate view of marriage will be more strongly associated with couple's volunteering than a husband's soulmate view.

### *Investments in Spousal Time*

Conjugal love is the most exclusive human relationship (Sprey 1971) requiring significant time investments for its proper functioning. Not surprisingly, spouses' shared leisure activities are positively linked to marital stability (Hill 1988) and quality (Girme, Overall, and Faingataa 2014). Being aware of the importance of quality time for a successful marriage, contemporary couples place a higher premium on spousal time—time that spouses spend alone together—than in the past (Finkel et al. 2014). Yet finding such a time is often quite difficult because of other time commitments, such as work and children. Indeed, research has shown that spousal time has declined over the past few decades (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006; Dew 2009). Given the couples' limited free time, one way to resolve this dilemma is to minimize time spent on other people and institutions, as the greedy marriage thesis predicts.

Weekends are perhaps the times when most couples try to set aside time for themselves, but weekends are also the times when others, including volunteer organizations, are most likely to ask for their availability. In fact, time spent in volunteer activities and social time spent with family and friends are concentrated during the weekends (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013:Table A-2). If time is a network good whose values increase with the number of users (Young and Lim 2014), scheduling constraints might arise more frequently on weekends than on weekdays (Winship 2009). Thus, couples who want to secure their quality time may experience time constraints with other commitments to friends, relatives, and children (if present). One strategy for protecting spousal time is to curtail time spent on other leisure pursuits. Indeed, one study found such evidence among married people with children, who reduced their time spent with friends and relatives on weekends (Dew 2009). This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** Time spent alone with the spouse is negatively associated with time spent volunteering.

### *Investments in Emotional Energy*

Emotional investment is another strategy for maintaining a healthy marriage. We focus on one such construct, marital generosity, which is defined here as giving emotional availability to one's spouse freely and abundantly (Science of Generosity Initiative 2012). Marital generosity can be best viewed as relationship maintenance behavior that helps couples sustain their commitment to their relationships (Canary and Stafford 1994). Couples see their generosity toward each other as a willingness to invest in their relationship. For example, one spouse might give the other a backrub at the end of a long day, do household chores the other usually undertakes, or actively listen to the other's concerns.

The question here is whether spouses who are generous with each other are also generous with their communities. One possibility is that generosity in marriage flows outward into generosity outside marriage. Generosity is generally understood as other-centered behavior driven by altruism (Piliavin 2009), which would suggest that generosity in one context (e.g., marriage) is present in other contexts (e.g., volunteering). Yet marital generosity might not necessarily be motivated by individual-level altruism (Dew and Wilcox 2013). Rather, it could be motivated by a desire to sustain the relationship, which would not necessarily extend beyond the couple to the larger community. Insofar as generous behaviors between couples are a manifestation of their affective bonds, they could turn couples inward (M. Johnson and Leslie 1982; Slater 1963). If true, then investments in generosity in marriage could inhibit investments in generosity outside of marriage. Like marital beliefs, we can also expect gender differences in the influence of marital generosity. Compared with men, women engage in more relationship maintenance behaviors, are more apt to express emotions, and are more likely to seek emotional support (England and

Farkas 1986; Thompson and Walker 1989); thus, wives' marital generosity should be more likely to reduce their own and their husbands' volunteering than husbands' generosity. These expectations are stated formally in the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4:** One's reports of generosity toward one's partner will be negatively associated with one's own and one's partner's volunteering.

**Hypothesis 5:** A wife's reports of generosity toward her husband will be more strongly associated with couple's volunteering than a husband's generosity toward his wife.

## *Selection*

The associations between marital investments and volunteering might be spurious due to selection effects—that is, there might be factors that select people into investing certain beliefs about marriage, prescribing certain relationship investment strategies, and encouraging or discouraging volunteer work. One possible source of selection is the institution of religion. Religious institutions promote traditional norms, emphasizing a commitment to lifelong marriage, children, and mutual support (Wilcox and Dew 2010). Religious institutions also provide social support networks that allow couples to meet their social and emotional needs through collective efforts. Thus, religion might select more couples who value normative functions of marriage, such as childbearing and social integration. Those who subscribe to the soulmate view of marriage are then less likely to select into religious congregations. Thus, we can expect this selection mechanism to drive the association between marital beliefs and volunteering.

## *Additional Relevant Factors*

To further test spuriousness, we included a set of variables known to be correlated with volunteering. Following John Wilson and Marc Musick's (1997) resource model, we arranged these control variables in the following way.

