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# Religion and Volunteering in Marital Relationships

Young-Il Kim<sup>1</sup> · Jeffrey Dew<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Married people are generally more religious and do volunteer work more frequently than unmarried people. However, little is known about which religious characteristics or domains predict volunteering behaviors among married couples. Using data from a U.S. national sample of heterosexual married couples, we examine which aspects of couples' religiosity predicted husbands' and wives' reports of volunteering. Results from actor-partner interdependence models indicated that performing religious observances in the home was associated with wives' reports of volunteering. Attending religious services regularly with one's spouse was associated with higher levels of volunteering for both wives and husbands. Other domains of religiosity, such as marital sanctification and co-religionist networks, were not associated with volunteering when other religious variables were in the model.

**Keywords** Religion · Volunteering · Marriage

A large body of research has shown a positive association between religion and volunteering, both cross-sectionally (Putnam and Campbell 2010) and longitudinally (Kim and Jang 2017). By every conceivable measure, empirical evidence has shown that regular worshippers are active volunteers: they are more likely to contribute more volunteer hours (Campbell and Yonish 2003); be involved in a wider range of volunteer activities (Wilson and Musick 1997), and participate in volunteer activities for nonreligious organizations more than infrequent attenders (Musick and Wilson 2008).

Most often, however, research on the association between religion and volunteering has focused on the individual as the unit of analysis, neglecting one dominant subgroup that fills the pews on Sunday morning: the married couple. Although families play significant roles in producing future volunteers (Mustillo

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et al. 2004), it is rarely analyzed at the couple or household level (for exceptions, see Brown and Zhang 2013; Rotolo and Wilson 2006). This oversight is unfortunate, not only because married people volunteer more than those with other marital statuses (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015a: Table 1), but also because they attend religious congregations more often than unmarried people (Pew Research Center 2018). Thus, although regular churchgoing married couples strongly support the American volunteer sector, little is known about the ways in which religion is associated with volunteering among married couples.

To examine what aspects of religion are associated with husbands' and wives' volunteering behavior, we used data from the Survey of Marital Generosity, a recent U.S. national sample of married couples aged 18–45 ( $N = 1368$  dyads). Because we use the marital dyad as the unit of analysis, we are especially interested in whether couple-level data (e.g., jointly reported religious attendance) are associated with husbands' and/or wives' volunteering. Further, we use the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM, Kenny et al. 2006), to examine whether each spouse's religious characteristics influence not only their own, but also their spouse's volunteering. To our knowledge, this is the first study to attempt to identify which religious characteristics or domains, among many, are associated with volunteering among U.S. heterosexual married couples.

## **Background**

### **Religion-Volunteering Link**

The volunteering literature has consistently documented the positive association between religion and volunteering (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Religious service attendance, in particular, is one of the strongest predictors of volunteer work. Why do regular church-goers are active in volunteering? That is because volunteering—as a form of work—requires resources (Musick and Wilson 2008: 111), and religious congregations provide all kinds of resources that are needed for performing volunteer work such as altruistic values, civic skills, and social networks (Putnam 2000). First, frequent attenders are more likely to be exposed to religious teachings that emphasize a service ethic—charity, altruism, and prosocial behavior (Wuthnow 2004). Second, religious congregations often cultivate civic skills (e.g., writing letters, organizing meetings, and speaking in public) that are transferrable to secular volunteer organizations (Verba et al. 1995). Third, religious congregations provide personal friendship networks that connect their members to volunteer organizations that their fellow congregants are involved with (Wilson and Musick 1997). The more people get acquainted with fellow congregants, the more likely they will be invited to engage in volunteer work in nonreligious settings (McPherson and Rotolo 1996). Thus, regular churchgoers are more likely to be aware of needs and opportunities in their communities (Ruiter and de Graaf 2006). In the context of our study, these resources are best provided through marital relationships, which we discuss next.

## Relational Spirituality Framework

The current study largely relies on the relational spirituality framework proposed by Mahoney (2010), which assumes that: (a) family members who believe in the divine, God, or a transcendent reality consider their family relationships and other domains of life such as volunteering as part of the sacred, and (b) such people make great efforts to maintain and reinforce positive family functioning through practicing religious rituals at home, attending religious services, and giving and receiving social support from fellow believers (Mahoney 2010: 807). This framework is useful for understanding the association between religion and volunteering among married couples, because it recognizes that individuals' perceptions of the sacred not only drive religious behaviors, but also relate to social behaviors (e.g., family life, community involvement, etc.) (Pargament and Mahoney 2005: 187). Furthermore, the relational spirituality framework itself does not posit the existence of any divine force. Rather, it is a psychological/sociological theory that examines how individuals' own perceptions and experiences of what they consider to be divine influence their relationship and social interactions.

