



## Research Articles

# Personal Strengths and Compassionate Love for the Partner in Mexico

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## Abstract

Human nature consists of strengths whose possession has personal and interpersonal advantages. Among these are resilience, self-efficacy in the exercise of emotional regulation strategies (SEERE), optimism and subjective well-being (SWB), which can condition the expression of compassionate love (CL) towards the partner. Based on this, the objectives of this research were: 1) to identify the effect of resilience, SEERE, optimism and SWB in the CL towards the romantic partner and 2) to examine the differences in the variables mentioned by education and time in the relationship. To do this, we worked with 202 heterosexual couples from Mexico City who responded voluntarily, confidentially and anonymously. Among the results, positive and significant relationships were found between resilience, SEERE, optimism and SWB with CL towards the partner. Likewise, it was found that the higher the school level, the more resilience, optimism and flourishing; as well as differences by time in the relationship showing that CL predominates at the beginning of the relationship; while in later stages, more family support and SEERE in cognitive reappraisal are reported.

*Keywords:* compassionate love, resilience, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, optimism, subjective well-being, couple

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According to [Goodman, Disabato, and Kashdan \(2019\)](#), human nature contains—among other aspects—personal strengths that, rather than being a moral or virtuous issue, refer to the dispositional qualities that people possess and that make or promote their adjustment, adaptation and welfare. Although in general these characteristics show very positive effects on people, in some cases, these strengths go against the self. For example, when an individual tends to forgive easily, this places them in a position in which they are more likely to maintain relationships with people who can abuse that feature.

Within these personal strengths, compassionate love (CL) stands out, which refers to various forms of affections, cognitions and behaviors oriented towards another person in an unconditional way. For her part, [Underwood \(2002, 2009\)](#) defines it as the attitudes and actions related to giving of the self for the good of another and it does not matter if the person is unknown or known and necessarily includes: free choice, a precise understanding about the needs and feelings of the other person, value the other at a fundamental level, have openness, receptivity and an emotional commitment to the other. From this approach, CL does not only include reducing the stress of the other person, but also taking actions that promote their flourishing. The

Underwood's explanatory model of the CL includes several components: 1) antecedents that in turn are divided into contextual (cultural, and social) and individual (biological, developmental and personality), 2) situational (the context and the type of relationship they have with the person), 3) motivation and discernment (includes personal reflection and the decision to act or express something for the good of the other and judge the appropriateness of the action), 4) consequences that involve actions and attitudes (unconditionally carry out positive behavior or not, towards the other or have an attitude that expresses through the face, body or words care or affection) and feedback (when CL is given, feedback can be generated both intrinsically, which involves the effect of the choice and action in the agent itself, or extrinsically, that is to say, coming from others, from their own actions or apparent motivations).

It should be noted that CL is associated with other psychological aspects such as altruism, support, voluntarism, attachment and empathy, but it is not synonymous to them. However, it is not difficult to find this ambiguity in the literature. For example, empathy plays the role as an emotional component that allows inferring the need or suffering of others in order to then activate the CL but it is not CL in itself (Villar-Ezcurra, 2007).

Although this feeling is generalizable to everyone, it has been observed that it is more intense when the sorrow is in people who are more important to the agent of the CL or to the person who feels it (Sober & Wilson, 1999). An example of this is the romantic partner, since this is considered a unique and close bond unlike any other (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), in whose midst, the attraction that unites and maintains both members interested in getting to know each other and interacting frequently over time. This contributes to generating interdependence between both people, connecting, involving and synchronizing their lives at the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels; which consequently will maintain and enrich their bond, making it more affectionate in its multiple forms (passion, affection or love) and more constructive (Sánchez-Aragón, 2013).

Thus, Fehr, Harasymchuk, and Sprecher (2014) recognize the importance of CL in the couple's relationship while mentioning that its understanding and significance has been "overshadowed" by the attention that has been placed on romantic love by several decades. However, there are definitions and theoretical models that help clarify its essence and functioning.

