




Self-compassion helps people forgive transgressors: Cognitive pathways of interpersonal transgressions

Yuki Miyagawa & Junichi Taniguchi


To cite this article: Yuki Miyagawa & Junichi Taniguchi (2020): Self-compassion helps people forgive transgressors: Cognitive pathways of interpersonal transgressions, *Self and Identity*, DOI: [10.1080/15298868.2020.1862904](https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2020.1862904)



To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2020.1862904>

 View supplementary material 

 Published online: 26 Dec 2020.

 Submit your article to this journal 

 Article views: 135


 View related articles 

 View Crossmark data 

ARTICLE



Self-compassion helps people forgive transgressors: Cognitive pathways of interpersonal transgressions

Yuki Miyagawa ^a and Junichi Taniguchi^b

^aDepartment of Psychology, Otemon Gakuin University, Ibaraki, Japan; ^bDepartment of Psychology, Tezukayama University, Nara, Japan

ABSTRACT

This study examined the psychological processes through which self-compassion relates to forgiveness of interpersonal transgressors. Specifically, this study focused on the mediating roles of rumination about interpersonal transgressors and subjective temporal distance from interpersonal transgressions. After completing a measure of self-compassion, participants recalled a time when they were hurt by others. Then, they responded to measures including subjective temporal distance, rumination, and forgiveness. A path model showed that self-compassion was associated with greater subjective temporal distance, lower revenge, and lower avoidance through lower rumination. In addition, self-compassion positively predicted benevolence. Results implied that people with high self-compassion may be less likely to ruminate, which may help them feel greater temporal distance from past interpersonal transgressions and forgive transgressors.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 June 2020
Accepted 8 December 2020


KEYWORDS

Self-compassion; forgiveness; rumination; subjective temporal distance; interpersonal transgressions

People live in a social world and their connections with others promote mental health and well-being (Canevello & Crocker, 2017; Feeney & Collins, 2015). However, relationships with others may also undermine well-being. People are hurt when they experience interpersonal transgressions (Worthington et al., 2007). Unforgiveness damages the quality of relationships and one's well-being (Stackhouse et al., 2016; Witvliet et al., 2001). Thus, when interpersonal transgressions occur, forgiveness is an important step in repairing relationships and recovering from personal distress. Forgiveness constitutes multiple motivational processes, which include low levels of revenge and avoidance, as well as high levels of benevolence toward transgressors (McCullough et al., 2003; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Therefore, forgiveness of transgressors indicates that people are motivated to be compassionate toward them without harming their relationships. The present study considers self-compassion as an antecedent of forgiveness of transgressors and examines how people with high self-compassion forgive their transgressors.

Self-compassion is defined as the ability to be emotionally supportive toward the self without engaging in self-denial (i.e., self-kindness rather than self-judgment), to deeply understand the similarity and connection between one's and others' experiences without

CONTACT Yuki Miyagawa  y-miyagawa@otemon.ac.jp  Department of Psychology, Otemon Gakuin University, Ibaraki, Japan

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

© 2020 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

feeling alone in suffering (i.e., common humanity rather than isolation), and to pay balanced and inclusive attention to the self without being overwhelmed by negative thoughts and emotions (i.e., mindfulness rather than over-identification; Neff, 2011). These three inter-correlated abilities of self-compassion help people maintain and facilitate intrapersonal well-being (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Zessin et al., 2015). Self-compassion is also beneficial for interpersonal well-being. People high in self-compassion show other-focused concern, such as altruism, perspective taking, and compassion (Neff et al., 2018; Neff & Pommier, 2013). They are better able to cope with interpersonal problems, such as conflict (Yarnell & Neff, 2013), romantic breakups (Zhang & Chen, 2017), and divorce (Sbarra et al., 2012). For example, trait and experimentally induced self-compassion positively predicted self-improvement motivation for future relationships after experiencing a romantic breakup, especially among those who felt responsible for the separation (Zhang & Chen, 2017).