This framework also ties together families' internal functioning, as evidenced by marital quality, for example, with their external environments, such as their spiritual communities. Acknowledging the role of community in strengthening family relationships is particularly relevant to the current study, because we view community—in the form of both dense social ties and involvement in institutions (Brint 2001)—as a mechanism through which religion shapes couple relationships. Couples embedded in religious social networks might receive more social and emotional support, which in turn could translate into a stronger commitment to these religious communities and institutions.

## Triangles Theory

Another theory that recognizes the role that third parties play in marital functioning is Marks' (1986) triangles theory. According to this theory, marriage consists of a pair of interacting triangles in which each triangle has three corners: the inner self (*one corner*), the spouse (*the second corner*), and other interests or commitments (*the third corner*). As far as this study concerned, part of the third corner consists of volunteer activity and religious commitments. The main assumptions behind this theory are that (a) both spouses are interacting not only with their spouse but also with their spouse's third-corners and, (b) each spouse is involved in various kinds of third-corners independently and jointly. For example, one spouse may enjoy reading, while the other enjoys hiking, but they attend a religious service every week together. Here, the couple has independent and joint third-corners. Having a joint third-corner is important for the relationship because it can build a strong relationship. In this regard, couples who share their marital views and pursue same religious interests may be more likely to do volunteer work, as it allows them to spend quality time together. Based on the

triangles theory as well as the relational spirituality framework, we propose that the following four religious dimensions may predict volunteering among married couples.

## Hypotheses

### Sanctification of Marriage

One's marital beliefs can affect one's marital relationships as well as one's relationship with the outside world, such as career, leisure, or community involvement (Willoughby et al. 2015). Scholars have identified two contemporary views of marriage that guide married people's behaviors: the soulmate and the neo-institutional view of marriage (Amato 2009; Wilcox and Dew 2010). The soulmate view of marriage focuses on the emotional functions of marriage, seeing marriage as a way to secure personal growth, intimacy, and individual fulfillment; the neo-institutional model puts more value on traditional functions of marriage, such as raising children, economic cooperation, and fulfilling religious goals while still striving to enhance the companionship within the relationship. A recent study found that wives who subscribed to the soulmate view of marriage were less likely to volunteer and may even lead their husbands to volunteer less (Kim and Dew 2016). The authors speculated that wives who adhered to the soulmate view of marriage may have also demanded more from their marriage relationship, leaving less time for other commitments.

Conversely, those who have a more traditional view, including those who sanctify marriage, may strike a balance between marital and community investments, and therefore may be more likely to participate in volunteer activities. Marital sanctification fits within the relational spirituality framework and occurs when an individual perceives an aspect of life as having spiritual or divine character and significance (Mahoney et al. 2003). Because individuals tend to protect what they consider sacred, couples who endow marriage with transcendent significance tend to put greater efforts into protecting their marriage by engaging relational maintenance behaviors (Mahoney et al. 2003; Stafford 2016). Those couples are then more likely to have high levels of marital satisfaction (Stafford et al. 2014).

On the other hand, marital sanctification may encourage various positive attitudes and behaviors toward the larger community, as the couples live out their beliefs about marriage. In other words, those who believe that their marriage is centered on the divine rather than couple-centered or individual-centered may be more committed to community involvement. Those couples may be concerned with doing things in and with their marriage to enact or foster its divine nature. Volunteering may be one of many ways to do that. Although research on marital sanctification has been solely focused on marital quality as the outcome variable, it is possible that sanctified view of marriage may be positively associated with prosocial behavior such as volunteering. Therefore, we expect that those who consider their marriage sacred are more likely to commit themselves to do volunteer work, and this attitude will influence the other spouse's volunteering as well.

**Hypothesis 1** One's belief in the sanctification of one's marriage will be positively associated with one's own and one's spouse's volunteering.

### **Joint Religious Activities In and Outside of the Home**

Based on the relational spirituality framework and the triangles theory, we predict that couples who spend more time together on religious activities in and outside of the home are more likely to do volunteer work. Looking at religious activity in the home first, research has shown that couples who practice in-home devotional activities, such as prayer or scripting reading, reported higher relationship quality (Ellison et al. 2010). Those couples who desire to strengthen their relationship may then not only practice their religious rituals at home, but also participate in volunteer work as a way to spend time together. In Marks' (1989) terms, religious activities as well as volunteer work can be "a common joint third-corner focus" in which couples combine church and community work into "one life-defining package" (pp. 21–22).