Regarding the conceptions of CL, there is that of Sprecher and Fehr (2005) who say that it is a love based on generosity and absence of selfishness, in which the partner is valued without taking into account the costs for the self, and providing a sense of happiness and fulfillment in the giver. On the other hand, Underwood (2002) indicates that it inspires behaviors related to commitment, tolerance and trust such as sharing, empathizing and supporting (actions typical of a healthy couple relationship). Along the same line, authors such as House, Landis, and Umberson (2011) have evidence that helping other people ensures connection with them, which, for example, improves bodily functions and accelerates recovery from the disease.

It is in this relational context that two important contributions have been made that manage to explain the behavior of CL in the couple:

1. Berscheid (2006, 2010) defines CL as the concern for the well-being of the partner and taking actions to promote it, without these being perceived as a result of future benefits for the self. In her model, CL is one of the four fundamental types of love along with romantic/passionate, companionship and attachment. She distinguishes between historical causes (e.g., evolutionary factors) and proximal causes of CL (perception

of stress in the other and identification of the most effective response to alleviate such stress). She also suggests that this type of love can develop in the early stages of the couple relationship but is only put to the test when support and sacrifice are required over time.

2. **Neff and Karney (2008)** consider that CL occurs at the beginning of the couple relationship and define it as a global positive assessment of the couple, as well as the precise understanding and acceptance of their strengths and weaknesses. Their model is based on two premises: 1) love is an integral attitude towards the partner (e.g., my partner is wonderful) that is based on a variety of perceptions and judgments (hierarchical) regarding their specific traits and abilities (e.g., my partner organizes clothes very well) and 2) the motivation of each member of the couple to see the other positively, may vary depending on the hierarchy of perceptions and judgments (general or specific), since it seems more important for the couple to believe that their partners are good or valuable in general, than to believe that they are talented in some particular aspect, which contributes more to marital satisfaction. In this way, the self-interest of each person can influence the global perception of their partner. In congruence, the motivation to see the partner under a positive light may not work so well when the members of the couple are evaluating specific qualities, since in this way they would be recognizing faults and imperfections that will have negative consequences on marital satisfaction. This reasoning suggests that among happily married and newly-wed couples—basically—some people base their positive view of the other on an accurate understanding of specific qualities, while others do so generally. The latter also recognize the negative and positive qualities of their partner, but thanks to CL, the other is valued despite their faults and weaknesses, forgetting about their selfish concerns, that is, what they want to find in their partner.

Although **Berscheid (2006, 2010)** recognizes the importance of CL, his approach only describes that it is one of the main types, mentions its typical behaviors and places them both at the beginning of the relationship and posteriori. While **Neff and Karney (2008)** point out that there are those who feel a CL from the beginning of their relationship because it is based on a specific evaluation of features that are positive or, on a global one that arises because negative features are observed but that stop having importance because the imperative thing is to love the person and not the selfish complication of dealing with these attributes.

Returning to the notion of human strengths from **Goodman et al. (2019)** there are others such as resilience, self-efficacy in the execution of emotional regulation strategies (SEERE), optimism and subjective well-being (SWB). Although some have been studied with the CL, their approach has not been with Mexican couples, nor have they been together in the same investigation, so they will be described and intertwined below, giving rise to the approaches of this research.

*Resilience* has been studied as the dynamic process of coping (**Grotberg, 2003**) and successful adaptation of people to adversity, extremely difficult situations and highly stressful scenarios (**Reich, Zautra, & Stuart, 2010**), finding benefits and generating new meanings that allow the person to grow and face new challenges with greater security and in a better way (**Seligman, 2002; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003**), in other words, emerge stronger from misfortune. Thus, it goes through a tripartite process that integrates that the person: recovers, resists and reconfigures their reality (**Lepore & Revenson, 2006**) by means of a trajectory of healthy functioning over time, as well as the ability to generate and express positive emotions (**Bonanno, 2005**).

Although research on resilience in couple relationships is very limited, **Skerrett (2015)** coined the term *we-ness* to refer to the sense of commonality between the couple that allows them to respond in a unique way to the

challenges of common life. Thus, in the face of a traumatic event, the members of the couple are likely to use a repertoire of behaviors and solutions based on similar previous experiences. In a study carried out by [Neff and Brody \(2011\)](#) on this topic, they identified that resilience was shown to be a key element in the management of relational difficulties and their maintenance over time. In such a way that to the extent that couples have the adequate resources to cope with moderate stress in their lives, the exposure to it cultivates the belief of being effective and resilient. As a basis for the notion of [Skerrett \(2015\)](#), [Walsh \(2011\)](#) mentions that mutual empathy facilitates relational resilience, and also describes as such, the relational empowerment achieved through the expression of CL and relational competence creates a socio-emotional intelligence between both of which include awareness, generosity, curiosity, healthy boundary setting, and interpersonal sensitivity. Together these elements contribute to the quality of resilience and are essential to its process during the stress that the couple may experience and the strategies they use to regulate their emotions.

