



Self-compassionate and apologetic? How and why having compassion toward the self relates to a willingness to apologize



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ABSTRACT

After offending someone, transgressors can offer an apology to attenuate the destructive consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, even though apologies can be immensely beneficial, transgressors often withhold an apology because it can feel uncomfortable to accept blame for wrongful behavior. We sought to enhance our understanding of factors that shape transgressors' responses by investigating whether self-compassion is associated with greater willingness to apologize. Because self-compassionate people withhold self-judgment and become less overwhelmed by experiencing negative emotions, they tend to face rather than withdraw from challenging situations. We therefore predicted that self-compassionate people would be more willing to apologize because they are less likely to withdraw in the context of transgressing, and we found support for this prediction in one study using a large sample. These findings expand our knowledge of factors that aid in conflict resolution and demonstrate that being understanding toward one's failures promotes constructive responses to those failures.

Sometimes, we hurt the people we love and care about with actions that can be as innocent as telling a white lie or as severe as being unfaithful to a romantic partner. Although we often experience regret following such harmful actions (Fisher & Exline, 2010), we tend to hurt others quite often, with recent data from a diary study suggesting that we transgress against others almost once a day (Schumann, 2014). These offenses can have destructive consequences for both transgressors and their victims, including damage to their relationship (Carrere & Gottman, 1999; Cramer, 2000) and psychological and physiological distress (Bastian et al., 2013; Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998). These offenses can even have negative implications for people in their broader social networks, such as their children (Katz & Gottman, 1993) and work colleagues (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Morrison, 2008). In fact, because offenses can threaten people's relationships and expose them to negative social interactions, they have the potential to severely undermine wellbeing (Cohen, 2004; Parker-Pope, 2010).

Fortunately, offenses do not always result in such negative consequences, as transgressors can engage in actions that can repair their hurtful behavior. One of the most effective strategies that transgressors can use is an apology. Apologies help victims empathize with their transgressors (Barkat, 2002; McCullough, Worthington, Maxey, &

Rachal, 1997) and view them more positively (Darby & Schlenker, 1989; Hareli & Eisikovits, 2006; Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003). As such, apologies increase victim forgiveness (Darby & Schlenker, 1989; Exline, Deshea, & Holeman, 2007; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; McCullough et al., 1997; Schumann, 2012; Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001) and reduce victim aggression toward the transgressor (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989), thus promoting reconciliation rather than continued anger and resentment. However, even though apologies can be immensely beneficial, transgressors often do not apologize (e.g., Exline et al., 2007), and may even respond defensively by denying responsibility, blaming the victim, or minimizing the severity of the harm (Hall & Fincham, 2005). As recent findings suggest, transgressors may avoid apologizing because they anticipate that doing so will feel humiliating and stressful (Leunissen, De Cremer, van Dijke, & Folmer, 2014). Apologizing requires admitting fault and accepting blame for wrongful actions, which people are motivated to avoid doing to maintain their positive sense of self (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Hedrick, 2013; Schumann, 2014; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008).

What, then, influences transgressors' general willingness to engage in the highly constructive response of apologizing? At present, little is known about the predictors of apology behavior. Yet, as the research findings reviewed above suggest, developing our understanding of factors that promote greater willingness to apologize is important, as

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the actions a transgressor chooses to take after committing an offense—such as apologizing or withholding an apology—can have important implications for everyone involved. The present research thus seeks to enhance our understanding of factors that shape transgressors' responses to the people they have hurt. Specifically, we investigate one individual difference predictor that we believe exerts an important influence on transgressors' willingness to apologize: self-compassion. In addition, we investigate why self-compassion might relate to willingness to apologize by examining shame and guilt proneness and behavioral tendencies that are associated with shame and guilt proneness as potential mediators.

1. Self-compassion and willingness to apologize via shame and guilt proneness

Self-compassion refers to how we treat ourselves in the face of our own failures and mistakes (Neff, 2003). It is thought to include three components, namely the tendency to treat oneself with kindness rather than harshness, to recognize that making mistakes is part of being human rather than something that only “I” do, and to accept one's negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors without judgment rather than either with defensiveness or self-deprecation (Neff, 2003, 2016).