Similarly, attending religious services together could encourage couples to invest their time in volunteering. As mentioned earlier, religious congregations serve as a gateway to volunteering as it provides cultural, civic, and social resources (Cnaan and Curtis 2013). Given that frequent attenders reap more benefits from religious congregations, couples who are jointly dedicated to their congregations may be able to encourage each other to participate in volunteering activities jointly or independently. These reasoning lead to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 2** Couple's joint in-home religious activities will be positively associated with one's own and one's spouse's volunteering.

**Hypothesis 3** Couple's joint service attendance will be positively associated with one's own and one's spouse's volunteering.

### **Co-religionist Friendship Networks**

The literature consistently points to the importance of social networks in access to volunteer opportunities and activities (Wilson 2000). A recent longitudinal study found that people who increase their religious service attendance are more likely to increase their volunteering because they become more integrated in social networks over time (Kim and Jang 2017). Religious social networks, in particular, play a major role in disseminating volunteering needs and information as well as promoting volunteering behavior. Indeed, research shows that the association between religious attendance and volunteering is partially (Lewis et al. 2013) and fully (Putnam and Campbell 2010) mediated by religious social networks. These findings suggest that embeddedness in co-religionist friendship networks is one of the crucial factors in promoting volunteering behavior.

In light of our theoretical framework, shared friendship networks—as a joint third-corner—are especially helpful for married couples not only because they share volunteer opportunities, but also they can strengthen couple's religious beliefs.

In their classic study, Berger and Kellner (1964: 1) assert that marriage is a “*nomos*-building instrumentality,” in which spouses help each other to validate the world around them. Spouses, when entering a marital relationship, need to build their *nomos* in a marriage. Marrying a person of same religious faith are able to ease this new *nomos*-building process, which in turn makes their religious belief more plausible (Berger 1967). Likewise, close friends who share their faith are better able to provide social and emotional support (McPherson et al. 2001: 425), which enables them to develop this plausibility structure. Taken together, those couples who are more integrated into co-religionist networks would not only be able to strengthen their plausibility structure, but would also be able to have more volunteer opportunities. All these reasoning leads to the fourth hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4** Couple’s co-religionist friendship networks will be positively associated with one’s own and one’s spouse’s volunteering.

## Method

### Data and Sample

We used data from the Survey of Marital Generosity (SMG) to conduct the analysis. As the name suggests, the main purpose of the SMG was to collect data on married couples in their childbearing years regarding behaviors that might be considered generous. Thus, the SMG included many questions relating to parenting, community involvement, and marital relations. It also included a number of questions regarding participants’ religious beliefs and practices. Participants responded to the survey between late 2010 and early 2011.

Participants in the SMG came from Knowledge Network’s “Knowledge Panel.” Knowledge Network is a survey research firm that has developed a nationally-representative panel of participants, the Knowledge Panel. Knowledge Networks developed the Knowledge panel using stratified random sampling and multiple methods (i.e., random digit dialing and random address based sampling). For the SMG, Knowledge Networks invited panel members between the ages of 18–45 who were heterosexual and married. Panel participants’ spouses were also invited to be part of the SMG. Knowledge Networks invited slightly over 4500 participants to be in the SMG; 1745 wives and 1705 husbands participated.

Our study had a number of inclusion criteria. First, participants had to have their spouse participate in the SMG. We used this criterion because the APIM analysis was dyadic; if a participant’s spouse was not in the SMG, we could not include them in the analysis. Second, participants and spouses had to be between the ages of 18–45. Our original sampling framework required participants to be between these ages, but spouses could be older (up to age 55). We wanted all participants and spouses to be of childbearing age because children can influence volunteering (Brown and Zhang 2013). Furthermore, only participants between the ages of 18 and 45 had post-stratification weights. We used these post-stratification weights in all of our analyses so that the sample would be as representative as possible. These

two inclusion criteria yielded a sample of 1368 couples in which both wives and husbands provided data. That is, we have 1368 wives and 1368 husbands who are married to each other.

A question may arise as to the representativeness of our sample. To examine whether our sample was representative of the US married population, we compared descriptive statistics from the SMG (weighted with post-stratification weights) to the General Social Survey (GSS, also weighted with the GSS's post-stratification weights). The GSS sample we selected contained 18–45 year old married individuals from 2010. This was the GSS sample that most closely approximated the SMG's sampling frame. Educational attainment and income were quite similar across the GSS and SMG. Further, the average number of children in the home only differed by .2–.3 of a point. There were some slight differences in race/ethnicity, however. In the SMG, 6.4% of the wives and 7.8% of the husbands identified as Black. 9.1% of wives and 4.1% of husbands identified as black in the GSS. In the SMG, 15.6% of the wives and 16.6% of the husbands indicated that they were Hispanic. The GSS percentages were 16.7% and 16.3% respectively. 9.1% of wives and 7.6% of husbands identified as not White, not Black, and not Hispanic in the SMG. In the GSS, these numbers were 6.6% and 2.7%. In sum, there are some slight differences in the percent of different race/ethnic groups in the SMG, but the SMG is fairly representative of the US married population between the ages of 18–45 in 2010.