In this line, the personal belief of each member of the couple about their abilities to organize and execute the necessary strategies to handle the emotions that are presented to them and that lead them to successfully achieve these actions ([Sánchez-Aragón, Díaz-Loving, & López-Becerra, 2008](#)) is known as *self-efficacy in the exercise of emotional regulation strategies* (SEERE). Two of the most relevant are: 1) cognitive reappraisal (CR) that involves the reconstruction of a potentially eliciting situation of emotion in such a way that its impact on the individual is modified and the stimulus is better responded to and 2) expressive suppression (ES) that involves the inhibition, camouflage or concealment of expressive behaviors of emotion favoring health problems ([Gross & Thompson, 2014](#)). Hence, when people consider that they dominate these strategies it is understood that they have SEERE.

In relation to CL, [Stellar and Keltner \(2014\)](#) indicate that because this type of love is an affective response focused on the suffering of the other, the person who expresses it must feel capable of managing their own emotions to provide someone who suffers with another way the CL would become stress. From another perspective, feeling CL impacts negative affect or favors positive affect, which would put CL as a means of emotional regulation ([Gilbert, McEwan, Matos, & Ravis, 2011](#)). Since CL implies, on the one hand, the sadness of seeing the other suffer and the love to do something for them. On that account, they suggest that the successful use of certain sadness regulation strategies—particularly CR—allows to react more affectionately towards the affected person, which also favors the connection with them ([Stellar & Keltner, 2014](#)). However, other investigations indicate that precisely the use of CR as a strategy to regulate one's CL as an emotion, reduces the compassionate response because it prevents getting negatively engaged with the dejection of the other ([Cameron & Payne, 2011](#)). Thus, it can be said that CL and SEERE interact in such a way that the way in which CL is provided to the other person will depend on the ability to regulate one's own emotions ([Inwood & Ferrari, 2018](#)).

Another strength with evidence in the literature for its beneficial effect on human life is *optimism*. [Kleiman et al. \(2017\)](#) recognizing the multifaceted nature of this construct, describe it as having positive expectations towards the future, a style to infer with a positive bias, the illusion of personal control over situations, as well as an “improved” focus to others. For their part, [Raksha and Swaran \(2018\)](#) conceptualized it as the generalized tendency to expect life situations to be positive. In consequence, optimism is related to hope, self-efficacy, motivation, confidence and perseverance in the face of stress-provoking situations or those of great adversity ([Seligman, 2002](#)). And it is linked to greater professional success, better problem solving, good health ([Zepeda-Goncen & Sánchez-Aragón, 2021](#)) and a longer life ([Peterson, 2000](#)).

More specifically, some researchers have identified the qualities that encourage the healthy functioning of the couple, among which CL and optimism stand out for generating intimacy, inspiring warm feelings, openness and the desire to be reciprocal, facilitating forgiveness, satisfaction and commitment (McDonald, Olson, Goddard, & Marshall, 2018). According to these authors, optimism enriches creativity, the ability to solve problems in a more cooperative and constructive way (Assad, Donnellan, & Conger, 2007; Neff & Geers, 2013) and it has positive effects on energy, which predisposes individuals to seek that their partners are also happy and welfare not only individually but also within the relationship (e.g., Williamson, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013), which is particularly evident in women (Goddard, Olson, Galovan, Schramm, & Marshall, 2016). In addition, the fact that the CL agent is positive in life, places it in a slightly dominant or advantageous position compared to the receiver, since the former is conceived with sufficient cognitive and emotional resources to provide CL (Smith, Ruiz, Cundiff, Baron, & Nealy Moore, 2013) and with it well-being on a personal and interpersonal level.