Self-compassion is linked to trait forgiveness (Chung, 2016; Neff et al., 2018; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Wu et al., 2019), and may promote offense-specific forgiveness. After reading a hypothetical scenario about an interpersonal transgression, people with high self-compassion were more likely to forgive the transgressor who provided a self-compassionate apology, such as “I am not perfect and I make mistakes sometimes” (Allen et al., 2015). One study (Wu et al., 2019) has investigated the psychological processes by which self-compassion links to forgiveness. Path models indicated that self-compassion relates to higher forgiveness through lower rumination and anger (Wu et al., 2019). Although Wu et al. (2019) accounted for why people high in self-compassion forgive others, several issues remain unsolved. First, the study (Wu et al., 2019) focused on the dispositional levels of self-compassion, forgiveness, rumination, and anger, thus, it is unclear whether people high in self-compassion are more likely to forgive the transgressors who have hurt them (i.e., offense-specific forgiveness; McCullough et al., 2000). Second, the study (Wu et al., 2019) measured dispositional forgiveness as one factor using the Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2005). Therefore, it is unknown how self-compassion links to multiple components of forgiveness (i.e., low revenge and avoidance and high benevolence; McCullough et al., 2003; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002) and whether similar mediation pathways can be found between self-compassion and these subcomponents. Third, although the study (Wu et al., 2019) examined the cognitive (i.e., rumination) and emotional (i.e., anger) pathways, other processes might exist between self-compassion and forgiveness.

To address these concerns, the present study was designed to investigate the relationship between self-compassion and offense-specific motivational components of forgiveness among adults. Specifically, we focused on two cognitive pathways through which self-compassion relates to revenge, avoidance, and benevolence in interpersonal transgressions. In line with past findings (Wu et al., 2019), we expected that rumination would mediate the associations between self-compassion and forgiveness. Furthermore, we examined subjective temporal distance from interpersonal transgression as the additional cognitive component that accounted for the associations between self-compassion, rumination, and forgiveness. We hypothesized that higher self-compassion would be related to lower rumination, leading to greater temporal distance and, consequently, to higher forgiveness (i.e., lower revenge and avoidance, and higher benevolence; Figure 1).

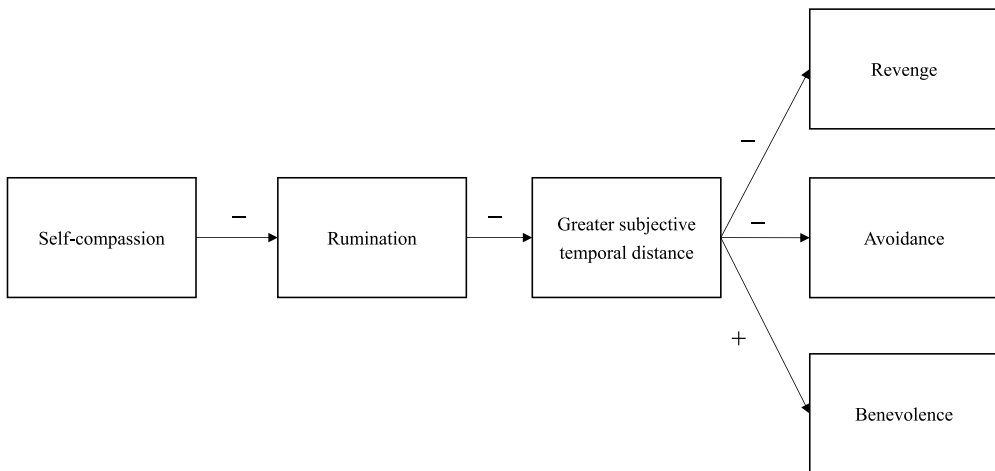


Figure 1. A proposed mediation model of associations between self-compassion, rumination, subjective temporal distance, and forgiveness.