When it comes to apologizing, compassion toward one's flaws and shortcomings might conceivably lead transgressors in either direction. On the one hand, self-compassion might make transgressors more willing to apologize by decreasing their need to hide from or minimize their mistakes; not feeling this need to withdraw might therefore make them feel more comfortable confronting and accepting responsibility for their wrongdoing via an apology (Schumann, 2014; Schumann, *in press*). On the other hand, self-compassion might make transgressors less willing to apologize because they might attribute mistakes to being human; in showing kindness toward themselves, they might preemptively excuse their actions and therefore not feel the need to repair these actions by offering an apology. These two possibilities suggest different pathways through which self-compassion might relate to a willingness to apologize: (1) that self-compassion will be *positively associated* with transgressors' willingness to apologize through a reduced need to withdraw in shame, or (2) that self-compassion will be *negatively associated* with transgressors' willingness to apologize through a reduced need to repair actions they feel guilty about.

Based on past research, however, we expected to find support for the first possibility, as self-compassion has been associated with fewer withdrawal behaviors and greater reparative behaviors. For example, self-compassionate people tend to use fewer avoidance-oriented strategies when dealing with challenging situations (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejjterat, 2005), are more likely to acknowledge responsibility for personal mistakes and interpersonal offenses (Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts Allen, & Hancock, 2007), and are more willing to try to repair these mistakes (Breines & Chen, 2012; Howell, Dopko, Turowski, & Buro, 2011).

Moreover, self-compassion is associated with decreased proneness to feeling ashamed (i.e., negative evaluations of oneself), and is not associated with proneness to feeling guilty (i.e., negative evaluations of one's behavior; Barnard & Curry, 2012; Lewis, 1971; Mosewich, Kowalski, Sabiston, Sedgwick, & Tracy, 2011; Woods & Proeve, 2014). As the conceptual definition of self-compassion implies, a self-compassionate attitude should make people less prone to making negative self-evaluations when faced with challenging situations, but should not necessarily lead them to view the negative aspects of their behavior in a more positive or more negative light (Neff, 2003). Instead, it should lead them to view their mistakes and the consequences of those mistakes accurately, rather than denying or exaggerating them (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003).

Shame and guilt also tend to have differential associations with responses to committing transgressions. Whereas shame has often been associated with defensive and withdrawal behaviors as a way to protect

a defective self-concept (Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, & Brown, 2012; Luyten, Fontaine, & Corveleyn, 2002; Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; Tangney, 1990; Tangney, Stuewig, & Martinez, 2014; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992), guilt has been associated with greater willingness to apologize as a way to repair one's negative behavior (Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967; Lewis, 1971; Riek, Luna, & Schnabelrauch, 2014; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). We therefore predicted that self-compassion would be associated with a reduced tendency to hide and withdraw in shame, and that this reduction would be associated with an increased willingness to apologize. By contrast, even though guilt has consistently been associated with greater willingness to apologize, we did not expect guilt proneness to mediate a relationship between self-compassion and willingness to apologize due to its lack of association with self-compassion.

2. Present research

In the present research, we investigated the associations between dispositional self-compassion and willingness to apologize as mediated by the dispositional tendencies to engage in ashamed and guilty responses to committing transgressions. Although previous research has found associations between self-compassion and willingness to apologize (Breines & Chen, 2012; Howell et al., 2011) and between self-compassion and the tendency to feel ashamed (Barnard & Curry, 2012; Mosewich et al., 2011; Woods & Proeve, 2014), to our knowledge no research has tested the associations among these variables simultaneously. We believe this is important, because understanding the psychological process through which self-compassionate people become more willing to apologize provides useful information about what active psychological ingredients might be targeted to promote more constructive, apologetic behavior. Thus, we sought to replicate past work demonstrating a link between self-compassion and willingness to apologize and extend this work by testing whether shame or guilt proneness mediate this link.