Finally, SWB as a health reference, includes from Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) vision and Diener et al. (2010): 1) positive and negative affect that involves the emotional aspects experienced by people, 2) flourishing that evaluates self-perceived success in areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purposes in life and enthusiasm and, 3) satisfaction with life understood as a cognitive judgment regarding the evaluation that a person makes over the quality of their life considering the expectations about it and the quality of their personal relationships such as that of a couple, life events, discrepancy between aspirations and achievements, perception of self-efficacy, as well as positive or negative thoughts.

In relation to CL, it has been identified that those with higher SWB are better able to be compassionate with others and with themselves and conversely, as they feel more CL, their well-being increases (Sprecher, Fehr, & Zimmerman, 2007; Zessin, Dickhäuser, & Garbade, 2015). And this is because experiencing momentary and permanent positive emotions predisposes the individual to perform compassionate acts (e.g., provide support, care, sacrifice and be responsive) in a close relationship—such as that of a couple—and vice versa, that is, experience CL by a friend or partner is associated with feeling good, improving their self-esteem, increasing their closeness and elevating their spirituality (at the individual level) as well as having all these effects in the recipient of such loving manifestations (Fehr et al., 2014).

Although the effects of gender and even certain diseases have been sought in some of these variables, the search for differences by education or by time in the relationship was not identified. In this regard, Giménez-Hernández (2005) and Morales-Rodríguez and Díaz-Barajas (2011) reported that the more education, their participants scored more in optimism and resilience, which can be explained by the fact that studying provides resources that give the person greater possibilities of being happy even at the cost of adversity, they can have more hope, a positive forecast for the future, be more cautious and deepen the analysis of the situation they face and thereby generate a better approach and solution (Gómez-Azcarate et al., 2014). As for the time in the relationship, Berscheid (2006, 2010) points out that CL occurs at the beginning of the relationship and as time passes it is tested. In turn, Neff and Kerney (2008) mention that it occurs mainly at the beginning of the relationship. In a study by Sánchez-Aragón (2018) optimism in couples in development versus dissolution was compared, finding that at the beginning of the relationship there is more of it. However, the scores do not decrease from the theoretical mean.

Based on the above, the purposes of this research were: 1) to identify the effect of resilience, SEERE, optimism and SWB in the CL towards the partner and 2) to examine the differences in the variables mentioned by education and time in the relationship.

## Method

### Participants

This research worked with a non-probabilistic sample of 202 healthy heterosexual couples from Mexico City. The members of the couple have ages ranged from 18 to 64 years ( $M = 37.56$ ,  $SD = 11.34$ ), in terms of their education, 18.6% had middle school, 31.9% had high school and 48% had a bachelor's degree. The range of time in the couple relationship ranged from 5 months to 38 years ( $M = 14.21$ ,  $SD = 9.8$  years).

About the characteristics of the sample, women age ranged from 18 to 61 years ( $M = 36.92$ ,  $SD = 11.05$ ), in terms of their education, 18.8% had middle school, 33.2% had high school and 48% had a bachelor's degree. The range of time in the couple relationship ranged from 5 months to 38 years ( $M = 14.21$ ,  $SD = 9.8$  years). For their part, the men: age ranged from 18 to 64 years ( $M = 38.20$ ,  $SD = 11.61$ ), in terms of their education, 18.3% had middle school, 30.7% had high school and 51% had a bachelor's degree. The range of time in the couple relationship ranged from 5 months to 38 years ( $M = 14.21$ ,  $SD = 9.8$  years).

### Measurements

The measures used to evaluate the variables were:

**Compassionate Love Scale towards the Partner** (Flórez-Rodríguez & Sánchez-Aragón, 2019). It consists in its short version of 10 questions in Likert-type format with five response options that indicate degrees of agreement and are distributed in two factors that explain 61.96% of the variance ( $KMO = .981$ , *Bartlett's Sphericity Test* = 25239.795,  $df = 528$ ,  $p < .001$ ): 1) Emotional support and empathy with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) of .97 and includes items such as: "I try to help my partner as much as I can," "My partner can trust that I will be there for him/her if he/she needs me" and "When I see my partner is sad, I feel the need to help him/her," and 2) Altruistic love with an  $\alpha = .93$  and items such as: "I would rather suffer myself than see my partner suffer," "One of the things that gives meaning to my life is helping my partner" and "I am willing to sacrifice for my partner."