Rumination would mediate the associations between self-compassion, revenge, and avoidance. Both trait and experimentally induced self-compassion related to lower rumination (Butz & Stahlberg, 2018; Neff et al., 2018). Cross-lagged analyses showed that rumination prospectively and negatively predicted revenge toward and avoidance from transgressors among individuals who participated in a daily diary study (McCullough et al., 2007). On the other hand, rumination might not have a mediating role in the relation between self-compassion and benevolence. Rumination is a response style that leads to psychopathology (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000) and might be unrelated to prosocial and benevolent tendencies toward transgressors.

We also focused on subjective temporal distance as a mediator between self-compassion and forgiveness because distancing from negative events helps regulate emotional distress (Bruehlman-Senecal & Ayduk, 2015; Miyagawa & Taniguchi, 2020). Self-compassion entails taking a balanced and broader perspective of one's experiences (Neff, 2011), thus seeming to help people keep a psychological distance from aversive events. People high in this trait felt distant from past stressful events and thus regulated negative emotional reactions toward them (Miyagawa & Taniguchi, 2020). Subjective temporal distance also affects forgiveness toward transgressors. Wohl and McGrath (2007) experimentally manipulated subjective temporal distance from interpersonal transgressions and showed that the temporal appraisal of events influenced forgiveness toward transgressors. Participants in the temporally distant condition showed lower motivation for revenge and avoidance and higher motivation for opening a dialogue with transgressors than those in the temporally close condition.

The two cognitive factors (i.e., rumination and subjective temporal distance) would thus likely mediate the associations between self-compassion and the three motivational components of forgiveness for interpersonal transgressions. Furthermore, rumination affects subjective temporal distance. People who were instructed to recall a past emotional event that they dwelt on felt temporally closer to it than those who were asked to think about a memory of a neutral social interaction (Siedlecka et al., 2015). These findings

led us to hypothesize that people high in self-compassion might ruminate less, thus perceiving a greater temporal distance from past interpersonal transgressions; this may likely explain why they are less likely to take revenge and be avoidant and more willing to be benevolent toward transgressors (Figure 1).

To test this hypothesis and to extend previous findings on self-compassion and forgiveness (Allen et al., 2015; Chung, 2016; Neff et al., 2018; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Wu et al., 2019), we asked participants to recall their past interpersonal transgression and measured offense-specific forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2000) as well as their responses toward their event. We also measured rumination about the transgressors rather than the transgressions. Kanemasa et al. (2018) found that ruminating about ex-partners positively predicted stalking behavior toward them, indicating that obsessive thoughts on others trigger negative responses that harm relationships. Thus, rumination about transgressors may likely make it difficult to forgive them. Furthermore, to address the limitation of the cross-sectional design, we tested alternative processes where forgiveness might mediate the associations between self-compassion, rumination, and subjective temporal distance.

Method

Participants

This study recruited participants from a Japanese internet research service: Rakuten Insight offered by Rakuten Inc., which has about 2.2 million registered monitors across Japan. Among the 300 participants who responded to the online survey in exchange for credit points, data from 46 participants were excluded because they failed to respond to two attention checks correctly ($n = 31$), left a blank on the description of their past interpersonal transgression ($n = 12$), or did not follow the instructions of the writing task ($n = 3$; e.g., they wrote multiple or positive events). The final sample was comprised of 254 participants (117 men, 137 women) in Japan, who had described their past interpersonal transgression. Their mean age was 40.4 ($SD = 11.1$), ranging from 21 to 59 years.

Procedure

At the beginning of this study, participants were provided with an informed consent form that explained the purpose and procedure of this study, potential risks, and voluntary participation, and those who agreed participated in the study. After completing the measure of self-compassion, they were asked to recall and write about an interpersonal transgression they had experienced in the past. They were instructed as follows: "Please look back on your life and bring to mind a time when someone you know hurt you or made you irritated. For instance, a time when you were embarrassed or betrayed. Please describe such an event in the space provided below." Next, they responded to items regarding the characteristics of their transgression and completed measures on subjective temporal distance, rumination, and forgiveness. They were debriefed and thanked at the end of the study. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author's affiliated university (IRB 2019–14). This online survey included additional measures for a separate paper, which are not reported in this study.