**Human resources.** Education is strongly associated with volunteering (Wilson 2000); thus, one's education will be positively associated with one's own and one's spouse's volunteering. Paid work hours can relate to volunteering differently for men and women. Full-time homemaking and part-time employment encourage women's volunteering while unemployment discourages men's volunteering (Taniguchi 2006); thus, wives' hours of paid work might decrease wives' volunteering while husbands' hours of volunteering might increase husbands' volunteering. Household income can also be positively associated with wives' volunteering because women might "enjoy benefits of higher family income without paying the high opportunity costs (of volunteering rather than working for pay) that men face" (Wilson 2005:12; see also Daniels 1988).

**Social resources.** The more integrated people are into social networks, the more likely they are to be asked to volunteer (Musick and Wilson 2008). Thus, a couple's socializing with other couples might be positively associated with volunteering. The presence of school-aged children can draw parents into the community as parents build social networks while finding playmates for their children, whereas the presence of preschool children can be negatively associated with volunteering, particularly for women (Nesbit 2012; Rotolo and Wilson 2007).

**Demographic controls.** We included race/ethnicity and marital duration as additional control variables. Marital duration was used as an alternative for age—namely, the longer a couple has been married, the more likely the individuals are to volunteer (Nesbit 2013).



## Method

### *Data and Sample*

We used data from the SMG, which was administered between December 2010 and February 2011 by Knowledge Networks, a survey research firm, using its existing nationally representative panel of individuals. The firm created its panel using random address-based sampling and random digit dialing. Both methods utilized a stratified sampling design.

Married individuals between the ages of 18 and 45 were eligible to participate in the SMG. In total, 4,510 individuals were invited to participate in the survey, and 3,133—69 percent of the invited panel participants—responded. Almost all of the SMG participants (89 percent) had spouses who also participated. Because the current study used the couple as the unit of analysis, we needed both the participants and their spouses to complete the SMG. Adding this criterion yielded a sample of 1,368 couples for this particular study, each with a participating spouse. To examine how our analytic sample is representative of the U.S. married population, we compared it with married couples aged 18 and 45 in the December 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS). After the use of the poststratification weights, our sample and the CPS population have about the same levels of age, education, and race/ethnicity makeup while the SMG participants tend to have higher levels of income.

### *Measures*

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable was a single measure of participants' volunteering. The SMG asked participants, "In a typical month, about how many hours do you volunteer for a charitable, religious, athletic, educational, fraternal, children's or some other voluntary organization?" Participants responded from 1 (*0 hours*) to 7 (*20+ hours*). Although wives and husbands were asked separately, the question could have allowed for responses that included volunteering they do jointly with their spouses. Indeed, the correlation between wives' and husbands' reports of volunteering was .47 ( $p < .001$ ). Whether this correlation was the result of joint volunteering remains uncertain. An additional limitation with this dependent variable is that it combined all types of volunteering. We recognize that people might opt to volunteer for different types of organizations. We discuss both limitations later.

**Independent variables.** Each couple's beliefs about marriage were assessed using a single item: "Which of these statements is closer to your views about marriage?" The first option was "Marriage is a relationship between two 'soulmates' meant to bring mutual happiness and fulfillment to each partner." The second option was "Marriage is a loving relationship that is *also* about forming a financial partnership and raising children together." To test the research hypotheses, participants selecting the first statement were coded 1 and labeled as "soulmate view of marriage" whereas those who selected the second statement were coded 0 and labeled as "neoinstitutional view of marriage." Thus, this variable represents those who hold the more contemporary view of marriage; those who chose the neoinstitutional view were the comparison group.<sup>1</sup> The correlation between husbands' and wives' reports of this variable was .31 ( $p < .001$ ).

We measured spousal time using the following question: "During the past month, about how often did you and your husband/wife spend time alone with each other, talking or sharing an activity?" The response set ranged from 1 (*never or rarely*) to 6 (*almost every day*). Both wives and husbands answered this question, but we averaged their reports of spousal time inasmuch as they were giving their perceptions of the same event. The correlation between husbands' and wives' reports of spousal time was .55 ( $p < .001$ ). We measured emotional investment through a marital generosity scale. The SMG asked respondents how often they gave to their spouses by expressing affection, expressing respect, performing small acts of kindness, and forgiving their

spouses for mistakes. The response range was from 1 (*always*) to 5 (*never*). We recoded the responses so that higher scores indicated more generosity. We took the mean of these four items to form the scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .84 for both wives and husbands.