**Resilience Scale** (Palomar-Lever & Gómez-Valdez, 2010), which in its short version consists of 20 questions with Likert-type format, assesses the five main aspects of resilience and whose total Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) is .93: 1) Strength and self-confidence that has an  $\alpha = .92$  and with 19 items, among them: "What has happened to me in the past makes me feel confident to face new challenges," 2) Social competence whose  $\alpha = .87$  and has eight items such as: "It is easy for me to establish contact with other people," 3) Family support that has an  $\alpha = .87$  and has six items such as: "I have a good relationship with my family," 4) Social support with an  $\alpha = .84$  and consists of five questions such as: "I have some friends/relatives... who really care about me" and 5) Structure whose  $\alpha = .79$  and that has five questions like: "Rules and routine make my life easier."

**Self-efficacy in the Execution of Emotional Regulation Strategies Scale** (Sánchez-Aragón et al., 2008) consists of two sections: trait and state. However, for this research only the trait factor was used, which is composed of 12 items divided into two factors that explain 61.42% of the variance and whose five-point Likert-type response format, evaluate to what extent it is believed that there is the capacity to carry out each of the two emotional regulation strategies: 1) Cognitive Appreciation with  $\alpha = .84$  and with items such as: “I re-evaluate the situation and modify my reaction” and 2) Expressive Suppression with  $\alpha = .71$  and with examples of items such as: “I fake and control any sign of emotion.”

**Optimism Scale** (Sánchez-Aragón, 2018) includes 27 items in Likert-type response format distributed in four factors that explain 55.11% of the variance ( $KMO = .961$  and *Bartlett's Sphericity Test* = 11466.149,  $df = 378$ ,  $p < .001$ ): 1) Positive Attitude ( $\alpha = .90$ ) with items such as: “I am optimistic even though it seems that what is coming will be negative,” 2) Internal Control ( $\alpha = .78$ ) with statements such as: “I think that if you work hard enough, you can achieve anything,” 3) Self-confidence ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and even statements like: “no task is too difficult for me” and 4) Hope ( $\alpha = .80$ ) consisting of sentences like: “I think my future is going to be very good.”

**Subjective Well-being Scales** (Diener et al., 1985, 2010; Granillo-Velasco, Sánchez-Aragón, & Zepeda-Goncen, 2020): 1) Emotional Experiences with 12 Likert items divided into two factors that explain 58.99% of the variance: a) positive (“pleasure,” “happiness”;  $\alpha = .85$ ) and b) negative (“sadness,” “bad”:  $\alpha = .81$ ), 2) Flourishing with 8 Likert items in one factor that explains the 58.13% of the variance and with items such as: “I am a good person and I live a good life,” “I have a useful and significant life” ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and 3) Life Satisfaction with 5 Likert items in a factor that explains 63.78% of the variance and whose examples of items are: “I am satisfied with my life,” “the circumstances of my life are good” ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

## Procedure

The application of approximately 30 minutes was carried out by qualified psychologists who went to places where they could find people with a current relationship and at least 1 month of living together (shopping malls, houses, schools, offices, recreational and cultural centers, etc.). So, participants (both members of the couple) were asked to participate in a voluntary and anonymous manner answering the scales that would not cause them any harm. They were also told that their answers would only be used for scientific purposes. Likewise, their questions were answered immediately during the application and their personal results were made available to the participants.

## Results

To meet the first objective, a product-moment Pearson correlation analysis was performed. The results show that the more hope (optimism) and life satisfaction, the more support and empathy (CL) is displayed. In addition, the more social support, family support, strength, structure and social competence (resilience), CR, hope, positive attitude, internal control and self-confidence (optimism), flourishing, life satisfaction and positive emotional experience, greater altruistic love is expressed (CL) (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Correlations Between Resilience, SEERE, Optimism and SWB With CL*

Variable	Support & empathy	Altruistic love
<b>Resilience</b>		
Strength	-	.223**
Social competence	-	.204**
Family support	-	.285**
Social support	-	.306**
Structure	-	.205**
<b>SEERE</b>		
CR	-	.134**
ES	-	-
<b>Optimism</b>		
Positive attitude	-	.298**
Internal control	-	.284**
Self-confidence	-	.182**
Hope	.173**	.339**
<b>SWB</b>		
Positive emotional experience	-	.299**
Negative emotional experience	-	-
Flourishing	-	.380**
Life satisfaction	.171**	.303**

*Note.* SEERE = self-efficacy in the exercise of emotional regulation strategies; CR = cognitive reappraisal; CL = compassionate love; ES = expressive suppression; SWB = subjective well-being.