As an additional aim and novel contribution of the present research, we distinguished between the tendency to *feel* guilt and shame and the tendency to engage in ashamed and guilty *behaviors*. According to recent research (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011), both shame and guilt include emotional responses (shame: feeling bad about yourself; guilt: feeling bad about how you acted) and action tendencies (shame: hiding or withdrawing from the situation; guilt: intentions to correct a negative behavior). We therefore measured all four types of responses to determine whether one or more of these mediated the relationship between self-compassion and willingness to apologize. To measure these four distinct responses, we used the Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (Cohen et al., 2011), which assesses people's general tendency to respond to committing transgressions with emotional and behavioral shame, as well as emotional and behavioral guilt. Because self-compassion helps people view their shortcomings through a lens of kindness and confront rather than hide from these shortcomings (Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007), we expected it to be associated with a reduced tendency to experience both the emotional and behavioral aspects of shame. However, we anticipated that the behavioral tendency to withdraw in shame might be the stronger predictor of willingness to apologize, as transgressors who tend to hide in shame should be particularly unlikely to face their victim and their wrongdoing via an apology. We therefore expected the tendency to withdraw in shame to be the primary mediator of the relationship between self-compassion and willingness to apologize.

To examine these hypotheses, we collected data from a large sample of participants ($N = 1272$) to provide a powerful test of our model. We achieved this sample size by collecting data from as many participants as we could during the course of three college semesters. Based on the moderate to large associations observed in past work on self-compassion, apologies, and shame (e.g., Barnard & Curry, 2012; Breines & Chen, 2012; Howell et al., 2011; Mosewich et al., 2011), this sample

size provided ample power to detect the hypothesized associations if they were present in the current study.

2.1. Participants and experimental design

Twelve hundred and seventy-two college students (419 males; 842 females; 5 persons who chose the option “other”; 6 missing) from a large American university participated in an online study in exchange for course credit¹. Participants were between 17 and 42 years of age, with an average age of 18.71 years ($SD = 1.48$). Most participants were born in the United States ($n = 1140$), with the majority being Caucasian ($n = 974$), followed by Asian ($n = 218$), African American ($n = 65$), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 5$), and American Indian or Alaskan Native ($n = 4$). Regarding religion, most participants identified as Christian ($n = 712$), followed by agnostic ($n = 186$), atheist ($n = 153$), something else, with an option to clarify in an open-ended question ($n = 78$), Jewish ($n = 63$), Hindu ($n = 43$), Buddhist ($n = 19$), and Muslim ($n = 12$). Participants also answered a question asking them how religious they were on a scale from 1 (*Not at all religious*) to 7 (*Extremely religious*), with their average response being 2.99 ($SD = 1.73$). No participants were excluded in the reported analyses. As part of a larger study, participants first completed a measure of self-compassion, followed by measures of willingness to apologize and guilt and shame proneness.²

2.2. Materials and Procedure

2.2.1. Self-compassion

Participants first completed the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003), which was designed to measure people's tendency to extend compassion toward themselves in instances of perceived failure. Participants rated their agreement with 26 items on a Likert scale from 1 (*Almost never*) to 5 (*Almost always*). Example items include “I try to be loving toward myself when I'm feeling emotional pain,” “When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through,” and “When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself” [reversed]. We calculated a composite self-compassion score by averaging across participants' responses (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$).

Although the Self-Compassion Scale was designed to include six subscales (see Neff, 2003), we chose to use a single composite score because we did not expect different associations with willingness to apologize across the different subscales. Moreover, recent work examining the psychometric properties of this scale has favored a single composite over the use of the six subscales individually (e.g., López et al., 2015; Williams, Dalgleish, Karl, & Kuyken, 2014).