We used three human resource variables: completed education, usual weekly employment hours, and total household income. First, completed education was measured on a 14-point scale that ranged from 1 (*no formal education*) to 14 (*professional or doctorate degree*). Next, the survey asked participants how many hours they typically engaged in paid employment. We top-coded responses at 90 hours. Finally, total household income was measured on a 19-point scale that ranged from 1 (*less than \$5,000*) to 19 (*\$175,000 or more*). The SMG measured total household income at the couple level.

We also measured the extent to which couples are integrated into their social networks. The first question asked participants to agree or disagree with the following statement: "My partner and I socialize with other couples." Participants' responses ranged from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*). The second measure was a count of the number of children in the household between the ages of 0 and 5 years old. The final measure was a count of the number of children in the household between the ages of 6 and 17 years old. Wives' and husbands' reports of the number of children in these two age groups each had a correlation of  $r = 1.00$  ( $p < .001$ ), so we simply used the husbands' reports. To control for selection effects, we used religious service attendance. Respondents were asked, "How often do you attend religious (worship) services?" The response set ranged from 1 (*more than once a week*) to 6 (*never*). We reverse-coded this variable so that higher scores indicated more frequent attendance.

Finally, we included a set of basic control variables. The first was a measure of marital duration, which was measured in years. We used wives' reports of marital duration and modeled it at the couple level inasmuch as wives' and husbands' reports of marital duration were correlated at  $r = .98$  ( $p < .001$ ). The second control variable assessed race and ethnicity. Participants indicated what race and ethnicity they considered themselves to be. We used these responses to form three dichotomous variables: African American (non-Hispanic), Hispanic American, and Other race/ethnicity. The comparison category was European American (non-Hispanic).

## Analysis

We used seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) to test Coser's idea that the greediness of marriage is determined by the marital dyad. SUR is appropriate for this study because, as previously noted, wives' and husbands' volunteering behaviors are correlated with each other. SUR simultaneously estimates regression equations while accounting for the correlated error structure between the equations (Zellner 1962). Thus, SUR allowed us to model wives' and husbands' reports of volunteering while accounting for the correlation between these variables. To estimate our models, we used `proc syslin` in SAS 9.3.

In the first model, we regressed wives' and husbands' reports of volunteering on the soulmate belief, spousal time, and marital generosity variables. Marital duration and race/ethnicity were included in the model, as were the human resource variables (education, employment, and income) and social resource variables (socializing with other couples as well as the number of children in the household). Both self (i.e., participant independent to participant dependent) and cross-spouse (i.e., participant independent to spouse dependent) effects were specified.<sup>2</sup> The second model was the same as the first model, except that we added religious service attendance.

As we note below, the volunteering variable was skewed. To check the robustness of our results, we ran seemingly unrelated probit models. We coded participants as 0 if they reported a volunteer score of 3 or lower (meaning volunteering less than one hour per week) and 1 if they had a score that was 4 or higher (meaning at least one hour per week or more). We used `proc qlim` in SAS 9.3 to estimate our seemingly unrelated probit models.

Some of the variables in the analysis had 1 to 2 percent of the responses missing. Rather than listwise deleting cases with missing variables, we used multiple imputation to generate probable responses. Multiple imputation fills in missing responses with plausible data using maximum likelihood methods (Rubin 1987); it does this multiple times (in this case five times), yielding more than one data set with missing data that have been imputed (i.e., yielding five data sets). We then ran the analysis for each data set and synthesized the findings using the appropriate formulae (Rubin 1987). To ensure that the findings were robust with respect to this analysis, we ran the analyses with listwise deletion. The findings were quite similar. We report the findings from multiple imputation analyses.

## Results

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis. For brevity, we discuss only the key variables of interest. First, the mean of volunteering was 2.55 for wives and 2.25 for husbands. Because a score of 2 on this scale represents one hour per month and a score of 3 on this scale represents two hours per month, these scores correspond to volunteering between one and two hours per month. Furthermore, given that the scale ranged from 1 to 7, these data indicate a positively skewed distribution. On the question about views of marriage, 53 percent of wives and 55 percent of husbands indicated that they viewed marriage as a relationship between two soulmates, meaning that 47 percent of wives and 45 percent of husbands chose the more traditional view. The mean for spousal time was 4.17, corresponding to spending time alone with each other about once per week. The mean for generosity toward one's spouse was 3.96 for wives and 3.90 for husbands, corresponding to "often (= 4)." The mean religious attendance score was 3.19 for wives and 2.97 for husbands, representing "once or twice a month (= 3)."