\*\* $p = .01$ .

Subsequently, one-way variance analyzes were carried out both to examine the differences by education and by time in the couple relationship. For the first case, it was found that people with bachelor's studies showed more resilience, optimism and flourishing compared to the other groups but mainly with those with middle school studies (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Differences in Resilience, SEERE, Optimism, Subjective Well-Being and CL by Education*

Variable	Middle school ( $N = 75$ )	High school ( $N = 129$ )	Bachelor's degree ( $N = 194$ )	$F$	$p$	Differences between groups
<b>Resilience</b>						
Strength	3.81	4.02	4.09	4.518	.011	M-B
Social competence	3.39	3.86	3.93	13.748	.000	M-H, M-B
Family support	4.09	4.18	4.35	4.412	.013	-
Social support	4.14	4.28	4.48	7.584	.001	M-B
Structure	3.51	3.76	3.85	6.133	.002	M-B



Variable	Middle school (N = 75)	High school (N = 129)	Bachelor's degree (N = 194)	F	p	Diferences between groups
<b>SEERE</b>						
CR	3.42	3.58	3.64	-		-
ES	3.15	3.36	3.24	-		-
<b>Optimism</b>						
Positive attitude	3.85	4.01	4.13	5.781	.003	M-B
Internal control	4.03	4.19	4.27	5.321	.005	M-B
Self-confidence	3.56	3.77	3.87	5.502	.004	M-B
Hope	3.81	4.01	4.06	3.863	.022	-
<b>SWB</b>						
Positive emotional experience	2.07	2.05	1.90	-		-
Negative emotional experience	2.34	2.30	2.22	-		-
Flourishing	4.07	4.19	4.32	5.907	.003	M-B
Life satisfaction	3.92	4.01	4.07	-		-
<b>CL</b>						
Support and empathy	3.43	3.43	3.26	-		-
Altruistic love	4.36	4.47	4.52	-		-

Note. SEERE = self-efficacy in the exercise of emotional regulation strategies; CR = cognitive reappraisal; CL = compassionate love; ES = expressive suppression; SWB = subjective well-being; M-B = middle school-bachelor; M-H = middle school-high school.

Regarding the differences by time in the relationship, there were fewer differences among the groups and more similarities. Thus, the data show that people with more time in the relationship (from 13.3 years onwards) scored more in family support (resilience factor) and in self-efficacy in the exercise of CR; while those with less time in the relationship (from 5 months to 13.3 years) scored more in negative emotion experience and in CL (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Differences in Resilience, SEERE, Optimism, SWB and CL by Time in Relationship*

Variable	5 months – 4.6 years (N = 84)	4.7 – 13 years (N = 118)	13.3 – 22.4 years (N = 99)	22.6 – 41 years (N = 103)	F	p
<b>Resilience</b>						
Strength	3.95	4.01	4.06	4.03	-	
Competence	3.77	3.82	3.81	3.84	-	
Family support	4.02	4.30	4.33	4.32	4.609	.003
Social support	4.29	4.41	4.42	4.29	-	
Structure	3.65	3.77	3.79	3.83	-	
<b>SEERE</b>						
CR	3.49	3.42	3.70	3.71	4.809	.003
ES	3.20	3.19	3.24	3.41	-	
<b>Optimism</b>						
Positive attitude	3.99	4.01	4.01	4.16	-	
Internal control	4.17	4.19	4.17	4.27	-	
Self-confidence	3.72	3.72	3.83	3.84	-	
Hope	4.03	4.03	3.94	3.99	-	

Variable	5 months – 4.6 years (N = 84)	4.7 – 13 years (N = 118)	13.3 – 22.4 years (N = 99)	22.6 – 41 years (N = 103)	F	p
<b>SWB</b>						
Positive emotional experience	1.93	1.99	1.96	2.05	-	
Negative emotional experience	2.39	2.34	2.22	2.13	2.789	.040
Flourishing	4.14	4.28	4.20	4.31	-	
Life satisfaction	4.01	4.05	3.93	4.09	-	
<b>CL</b>						
Support and empathy	3.63	3.50	3.21	3.05	9.438	.000
Altruistic love	4.59	4.59	4.37	4.36	5.089	.002

*Note.* SEERE = self-efficacy in the exercise of emotional regulation strategies; CR = cognitive reappraisal; CL = compassionate love; ES = expressive suppression; SWB = subjective well-being.