## Measures

The dependent variable was a measure of participants' frequency of volunteering. Specifically, 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?" The response possibility was a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (0 h) to 7 (20+ h).

We measured five different domains of religiosity. The first was marital sanctification, which was based on a single item that asked participants about their level of disagreement/agreement with the following statement, "God is at the center of our marriage." Participants could respond on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree).

The second domain was joint in-home religious activities. The SMG asked participants "How often do you pray or do religious activities with your spouse at home besides grace at meals?" Participants could respond from 1 (Never) to 6 (Several times a day). Because spouses were reporting on the same phenomenon, we averaged their reports, making it a couple-level measure.

Third, we created another couple-level dummy variable that indicated whether participants were attending religious services at a higher than average rate with their spouse. One of the variables in the SMG asked participants how often they attended religious services. They could respond 1 (more than once a week) to 6 (Never). We reverse coded the variable for the purposes of this study. The SMG then asked participants to list with whom they "typically" attended religious services. "My spouse" and "my spouse and children" were both in the response set. Thus, if both



participants said they attended at least “several times a month” and both said that they attended with their spouse, then the couple got a score of “1” on this variable. All other participants received a code of “0.”

The fourth variable measured the strength of participants’ co-religionist networks. Participants were asked to disagree/agree with the following statements. “My spouse and I have many friends who share our faith.” Participants could respond 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree).

Finally, we included a number of control covariates that previous research has shown to affect volunteering such as education, employment, income, presence of children, and race/ethnicity (Musick and Wilson 2008; Wilson 2000). Education was measured on a scale of 1 (No formal education) to 14 (Professional or Doctorate degree). Usual weekly employment hours were self-reported. We top-coded this variable to 90 h per week. Total household income was a couple-level variable. It was based on a 19-point scale that ranged from 1 (less than \$5000) to 19 (\$175,000 or more). Wives and husbands reported how much social support they received for their marriage from families and friends. To measure this construct, the SMG asked participants to agree or disagree with two statements: “My friends are supportive of my marriage” and “My family is supportive of my marriage.” We averaged the scores from these variables to create the social support variable. Number of younger children (children ages 0–5) and number of older children in the home (children ages 6–17) was a couple-level variable. Marital duration was reported in years. For both number of children in the home and marital duration, we used wives’ reports. The high correlation between wives’ and husbands’ reports of these two variables was extremely high (i.e.,  $r=.99$ ). Finally, participants reported their race/ethnic identity. From these we created three dummy variables (Black, non-Hispanic; Hispanic; Other race/ethnicity). The comparison category was White, non-Hispanic.

## Analysis

We used path analysis and the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM, Kenny et al. 2006) to analyze the data. Path analysis is a technique that estimates multiple regression equations simultaneously. This is helpful with dyadic data analysis so that we can estimate both wives’ and husbands’ equations at the same time. It also allows us to account for the correlation between dyadic partners’ reports of the dependent variables. That is, because wives’ reports of their volunteering is likely to be correlated with husbands’ reports of volunteering, estimating these dependent variables without taking the correlation into account would likely result in biased estimates. Path analysis enabled us to estimate the correlation between wives’ and husbands’ reports of volunteering.

The APIM is an analytical strategy designed to study dyads (Kenny et al. 2006). In an APIM model, we regress each participant’s dependent variable (i.e., volunteerism) on their own independent variables (i.e., their own religiosity measures) as well as their spouses’ independent variables (i.e., their spouses’ religiosity measures). Associations between one’s own independent and dependent variables are called “actor effects.” Associations between one’s spouse’s independent variables and one’s own dependent

variables are called “partner effects.” We ran five path/APIM models to investigate the hypotheses. Wives’ and husbands’ reports of volunteering were the dependent variables in all of the models. The first model had wives’ and husbands’ reports of marital sanctification. The second model removed marital sanctification and added the joint in-home religious activities variable. The third model removed the joint in-home religious activities variable and added the joint service attendance variable. The fourth model took out the joint outside-religious activities and added wives’ and husbands’ reports of co-religionist friends. The fifth model included all of the religious variables. We should note that the control covariates were included in all of the models and all of the models were weighted with the post-stratification weights. We thought running the four models with the religious variable separately prior to running the full model would help us understand the full model better.