¹ Participants completed the study in two groups, such that the first group of participants completed the study during two consecutive semesters, while the second group completed the study with a summer semester in between ($n_{\text{First group}} = 794$; $n_{\text{Second group}} = 478$). Because of this time lag, we also tested whether timing of participation moderated any of the reported findings (using PROCESS Model 59; Hayes, 2013). The patterns and statistical significance of our findings were similar to the ones reported in the main text, with a few minor differences. First, the association between guilt repair and willingness to apologize was no longer statistically significant ($B = 0.07$, $t(1260) = 1.43$, $p = 0.15$, 95% $CI [-0.02, 0.16]$). Second, the total and direct effects of self-compassion on willingness to apologize were moderated by timing of participation ($B_{\text{Total}} = 0.24$, $t(1268) = 2.40$, $p = 0.02$, 95% $CI [0.04, 0.44]$; $B_{\text{Direct}} = -0.20$, $t(1260) = -2.01$, $p = 0.04$, 95% $CI [-0.39, -0.01]$). Although self-compassion was associated with greater willingness to apologize in both the first ($B_{\text{Total}} = 0.50$, $t(792) = 8.08$, $p < 0.001$, 95% $CI [0.38, 0.62]$; $B_{\text{Direct}} = 0.49$, $t(698) = 7.37$, $p < 0.001$, 95% $CI [0.33, 0.57]$) and second group of participants ($B_{\text{Total}} = 0.25$, $t(476) = 3.11$, $p = 0.002$, 95% $CI [0.09, 0.41]$; $B_{\text{Direct}} = 0.25$, $t(470) = 3.21$, $p = 0.001$, 95% $CI [0.10, 0.40]$), this association was stronger for participants in the first group.

² The other measures included in this study were participants' medical history, socioeconomic status, trait anger and hostility (Buss & Perry, 1992), trait self-forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2005), relational interdependence (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), physical symptomatology (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983), and perceived stress (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983).

2.2.2. Willingness to apologize

To assess individual differences in their willingness to apologize for transgressions, participants completed the Proclivity to Apologize Measure (Howell et al., 2011). This measure includes 8 items (e.g., “I tend to downplay my wrongdoings to the other person, rather than apologize” [reversed]; “I don't apologize very often because I don't like to admit that I'm wrong” [reversed]) and participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each item on a Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). We computed a composite by averaging across participants' responses (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$), with higher scores indicating greater willingness to apologize.

2.2.3. Shame and guilt proneness

Next, participants completed the Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (Cohen et al., 2011). The 16-item scale was designed to measure individual differences in the propensity to feel shame and guilt across a range of transgressions and includes two shame subscales and two guilt subscales (4 items per scale). Regarding shame, it measures the emotional tendency to make negative evaluations about the self (“shame NSE”; $\alpha = 0.70$; e.g., “You make a mistake at work and find out a coworker is blamed for the error. Later, your coworker confronts you about your mistake. What is the likelihood that you would feel like a coward?”; “You rip an article out of a journal in the library and take it with you. Your teacher discovers what you did and tells the librarian and your entire class. What is the likelihood that this would make you would feel like a bad person?”), and the behavioral tendency to withdraw following public transgressions (“shame withdraw”; $\alpha = 0.63$; e.g., “After making a big mistake on an important project at work in which people were depending on you, your boss criticizes you in front of your coworkers. What is the likelihood that you would feign sickness and leave work?”; “You take office supplies home for personal use and are caught by your boss. What is the likelihood that this would lead you to quit your job?”)

Regarding guilt, it measures the emotional tendency to make negative evaluations about one's behavior (“guilt NBE”; $\alpha = 0.70$; e.g., “You lie to people but they never find out about it. What is the likelihood that you would feel terrible about the lies you told?”; “At a coworker's housewarming party, you spill red wine on their new cream-colored carpet. You cover the stain with a chair so that nobody notices your mess. What is the likelihood that you would feel that the way you acted was pathetic?”), and the behavioral tendency to repair one's actions following private transgressions (“guilt repair”; $\alpha = 0.61$; e.g., “After realizing you have received too much change at a store, you decide to keep it because the salesclerk doesn't notice. What is the likelihood that you would feel uncomfortable about keeping the money?”; you reveal a friend's secret, though your friend never finds out. What is the likelihood that your failure to keep the secret would lead you to exert extra effort to keep secrets in the future?). Participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would respond in the way described on a Likert scale from 1 (*Very unlikely*) to 7 (*Very likely*).