## Discussion

The premise of this research was that personal strengths are the qualities that enrich the lives of those who possess them and of those who are close to them, particularly their partners. This research was aimed at: 1) identifying the effect of resilience, SEERE, optimism and SWB in the CL towards the partner, and 2) examining the differences in the variables mentioned by education and time in the relationship. To do this, some correlation and variance analysis were carried out, which showed interesting results.

Regarding the first objective, it was found that when participants have more conviction that their future will bring good things (hope-optimism factor) and feel more satisfaction with the conditions of their own life compared to their ideal, the participants try to help more their partner, they consider that their partner can trust that they will receive what they need, and they recognize that when they see their partners sad, they feel the need to help them (support and empathy-CL factor). This may be because when a person has a positive vision of both the past and what the future holds, it gives them a potential value that enables them to generate actions aimed at alleviating or providing comfort to their partner (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), prioritize them, show them how important he/she is and understand them (Reis, Maniaci, & Rogge, 2014). In addition to the above, the fact that CL has empathy as an emotional component, allows us to infer the right moments in which CL can manifest itself and thus alleviate the suffering of the partner (Villar-Ezcurra, 2007). This is particularly important because to the extent that the partner is well, the participant will also experience their own well-being (Berscheid, 2006, 2010; Sober & Wilson, 1999).

Moreover, the data show that to the extent that participants feel better people whose life is useful and meaningful, who have characteristics such as being optimistic and competent as well as being respected by others (flourishing); with greater life satisfaction and more positive emotions in everyday life such as happiness, pleasure and joy (SWB); likewise, greater encouragement towards life's challenges and situations (positive attitude-optimism), more beliefs of self-efficacy (internal control-optimism), greater self-confidence about one's own abilities (self-confidence-optimism) and hope for the good that the future will bring (hope-optimism); as well as more social and family support, strength that comes from learning from adverse situations in the past, a more structured life and greater capacities to relate socially (all resilience factors), they express their CL in an altruistic way, preferring to suffer themselves than seeing their partner suffer, they also prefer to engage in actions that help the partner, and to sacrifice for the partner. This, in general, confirms that the individual's

personal strengths contribute to spending a lot of effort and time being attentive to the well-being of their partner, a fundamental intention of CL (Underwood, 2002, 2009) where generosity and lack of selfishness are evident (Sprecher & Fehr, 2014).

More specifically, when individuals feel flourishing, they experience positive emotions and by evaluating their life as valuable, this predisposes them to provide, to care, to be responsive to the needs of their partners and to sacrifice for them; which consequently will make them feel good, improve their self-esteem and increase closeness with them (Fehr et al., 2014) in addition to the positive effects on partners such as feeling loved, valued, accompanied and supported (Zessin et al., 2015). Concerning the relationship between optimism and altruistic love, it can be said that when people have positive expectations about the future (Kleiman et al., 2017; Raksha & Swaran, 2018) and trust in their own resources, this puts them in a slightly dominant position to solve the problem that afflicts their partner through CL (Smith et al., 2013). Finally, the relationship between resilience and altruistic love can be better understood from the Grotberg (2003), Reich et al. (2010) and Seligman (2002) perspectives, whom, when defining resilience, list its attributes: successful adaptation to adversity, ability to find benefits, generate new meanings to situations, allow growth and face situations with greater security and better way. All of them enable people to see stressful stimuli as a challenge and not as a threat, therefore, they can solve not only their problems, but also those of their partner in a sensitive and competent way (Skerrett, 2015; Walsh, 2011) by connecting better with them (House et al., 2011) and their needs. Even when the scenario is negative, the person sees the benefits of doing good to their partner (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003) and therefore to themselves (Fehr et al., 2014).