The variables had between 0 and 5% missing. In the path models, we used Full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation to correct for the missing data. FIML yields similar estimates to multiple imputation and is widely used in social science fields (Johnson and Young 2011).

## **Descriptive Statistics**

Table 1 gives the descriptive statistics for the different measures. Wives’ and husbands’ means for volunteering were 2.55 and 2.24, respectively. These means correspond to somewhere between 1 and 2 h per month. Looking at the minimum and maximum scores suggests that the both variables have a positive skew. Wives’ and husbands’ reported marital sanctification was at the midpoint of the scale (around 3.5 on a scale of 6). The mean for the averaged in-home religious activities done in the home was 2.58. On the scale, this represents between less than once per week and once per week. 31% of the couples reported that they jointly attended religious services at a frequency that was higher than average. Both wives and husbands agreed with the statement about having many co-religious friends at about the mid-point of the scale.

Table 1 also shows the descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics. Wives’ and husbands’ mean levels of education were near 11, corresponding to a value of “some college” or associates degree. Wives reported an average of 19.18 h of employment per week; husbands reported 39.04 h of employment per week. The average total household income was 12.81 which corresponds to the scale response near \$60,000–\$74,999. Couples reported an average .60 younger children in the home and 1.09 older children in the home. The average length of marriage was 9.48 years. 69% of the wives self-identified as White, non-Hispanic while 6%, 15%, and 9% self-identified as Black, Hispanic, and Other race/ethnicity respectively. 68% of husbands self-identified as White, non-Hispanic while 8%, 17%, and 8% self-identified as Black, Hispanic, and Other race/ethnicity respectively.

## **Bivariate Correlations**

Table 2 shows the bivariate correlations between wives’ and husbands’ reports of volunteering as well as their religiosity. We present these coefficients to show

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics ( $N=1368$  dyads)

|   | Mean/percent | SD    | Min | Max |
|---|--------------|-------|-----|-----|
| W volunteering                                  | 2.55         | 1.79  | 1   | 7   |
| H volunteering                                  | 2.24         | 1.71  | 1   | 7   |
| W marital sanctification                        | 3.60         | 1.80  | 1   | 6   |
| H marital sanctification                        | 3.56         | 1.81  | 1   | 6   |
| Couple's religious activities in the home       | 2.58         | 1.58  | 1   | 6   |
| Joint religious service attendance <sup>a</sup> | 31%          |       |     |     |
| W co-religionist friends                        | 3.84         | 1.55  | 1   | 6   |
| H co-religionist friends                        | 3.80         | 1.56  | 1   | 6   |
| W education                                     | 10.64        | 1.55  | 3   | 14  |
| H education                                     | 10.53        | 1.67  | 1   | 14  |
| W weekly employment hours                       | 19.18        | 19.18 | 0   | 80  |
| H weekly employment hours                       | 39.04        | 14.66 | 0   | 90  |
| Total household income                          | 12.81        | 3.38  | 1   | 19  |
| W social support for marriage                   | 3.50         | 1.15  | 1   | 5   |
| H social support for marriage                   | 3.46         | 1.15  | 1   | 5   |
| Number of younger children in home              | .60          | .83   | 0   | 4   |
| Number of older children in home                | 1.09         | 1.18  | 0   | 8   |
| Marital duration                                | 9.84         | 5.99  | 0   | 26  |
| Wife Black <sup>b</sup>                         | 6.4%         |       |     |     |
| Wife Hispanic <sup>b</sup>                      | 15.6%        |       |     |     |
| Wife other race/ethnicity <sup>b</sup>          | 9.1%         |       |     |     |
| Husband Black <sup>b</sup>                      | 7.8%         |       |     |     |
| Husband Hispanic <sup>b</sup>                   | 16.6%        |       |     |     |
| Husband other race/ethnicity <sup>b</sup>       | 7.6%         |       |     |     |

All results are weighted using the post-stratification weights

W wife, H husband

<sup>a</sup>Reference category is both wives and husbands attended religious services less than several times a month with their spouse

<sup>b</sup>Reference category is White, non-Hispanic

the intercorrelations of the different variables. Seeing these intercorrelations may inform the results that we get from the path models.