3. Results

We tested the prediction that self-compassion would be positively associated with willingness to apologize and that shame and guilt proneness would mediate this link by conducting a mediation analysis whereby self-compassion predicted willingness to apologize through shame withdraw, shame NSE, guilt repair, and guilt NBE (using PROCESS, Model 4, Hayes, 2013)³. Confidence intervals for the indirect

³ A different way to analyze our data would be by testing whether self-compassion predicted the emotional tendencies to experience shame and guilt (i.e., shame NSE and guilt NBE), which in turn predicted the behavioral tendencies to either withdraw or repair, which then predicted willingness to apologize. Consistent with the research reviewed in the Discussion, shame NSE was associated with both the tendency to withdraw and to repair, while guilt NBE was only associated with the tendency to repair. Moreover,

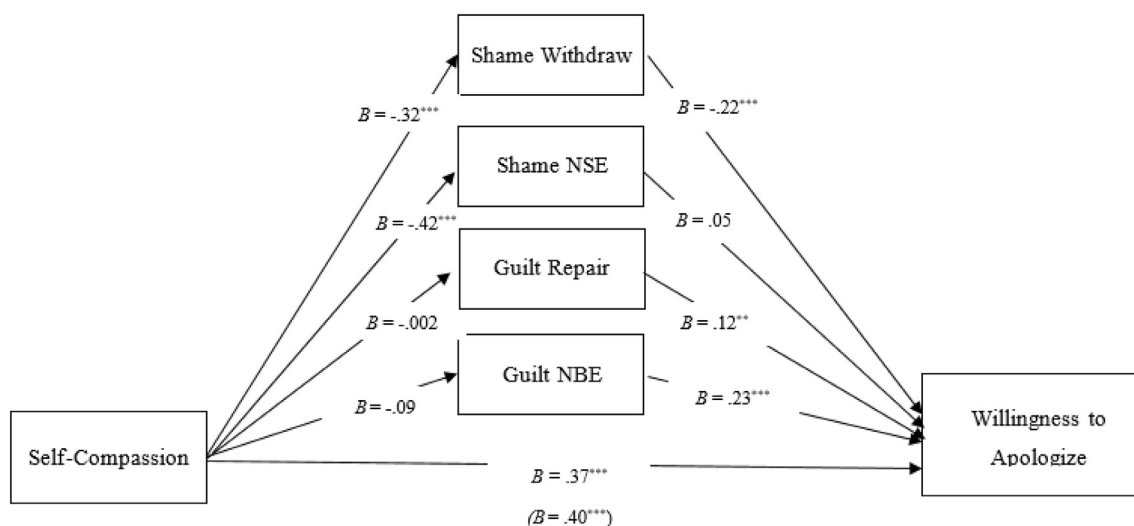


Fig. 1. Association between self-compassion and willingness to apologize as mediated by guilt NBE, guilt repair, shame NSE, and shame withdraw. ***p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

Table 1
Correlations and descriptive statistics of all variables. Values on the diagonal represent variances.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-compassion	0.43					
2. Shame withdraw	−0.19***	1.19				
3. Shame NSE	−0.25***	0.18***	1.20			
4. Guilt repair	−0.001	0.01	0.53***	0.99		
5. Guilt NBE	−0.05	0.10**	0.58***	0.53***	1.58	
6. Willingness to apologize	0.22***	−0.21***	0.16***	0.26***	0.30***	1.38
Mean	2.94	3.00	5.64	5.52	5.14	5.19
SD	0.65	1.09	1.10	0.99	1.26	1.17
Range	1.12–4.81	1–7	1.50–7	1.75–7	1–7	1–7