When exploring the differences by education regarding the variables under study, it was found that participants with a bachelor's degree have more resilience, optimism and a sense of flourishing (SWB) compared to those from middle school and then to those of high school. This could be explained from the point of view that with greater school preparation, people develop more capacities through daily experience. These skills have to do with problem solving, with a positive approach to the short and medium-term future, and with the assessment that they are a good person and have a useful and satisfactory life. Education provides small tests that highlight these resources and accumulated learning. Based on this, people can have a sense of cognitive and emotional evolution that better enables them to respond to the demands of life (Giménez-Hernández, 2005; Gómez-Azcarate et al., 2014; Morales-Rodríguez & Díaz-Barajas, 2011).

Finally, when examining the differences by time in the relationship in resilience, SEERE, optimism, SWB and CL, it was observed that participants with more than 13 years in their relationship scored more in family support (resilience) and in self-efficacy in the exercise of CR compared to those who have less time in their relationship. These findings may be due to the fact that being in a relationship for more than 13 years implies continuity, an ingredient in the stability of couple relationships (Retana-Franco & Sánchez-Aragón, 2006), which is why the members of the couple have had the opportunity to: 1) experience ups and downs that have allowed their families to be counted on, which is particularly important in collectivist cultures such as the Mexican culture, this coupled with 2) learning not to easily "get hooked" or negatively engaged on emotional-triggering events to resolve them in the best way (Gross & Thompson, 2014) and making use of the Skerrett's commonality (2015) to exercise shared resilience among the members of the couple; all this with the purpose of not damaging the relationship (Sánchez-Aragón, 2009). On the other hand, participants with less than 13 years in their relationship experience more negative emotions (SWB) and express more CL for their partner (support and empathy, and altruistic love) compared to those who have more time. This could be due to the fact that

the less time in the relationship, leads to a coexistence between the couple which presents them with more novel situations that can elicit more differences between their members, in addition to that, more “errors” are manifested since the couple is still getting to know each other. This helps emotions to be experienced more intensely and impulsively, which can tinge the person with negativity (Sánchez-Aragón, 2018). In contrast, less time in the relationship contributes to the participants feeling more CL for their partner, this is supported by Berscheid (2006, 2010) who considers that this type of love develops in the early stages but is actually tested when support and sacrifice are required over time. For their part, Neff and Karney (2008) say that CL occurs more in newly married couples or those happily married, and they explain that this type of love can arise from the global evaluation of the couple and the subsequent acceptance of their negative qualities without damaging the relationship; or, from the immediate evaluation and acceptance of the specific characteristics of the couple. Lastly, Sánchez-Aragón (2018) found that in the development and maintenance stages of the relationship there was more support, expression of love, interaction and communication compared to those people in the process of dissolution, showing that at the beginning there is more empathy and willingness to sacrifice for their partner because there is more motivation and love.

In conclusion, this study confirms the value of personal strengths (Goodman et al., 2019) in the individual and in their couple relationship, since some effects that were not very high were evidenced and they indicate positive relationships between resilience, SEERE, optimism and SWB with the attitudinal and behavioral expression of CL. This work theoretically complements the field because its findings provide empirical data that reveal how the variables studied are linked to the notion of sacrifice for the partner, but not to “regular support.” This could imply that there are other variables—to be identified—that can determine the presence of empathy and support, but also that the strengths studied only emerge in situations that require sacrifice or deprivation. Likewise, the results—although in some weak cases—provide more comprehensive information on how various variables not studied together in other countries, including Mexico, are associated with CL for one's partner. In the same way, it was found, on the one hand, that formal education contributes to the enrichment of these resources, and on the other, that CL predominates at the beginning of relationships and aspects such as social support and reappreciation of the emotions that arise in life. These features manifest better as the years go by. This knowledge obtained makes it necessary to strengthen the members of the relationship in terms of their personal resources, mainly when they have low education or go through other stages of the couple life cycle. In this sense, the results are also a guideline towards their application in clinical or marital orientation contexts.

Regarding the future directions of this study, it is suggested to analyze the variables in the stages of the couple's life cycle more deeply, adding other variables such as gratitude, tolerance and empathy, which would provide a clearer idea of the mechanisms fundamentals of CL and even explore the behavior of the same variables in other types of personal relationships.

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## Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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