Wives' and husbands' reports of volunteering frequency were modestly correlated with their own and their spouses' reports of religiosity. These correlations ranged in magnitude from .07 to .41. All of the correlations were significant at the  $p < .001$  level. The intercorrelations between the religiosity variables were stronger. They ranged from .29 to .68 (all at  $p < .05$  or better). These correlations suggest that at least some of the religiosity variables will be related to volunteering. We are also likely to find both actor and partner effects. Furthermore, some of the independent variables may be significant in the single religious variable models, but not in the full model because they are so correlated with each other. We examined variance

**Table 2** Volunteering and religiosity: correlations ( $N=1368$  dyads)

|   | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7    |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| 1 W volunteering                                  |        |        |        |        |        |        |      |
| 2 H volunteering                                  | .41*** |        |        |        |        |        |      |
| 3 W marital sanctification                        | .18*** | .31*** |        |        |        |        |      |
| 4 H marital sanctification                        | .10*** | .30*** | .66*** |        |        |        |      |
| 5 Couple's religious activities in the home       | .33*** | .30*** | .58*** | .50*** |        |        |      |
| 6 Joint religious service attendance <sup>a</sup> | .33*** | .35*** | .46*** | .40*** | .57*** |        |      |
| 7 W co-religionist friends                        | .17*** | .32*** | .68*** | .50*** | .44*** | .39*** |      |
| 8 H co-religionist friends                        | .13*** | .31*** | .50*** | .62*** | .39*** | .36*** | .59* |

All results are weighted using the post-stratification weights

W wife, H husband

<sup>a</sup>Reference category is both wives and husbands attended religious services less than several times a month with their spouse

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

inflation statistics to ensure that multicollinearity between the independent variables was not going to interfere with the estimation of the models. None of the variance inflation factors exceeded three, indicating multicollinearity is not an issue in our analyses.

## Path Models

Table 3 shows the results of the path analysis. Model 1 tested the association between marital sanctification and volunteering. Wives' marital sanctification was positively associated with both their own ( $b = .16, p < .001$ ) and their husbands' reports of volunteering ( $b = .11, p < .05$ ). Husbands' reports of marital sanctification were positively associated with their own reports of volunteering ( $b = .16, p < .001$ ), but not their wives' reports. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

Many of the control covariates were significant in the direction predicted by previous research. Wives' level of education was positively associated with both their own ( $b = .11, p < .01$ ) and their husbands' reports of volunteering ( $b = .09, p < .01$ ). Husbands' education was also associated with their own ( $b = .12, p < .001$ ) and their wives' reports ( $b = .07, p < .05$ ). Wives' weekly hours of employment were negatively associated with their own reports of volunteering ( $b = -.01, p < .05$ ), while husbands' weekly employment hours were positively associated with wives' reports of volunteering ( $b = .01, p < .05$ ). Husbands' reports of the social support they get for their marriage was positively associated with both their own ( $b = .12, p < .05$ ) and their wives' reports of volunteering ( $b = .14, p < .05$ ). Number of older children in the home were positively related to volunteering ( $b = .16, p < .01$  for wives and  $b = .15, p < .05$  for husbands) as was marital duration ( $b = .03$ , for both,  $p < .01$  for wives and  $p < .001$  for husbands). Black husbands and Hispanic husbands reported volunteering less than

**Table 3** Path model analysis of the association between religiosity and self-reported volunteering ( $N=1368$  dyads)

| Variables                                       | Model 1   |           | Model 2   |           | Model 3   |           | Model 4   |           | Model 5   |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|   | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. |
| Intercept                                       | -1.36***  | -2.10***  | -.96*     | -1.61***  | -.34      | -1.07**   | -1.13**   | -1.84***  | -.79      | -1.59***  |
| W marital sanctification                        | .16***    | .11*      |           |           |           |           |           |           | .06       | .04       |
| H marital sanctification                        | .10       | .16***    |           |           |           |           |           |           | -.05      | -.04      |
| Religious activities in the home                |           |           | .33***    | .25***    |           |           |           |           | .19**     | .05       |
| Joint religious service attendance <sup>a</sup> |           |           |           |           | 1.08***   | .99***    |           |           | .56***    | .62***    |
| W co-religionist friends                        |           |           |           |           |           |           | .13**     | .12**     | .02       | .02       |
| H co-religionist friends                        |           |           |           |           |           |           | .16***    | .19***    | .06       | .08       |
| W education                                     | .11**     | .09**     | .09*      | .08**     | .10**     | .08**     | .12**     | .10**     | .09*      | .09**     |
| H education                                     | .07*      | .12***    | .05       | .11***    | .03       | .09**     | .06       | .11***    | .03       | .09**     |
| W employment                                    | -.01*     | -.01      | -.01      | -.01      | -.01*     | -.01      | -.01*     | -.01      | -.01      | -.01      |
| H employment                                    | .01*      | .01       | .01**     | .01       | .01**     | .01       | .01**     | .01       | .01**     | -.01      |
| Total household income                          | .02       | .01       | .03       | .01       | .02       | .01       | .01       | -.01      | .03       | .01       |
| W social support for marriage                   | -.11      | .04       | -.11      | .05       | -.08      | .06       | -.13      | .01       | -.12      | .03       |
| H social support for marriage                   | .14*      | .12*      | .15**     | .14**     | .14*      | .12*      | .10       | .08       | .13*      | .09       |
| Number of younger children in home              | -.12      | -.03      | -.18**    | -.06      | -.15*     | -.05      | -.12      | -.03      | -.19**    | -.07      |
| Number of older children in home                | .16**     | .15*      | .11*      | .11       | .13*      | .12       | .16**     | .15*      | .11       | .11       |
| Marital duration                                | .03**     | .03***    | .03***    | .04***    | .03**     | .03***    | .03**     | .03***    | .03**     | .03***    |
| Participant Black <sup>b</sup>                  | .24       | -.28*     | .28*      | -.13      | .50       | -.01      | .36       | -.17      | .27       | -.22      |