** *p* < 0.01.
*** *p* < 0.001.

effects (i.e., of self-compassion to willingness to apologize through each of the four tested mediators) reflect unstandardized estimates and were calculated based on 5000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples (see Fig. 1). Bivariate correlations among our variables are displayed in Table 1.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, analyses revealed a significant total effect of self-compassion on willingness to apologize ($B = 0.40, t(1270) = 8.11, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [0.30, 0.50]$). In addition, self-compassion was associated with decreased shame NSE ($B = -0.42, t(1270) = -9.14, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [-0.51, -0.33]$) and decreased shame withdraw ($B = -0.32, t(1270) = -6.85, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [-0.41, -0.23]$). Shame withdraw, in turn, was associated with decreased willingness to apologize ($B = -0.22, t(1266) = -7.93, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [-0.28, -0.17]$), while shame NSE was not associated with willingness to apologize ($B = 0.05, t(1266) = 1.33, p = 0.18, 95\% CI [-0.02, 0.12]$). Self-compassion was not associated with guilt NBE ($B = -0.09, t(1270) = -1.59, p = 0.11, 95\% CI [-0.19, 0.02]$) or guilt repair ($B = -0.002, t(1270) = -0.04, p = 0.97, 95\% CI [-0.09, 0.08]$). However, guilt NBE was associated with increased willingness to apologize ($B = 0.23, t(1266) = 7.62, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [0.17, 0.29]$), as was guilt repair ($B = 0.12, t(1266) = 3.26,$

$p = 0.001, 95\% CI [0.05, 0.19]$).

Analyses revealed a significant indirect effect of self-compassion on willingness to apologize via shame withdraw ($0.07; 95\% CI [0.05, 0.10]$), but not via shame NSE ($-0.02; 95\% CI [-0.05, 0.01]$), guilt NBE ($-0.02; 95\% CI [-0.05, 0.01]$), or guilt repair ($-0.0002; 95\% CI [-0.01, 0.01]$). Thus, self-compassion was associated with greater willingness to apologize through a decreased tendency to withdraw in shame. However, self-compassion was still associated with willingness to apologize after taking into account the four tested mediators ($B = 0.37, t(1266) = 7.71, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [0.28, 0.46]$), suggesting that shame withdraw only partially explained the association between self-compassion and willingness to apologize.

4. Discussion

The present study investigated the associations between self-compassion and willingness to apologize for one's mistakes and found that a self-compassionate attitude was associated with greater willingness to apologize. This association was partially mediated by a decreased tendency to hide and withdraw in shame. We found no evidence that the association between self-compassion and willingness to apologize was mediated by a tendency to experience the emotional component of shame or the emotional and behavioral components of guilt. Thus, although it was conceivable that self-compassion would reduce transgressors' willingness to apologize by reducing their guilt, the current work replicates past work by demonstrating that self-compassion is associated with greater willingness to apologize (Howell et al., 2011), and extends this work by identifying shame-withdraw as a mediator of this association.

While the study was limited by its cross-sectional design, its reliance on self-report measures, and its use of a convenience sample, it offers several contributions to the existing literature on self-compassion and suggests several meaningful directions for future research. For instance, the present findings provide further support for the notion that being understanding toward one's own failures promotes constructive (rather than destructive or avoidant) responses to those failures (Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003). Moreover, while previous studies have linked self-compassion to decreased shame proneness and greater willingness to take responsibility for one's actions and repair them (e.g., Barnard & Curry, 2012; Breines & Chen, 2012), no study to date has tested these associations simultaneously. We believe this work is important not only because it helps us identify who might apologize and who might not, but also because it advances our understanding of the psychological experience of offending others and the emotional

(footnote continued)

although self-compassion was associated with decreased shame NSE, which was associated with decreased shame withdraw and subsequently increased willingness to apologize, there was no evidence for an indirect effect of self-compassion on willingness to apologize through this serial mediation pathway. Thus, consistent with the findings reported in the Results section, the only indirect effect between self-compassion and willingness to apologize was through shame withdraw.

barriers transgressors face when deciding how to respond to the people they have hurt.