### *SUR Models*

Table 2 presents the results of the first SUR model, which includes the marital investment variables, the basic control covariates, as well as the human and social capital variables. These variables explained 11 percent of the variance in wives' and husbands' volunteering. Regarding the associations between one's marital belief and one's own and one's partner's volunteering (Hypothesis 1), our theoretical expectation was supported for women: Wives' soulmate view of marriage was negatively associated with their own ( $b = -.21, p < .05$ ) and their husbands' volunteering ( $b = -.20, p < .05$ ), but husbands' soulmate view of marriage was associated with neither their own nor their wives' volunteering. An  $F$ -test for equality of these coefficients for wives' soulmate belief against husbands' soulmate belief coefficients was significant,  $F(1, 2698) = 4.05, p < .05$ , supporting Hypothesis 2 that wives' soulmate belief is a stronger predictor of their own and their husbands' volunteering than husbands' soulmate belief.

Spousal time was positively associated with husbands' reports of volunteering ( $b = .08, p < .05$ ), providing no support for Hypothesis 3. Similarly, husbands' reports of generosity toward their wives were positively associated with their own volunteering ( $b = .21, p < .05$ ). Wives' reports of generosity toward their husbands were not associated with either their own or their husbands' volunteering. An  $F$ -test comparing the husbands' generosity coefficient to that of the wives' coefficient was not statistically significant either. Thus, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were not supported.

Table 3 presents the results that incorporate religious service attendance. As expected from previous research, one's religious attendance was positively associated with one's own volunteering (wives:  $b = .30, p < .001$ ; husbands:  $b = .26, p < .001$ ), but there were no significant cross-spouse effects. The addition of religious attendance improved variance explained in volunteering by 9

**Table 2.** Seemingly Unrelated Regression Coefficients of the Association between Marital Investments and Volunteering with Human and Social Resources and Basic Controls.

	Wives' volunteering		Husbands' volunteering	
	B	SE	B	SE
<b>Marital investments</b>				
W: Soulmate view of marriage <sup>a</sup>	-.21*	.10	-.20*	.09
H: Soulmate view of marriage <sup>a</sup>	.06	.10	.04	.09
Averaged spousal time <sup>b</sup>	.05	.04	.08*	.04
W: Generosity toward husband	.03	.08	.01	.07
H: Generosity toward wife	.01	.07	.16*	.07
<b>Control variables</b>				
W: Education	.15***	.04	.10**	.04
H: Education	.10**	.03	.16***	.03
W: Weekly work hours	-.01***	.003	-.01	.01
H: Weekly work hours	.01**	.003	.01	.01
Household income <sup>b</sup>	-.02	.02	-.02	.02
W: Socializing with other couples	-.03	.05	.06	.06
H: Socializing with other couples	.16**	.05	.15**	.05
Number of 0- to 5-year-olds in home <sup>b</sup>	.01	.06	.08	.06
Number of 6- to 17-year-olds in home <sup>b</sup>	.22***	.05	.21***	.04
Marital duration <sup>b</sup>	.04***	.01	.05***	.01
African American <sup>c</sup>	.65***	.25	-.02	.19
Hispanic American <sup>c</sup>	-.28	.15	-.01	.15
Other race/ethnicity <sup>c</sup>	-.21	.16	-.13	.16
Constant	-1.59**	0.50	-2.74***	0.48
R <sup>2</sup>	.11		.11	

Note. Gray shade denotes cross-spouse effect.

<sup>a</sup>Comparison category is neoinstitutional view of marriage.

<sup>b</sup>Variable measured at the couple level.

<sup>c</sup>Comparison category is European American.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

percentage points. Although spousal time was still significantly associated with husbands' reports of volunteering ( $b = .08, p < .05$ ), the association between husbands' generosity and husbands' volunteering became nonsignificant. The association between wives' soulmate beliefs and both wives' and husbands' volunteering was only significant at  $p = .09$  and  $p = .07$ , respectively. However, gender difference for soulmate coefficients remains significant,  $F(1, 2694) = 4.09, p < .05$ .

Turning to control variables, we found some unique results that are worth mentioning. Wives' level of education was positively associated with husbands' volunteering ( $b = .08, p < .05$ ), but husbands' level of education was unrelated to wives' volunteering. Husbands' work hours were positively associated with wives' volunteering ( $b = .01, p < .01$ ). Husbands' social integration was positively associated with their wives' volunteering ( $b = .13, p < .05$ ). The number of children aged 0 to 5 years was negatively associated with only wives' volunteering ( $b = -.11, p < .05$ ). Marital duration was positively associated with both wives' ( $b = .03, p < .001$ ) and husbands' volunteering ( $b = .05, p < .001$ ). To be sure, this association may reflect age effects and/or cohort effects, which we are unable to disentangle.