**Table 3** (continued)

| Variables                         | Model 1   |           | Model 2   |           | Model 3   |           | Model 4   |           | Model 5   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                   | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. | W Volunt. | H Volunt. |
| Participant Hispanic <sup>b</sup> | -.31      | -.30*     | -.24      | -.20      | -.18      | -.11      | -.27      | -.26      | -.24      | -.21      |
| Participant Other <sup>b</sup>    | -.31*     | -.26      | -.31*     | -.25      | -.18      | -.13      | -.27      | -.22      | -.27      | -.20      |
| R <sup>2</sup>                    | .16       | .18       | .18       | .21       | .20       | .20       | .15       | .17       | .23       | .22       |

Unstandardized coefficients shown. All results are weighted using the post-stratification weights

*W* wife, *H* husband, *Volunt* volunteering

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Reference category is both wives and husbands attended religious services less than several times a month with their spouse

<sup>b</sup>Reference category is White, non-Hispanic

White, non-Hispanic husbands ( $b = -.28$  and  $-.30$  respectively,  $p < .01$ ). The model explained 16 percent of the variance for wives' and 18 percent of husbands' reports of volunteering.

Model 2 removed the sanctification variables and added the amount of in-home religious activities the wives' and husbands' reports. Averaged reports of religious activities that was averaged between in the home were positively associated with both wives' reports of volunteering ( $b = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and husbands' reports ( $b = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Given that most of the control covariates were similar in direction and magnitude as the first model, we do not discuss them in the text. The new model had an  $R^2$  of .18 for wives' volunteering and .21 for husbands' volunteering.

Model 3 removed the in-home religious activities and added the dummy variable that measured whether both wives and husbands reported higher than average joint service attendance. Not surprisingly, those couples who reported higher than average joint service attendance reported higher levels of volunteering ( $b = 1.08$  for wives and  $b = .99$  for husbands, both  $p < .001$ ). The  $R^2$  for this model was .20. Taken together, these findings support Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Model 4 removed the dummy variable and added a measure that assesses the extent to which participants are integrated into their co-religionist networks. The more wives agreed with the notion that they had many co-religionist friends, the more they ( $b = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and their husbands' ( $b = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) reported volunteering. The same findings held true for husbands' reports of co-religionist friends, but the coefficients were slightly stronger ( $b = .16$  for wives and  $b = .19$  for husbands, both  $p < .001$ ). The  $R^2$  was .15 for wives and .17 for husbands. These findings support Hypothesis 4.

Model 5 was the full model, with all of the independent variables included. In this model, individual-level reports of marital sanctification was no longer associated with either wives' or husbands' volunteering. Averaged in-home religious activities were associated with wives', but not husbands' reports of volunteering. For wives, the unstandardized coefficient was  $b = .19$  ( $p < .01$ ). Consistent with the results of Model 3, wives in couples who reported higher than average joint service attendance reported more volunteering ( $b = .56$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as did husbands ( $b = .62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). None of the other religiosity variables were associated with wives' and husbands' reports of volunteering. The  $R^2$  for the full model was .23 for wives and .22 for husbands. The results of the full model provide support only for Hypothesis 2 (for wives) and Hypothesis 3.