The present findings also extend earlier research on the link between shame proneness and willingness to apologize, which has revealed a somewhat complicated relationship between these two variables. Although shame often promotes defensive responding (De Hooge, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2008; De Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2010), it can also promote reparative action if the self-defect in question is perceived as specific and repairable rather than global (much like how guilt focuses on the negativity of a specific behavior; Gausel & Leach, 2011). Because we measured variables at the trait level, the present findings suggest that the general tendency to experience the emotional aspect of shame might not prohibit apologizing, as this tendency might capture both specific and global experiences of shame. Yet, it remains possible that the emotional aspect of shame might mediate the association between self-compassion and greater willingness to apologize when measured at the state level in response to a specific offense—an offense that could lead to either specific or global experiences of shame, and consequently, their divergent outcomes of reparative versus defensive responses. Thus, while the general proneness to experience shame as an emotion might not provide the specificity necessary to predict a general tendency to apologize, shameful emotions in response to specific transgressions might predict whether or not people choose to apologize in those specific instances. Future work might examine this possibility.

Future work might also seek to further uncover the psychological mechanisms driving the association between self-compassion and willingness to apologize, as reductions in a tendency to hide in shame only partially explained this relationship. One possibility is that people who show compassion toward themselves also tend to show compassion toward others. This compassion could manifest as feelings of empathy for the victim, which have been shown to promote apologies (Howell, Turowski, & Buro, 2012; Schumann & Vazeou Nieuwenhuis, 2017). Additionally, because self-compassion allows one to recognize that making mistakes is part of being human, self-compassionate transgressors might be less likely to blame and reproach the victim for his or her part in provoking the offense (as transgressors often do; e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990), consequently leading to a greater willingness to apologize. As with shame, identifying other mediators of the link between self-compassion and apologies can help to deepen our understanding of the factors that hinder or promote constructive responses to their offenses.

Another meaningful direction for future research would be to test the effect of a self-compassion intervention on transgressors' real apology behavior. Because the conclusions we can draw from the present study are constrained by the correlational nature of the methods used, a self-compassion induction could offer further confidence in the results while also examining whether and when real-world apologies can be promoted. Moreover, examining real apology behavior would allow an investigation into whether self-compassionate transgressors also offer higher quality apologies that tend to be more effective at promoting reconciliation (Darby & Schlenker, 1989; Kirchhoff, Wagner, & Strack, 2012; McLaughun, Cody, & O'hair, 1983; Scher & Darley, 1997). For example, it is possible that self-compassion may enhance the quality of a given apology by promoting the inclusion of more apology elements (e.g., acknowledging how the victim has suffered; accepting responsibility) and reducing the inclusion of defensive strategies (e.g., justifications; attempts to blame the victim; Schumann, 2014). Because transgressors may be motivated to offer perfunctory, defensive apologies as a method for protecting their self-concepts (Ohtsubo & Watanabe, 2009; Schumann, 2014), self-compassion might buffer against this need for self-protection and therefore improve the content of transgressors' apologies.

Finally, future work might examine whether there are conditions under which self-compassion hinders constructive responses. As noted earlier, it is conceivable that a tendency to be compassionate toward

one's flaws could lead to a readiness to excuse one's wrongful actions. It thus seems possible that extremely high levels of self-compassion could produce less willingness to apologize, especially for lower severity offenses that are easier to justify or for offenses committed against people who can easily be removed from one's scope of justice (e.g., outgroup members). Moreover, because self-compassion has been associated with the feeling that one can honestly express one's emotions (Neff, 2003), it is possible that self-compassion could decrease the use of apologies in situations where transgressors do not feel sincerely remorseful or responsible for an offense. Additional work examining the association between self-compassion and apologies under diverse circumstances is therefore needed to provide a more complete picture of how self-compassion influences conflict resolution processes.

5. Statements

- Informed consent was obtained from all human subjects.
- We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.
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