**Table 3.** Seemingly Unrelated Regression Coefficients of the Association between Marital Investments and Volunteering with Human, Social, and Cultural Resources and Basic Controls.

	Wives' volunteering		Husbands' volunteering	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
<b>Marital investments</b>				
W: Soulmate view of marriage <sup>a</sup>	-.16 <sup>†</sup>	.09	-.16 <sup>†</sup>	.09
H: Soulmate view of marriage <sup>a</sup>	.09	.10	.06	.09
Averaged spousal time	.06	.04	.08*	.03
W: Generosity toward husband	-.01	.07	-.03	.07
H: Generosity toward wife	-.05	.07	.10	.07
<b>Control variables</b>				
W: Education	.11**	.03	.08*	.03
H: Education	.04	.03	.09**	.03
W: Weekly work hours	-.01***	.003	-.01	.01
H: Weekly work hours	.01**	.003	-.01	.01
Household income <sup>b</sup>	.01	.02	.01	.02
W: Socializing with other couples	-.07	.05	.03	.05
H: Socializing with other couples	.13*	.05	.11*	.05
Number of 0- to 5-year-olds in home <sup>b</sup>	-.11*	.05	-.03	.05
Number of 6- to 17-year-olds in home <sup>b</sup>	.15***	.04	.14***	.04
W: Religious service attendance	.30***	.04	.08	.04
H: Religious service attendance	.06	.05	.26***	.04
Marital duration <sup>b</sup>	.03***	.01	.05***	.01
African American <sup>c</sup>	.26	.24	-.21	.19
Hispanic American <sup>c</sup>	-.36*	.15	-.01	.14
Other race/ethnicity <sup>c</sup>	-.24	.15	-.17	.15
Constant	-1.16*	0.47	-2.14***	0.45
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.20		.20	

Note. Gray shade denotes cross-spouse effect.

<sup>a</sup>Comparison category is neoinstitutional view of marriage.

<sup>b</sup>Variable measured at the couple level.

<sup>c</sup>Comparison category is European American.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed tests).

Because of the skewness in volunteering distribution, we dichotomized volunteering as described above and ran seemingly unrelated probit models to verify the robustness of the results. The results from the seemingly unrelated probit models were quite similar to the SUR models (analysis not shown). Some of the coefficients for the control variables that were not significant in the SUR models were significant in the probit models.

## Discussion

For the past 40 years, it has been customary to test the greedy marriage thesis by comparing marital status groups. What has not been tested, however, is Coser's original hypothesis—whether the greediness of marriage is determined by two marital actors, the wife and husband. Here we

attempted to bring the marital dyad back into the analysis of the greedy marriage thesis and test whether investments in the marital relationship inhibit community involvement through formal volunteering. Our results provided evidence that marriage may or may not be greedy depending on its participants—how they define and manage their marriage.

First, wives' soulmate view of marriage appears to inhibit their own and their husbands' volunteering: Wives who see marriage primarily as a union of two soulmates reported a lower level of volunteering than those who put additional values on financial partnership and parenthood. Husbands whose wives hold this romantic view also reported less volunteering, even controlling for husbands' own view of marriage. As previous theoretical work implies, couples who hold soulmate views of marriage appear to be inward-looking, "pushing aside other relationships" (Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006:19). Because women tend to be more involved in the emotional management of the relationship (Helms, Crouter, and McHale 2003), wives who take a more romantic view of marriage appear to seek emotional satisfaction primarily through husbands, which might take couples' time and energy away from their involvement in the community. This interpretation is consistent with Coser's argument that asymmetry in emotional investment in the family makes the family greedy. Yet unlike Coser's prediction, we show that husbands' ties to community can be weakened by the greedy family.