As noted in the descriptive statistics section, wives' and husbands' reports of volunteering were positively skewed. This suggests that a path model using an ordinary least squares approach may not be appropriate. To test the robustness of our findings, we ran the final model in Table 3 using path analysis and dichotomous versions of the dependent variable (i.e., logistic regression). We conducted a mean-split analysis where those with at or below average volunteering were scored as "0" and those reporting higher than average volunteering were scored as "1". In this logistic regression, the findings regarding religiosity were the same. That is, in-home religious activities were positively associated with wives' reports of volunteering and high joint attendance was positively associated with both wives' and husbands' volunteering (analysis not shown, but available upon request). Thus, the skew of the

dependent variable did not influence the association between them and the different religious variables.

## Discussion

It is well established that regular churchgoers volunteer more frequently than irregular churchgoers (Wilson and Janoski 1995). It is also well known that married individuals tend to volunteer more frequently than unmarried counterparts (Smith 2010). Little is known, however, about the religious characteristics of married volunteers. What religious resources do married couples draw on to serve the larger community? In an attempt to answer this question, this study used the conceptual framework of relational spirituality (Mahoney 2010) and triangles theory (Marks 1986) and examined what aspects of religion influence volunteering among heterosexual married couples. While some of our findings replicated those from earlier studies that use the individual as the unit of analysis, our actor-partner interdependence models reveal some interesting findings that are worth further discussion.

First, in Model 1, we identified the actor and partner effects of marital sanctification on volunteering. Wives' feelings of marital sanctification were shown to be positively associated with not only their own (i.e., an actor effect), but also their husbands' volunteering (i.e., a partner effect). These findings are largely in line with the notion that the sanctity of marriage could motivate couples to engage in volunteering as a way of enacting their view of marriage. This finding complements much current literature on marital sanctification, which places emphasis on marital quality as the outcome of sanctification (Mahoney 2010). Similar actor and partner effects were also found in the relationship between co-religionist friendship networks and volunteering (Model 4). These results suggest that in order to better understand married individuals' volunteering behaviors, it is necessary to consider spouse's beliefs and behaviors.

Another results worth nothing is that, in the full model, the association between marital sanctification and volunteering became non-significant. In order to determine which religious factor accounted for this association, we ran supplemental models in which each religious variable was entered into Model 1 separately. Results showed that the relationship between wives' and husbands' sanctification of marriage and wives' and husbands' volunteering fell to non-significance when controlling for in-home religious activities. These findings indicate that those who have a greater sanctification of marriage tend to have higher in-home religious activities that may in turn increase the likelihood of couples' volunteering. These findings are in line with the relational spirituality framework in that couples who sanctify their marriage may invest their time in spiritual activities at home to enhance the perceived connection with the divine (Mahoney 2010). And such couples may invest their time and energy in volunteer work not only because volunteering is considered sacred itself, but also because it can be utilized to strengthen the couples' relationship (Pargament and Mahoney 2005).

Lastly, we confirmed the importance of religious service attendance by showing that greater levels of joint service attendance were positively associated with both



wives' and husbands' volunteering. These results are consistent with those of previous research that uses the individual as the unit of analysis, but they provide further insight into the role that religion plays in promoting marital functioning. Research shows that dissimilar patterns of religious attendance are linked to lower levels of marital quality and greater risk of divorce (Vaaler et al. 2009). In light of these findings, our study suggests that couples in which both spouses attend religious services regularly reap benefits from their investment in congregations, as it not only helps couples to build a relationship but is also associated with serving others in the community.

We mention a few limitations of this study. First, we were unable to consider whether the association between our religious variables and volunteering varies by domains of volunteering. Because married people are most likely to do volunteer work for religious organizations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015b: Table 4), we suspect that the results could have been different for secular volunteering if we included it. Future research may benefit from analyzing the association between religious variables and secular volunteering to determine whether our findings reported here are sensitive to the volunteering domain. Second, the data are cross-sectional; thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that selection is responsible for the observed association. Third, our data may overrepresent married couples who have more stable marriages; it is possible that some in our sample have left their marriages since the data were collected.

Despite these limitations, this study reaffirms previous research on religion-volunteering links but also adds important contexts to further understand how religion fosters volunteering within marriages. To our knowledge, this is the first study that applied the actor-partner interdependence model to investigate the relationship between religion and volunteering among U.S. heterosexual married couples. 20 years ago, Wilson (2000) points out that there has been little knowledge concerning how volunteering is encouraged in the family. Despite many publications on the subject of volunteering, volunteering behavior has been rarely analyzed at the couple level and no research has examined it along with religion, resulting in limited knowledge of volunteering among religious married individuals. Using a dyadic data, our study suggests that religious married individuals draw many cultural and social resources from their homes as well as their religious congregations.

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