Another important finding is that spousal time was positively associated with husbands' reports of volunteering. Given that this result is significant in the opposite direction to our expectations, it is worth discussing further. One possible explanation for this outcome is that couples who invest more time in their marriage are more likely to have better relationships (M. D. Johnson and Anderson 2013). These couples are then more likely to volunteer together. Using Stephen Marks' (1989:18) term, volunteering could constitute a "joint third-corner" in which spouses pursue their volunteering interests jointly. One study estimated that in 1992, 41 percent of the married volunteers did volunteer work with their spouses, and husbands reported joint volunteering more than wives (Musick and Wilson 2008). Thus, husbands might benefit from joint volunteering more than wives, and the marital bond seems to function as a "specific hook" that can draw husbands into volunteering (Einolf 2011). This speculation could explain why spousal time enhances husbands' volunteering, but not wives'. If our speculation is correct, then future research could explore whether spousal time relates to couple's solitary versus joint volunteering differently.

Another interpretation is that the relationship between spousal time and time spent in volunteering is not a zero-sum game; rather, time investment in a marriage generates a greater energy (Durkheim 1953). Stephen Marks' (1977) expansion approach to human energy questions the very basis of the greedy marriage thesis as it claims that the scarcity of resources indeed enhances the ability to parcel out time and energy by adjusting the level of commitment depending on particular relationships. In doing so, spouses can invest their emotion and energy in each other without losing energy for others. If this theory is true, then time spent with spouses can even create energy that becomes available for other social domains, including the civic sector. Given that our measures of spousal time and volunteering were not based on actual time use, perhaps future research could better explain the relationship between spousal time and volunteering using time-use data.

Our null finding on the relationship between husbands' generosity and husbands' volunteering warrants mentioning given that, despite its growing importance (Fowers and Owenz 2010), no research has explored the concept of marital generosity as a predictor of volunteering. Men's religious attendance seems to be a major source of spuriousness because it is positively associated with men's marital generosity (Wilcox and Dew Forthcoming) and volunteering (Campbell and Yonish 2003). This null finding may indicate that marital generosity is too far removed from other processes that govern volunteerism to be related. Alternatively, our measures of generosity, though important, may take such little time that this type of marital investment may not interfere with other activities. That is, expressing affection or engaging in small acts of kindness may not take much time to perform.

There are other limitations with our data. Data constraints do not allow us to consider whether the association between our key independent and dependent variables varies according to domains of volunteering. This limitation is notable because our sample comprises married individuals who are most likely to invest their volunteer time primarily for religious organizations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015b:Table 4). Because religious attendance is negatively correlated with the soulmate view of marriage (wives:  $r = -.08, p < .01$ ; husbands:  $r = -.07, p < .01$ ), we suspect that the results could have been different for religious and secular volunteering if we included both measures of volunteering. It would be helpful for future research to determine whether the relationship between marital beliefs and volunteering varies by the volunteering domain.

The data are cross-sectional; thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that selection is responsible for the observed association.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the addition of religious attendance to the model renders the associations between soulmate belief and volunteering of only marginal significance. Thus, our data are only suggestive of potential inhibiting effects of wives' soulmate belief on wives' and husbands' volunteering. It is possible that organized religion might select more people who value parenthood (Hayford and Morgan 2008) over the marital relationship itself. Those who value the marital relationship more are then less likely to select into religious congregations and therefore have less access to institutions that provide opportunities for and encourage volunteering. Another possibility is that religious attendance might mediate the relationship between the soulmate view of marriage and volunteering—that is, couples who view marriage primarily as a union of two soulmates might be less likely to become involved in an organized religion, which in turn decreases the likelihood of being involved in volunteering. Given our cross-sectional data, we are unsure whether marital belief precedes volunteering behavior and thus unable to make a strong case for the mediation mechanism. Longitudinal research is required to determine which mechanism—mediation or selection—links soulmate beliefs to volunteering.

Despite these limitations, our new approach to studying the greediness of marriage expands our understanding of the family-community nexus by investigating whether a marriage-centered lifestyle competes with a civic focus for American young adults. The findings from this study suggest that the greedy nature of marriage stems, in part, from the particularity of the relationship between partners. Not all marriages are alike; insofar as marriage is a union of two people who commit to each other, greediness or generosity of marriage should be, in part, determined by the dynamics of the marital relationship.

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## Notes

1. There are demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral correlates of these marital conceptualizations. For example, marital duration is negatively associated with participants choosing the soulmate view of marriage (analysis available upon request).
2. Although both wives and husbands indicated their race and ethnicity, we only modeled race and ethnicity as self effects because we had no theoretical reason to expect any cross-spouse effects for this variable.
3. On a related note, there is a possibility of left-censoring bias. That is, our data do not contain individuals between the ages of 18 and 45 who were married, but who have since divorced. Thus, our data may overrepresent married couples who have more stable marriages. This issue is common to most data for married couples.

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