Measures

Self-compassion

Participants completed the Japanese version of the Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF; Arimitsu et al., 2016). Participants indicated how often they engaged in thoughts and behavior described by 12 items, such as “I’m kind to myself when I’m experiencing suffering,” on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). The Japanese SCS-SF is highly correlated with the Japanese Self-Compassion Scale ($r = .95$; Arimitsu et al., 2016). Following Arimitsu et al. (2016), we computed the total score by averaging all 12 items after reverse-coding the items that represent self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.64$). We also added an attention check to this scale: “Please select *almost always* if you read this item.”

Closeness

After recalling and writing about their past interpersonal transgression, participants indicated how close they had been to their transgressor before the transgression on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*we were not close at all*) to 7 (*we were very close*; $M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.93$).

Past Emotional Reactions

Participants reported how “angry” and “disgusted” they had felt when their interpersonal transgression had happened on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*I did not feel this emotion*) to 4 (*I strongly felt this emotion*). We calculated the mean scores of these items as past emotional reactions ($\alpha = .73$, $r = .58$, $p < .001$, $M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.80$).

Subjective Temporal Distance

Participants indicated subjective temporal distance from their transgression through the following three items (Siedlecka et al., 2015). “How close or far away in time does the event feel?” (1 = *feels very close to*, 7 = *feels very far away*); “How long ago in time does the event seem to you?” (1 = *feels very recent to*, 7 = *feels very long ago*); “How near or distant in time does the event feel?” (1 = *feels very near to*, 7 = *feels very distant*). In this study, we translated the original scale into Japanese. Following Siedlecka et al. (2015), we computed the total score by averaging these three items ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.80$). A higher score indicated that participants felt further away from their recalled event.

Time Since the Event

Participants reported how long ago their recalled transgression had happened ($M_{\text{month}} = 105.20$, $SD = 105.36$, *Median* = 69.00, range = 2.00–545.00 months).

Rumination

Participants responded to two items adapted from Kanemasa et al. (2018) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). These items were “I can’t get the person out of my head” and “I remember the person at every opportunity.” We calculated the mean score of these two items as rumination ($\alpha = .86$, $r = .76$, $p < .001$, $M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.31$).

Forgiveness

Participants indicated how much they forgave their transgressor at the moment. We adapted the Japanese version of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 2003), which was translated and validated by Ohtsubo et al. (2015). The TRIM has 18 items for assessing the three types of interpersonal motivation underlying forgiveness (i.e., revenge, avoidance, and benevolence). Examples of each subscale are “I’ll make him/her pay,” “I avoid him/her,” and “Even though his/her actions hurt me, I still have goodwill for him/her,” respectively. Participants responded to these 18 items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). We computed the mean scores for revenge ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.29$), avoidance ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.01$), and benevolence ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 1.84$, $SD = 0.96$). We also added an attention check to this scale: “Please select *agree* if you read this item.”

Responsibility attributions

Participants indicated how responsible their transgressor was for their transgression based on three items of McCullough et al. (2003). These items were slightly modified to use a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). They were “I think that the person’s behavior was intentional,” “I think that the person had a responsibility for this event,” and “I think that the person could have known that I was hurt.” We computed the mean score of these three items as responsibility attributions ($\alpha = .55$, $M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.96$). A higher score indicated that participants attributed more responsibility to their transgressor.

Data Analyses

We first calculated the descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlation coefficients among the study variables. Afterward, we conducted a path analysis with the maximum likelihood estimator and estimated the proposed indirect effects with 2,000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals using *Mplus*. We considered indirect effects significant if the 95% confidence interval did not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We also tested the alternative mediation models where forgiveness mediated the associations between self-compassion, rumination, and subjective temporal distance.

Results

Table 1 shows the correlation coefficients among the study variables. Self-compassion was not significantly correlated with time since the event, closeness, past emotional reactions, responsibility attributions, and, unexpectedly, with subjective temporal distance and revenge. As expected, self-compassion related negatively to rumination and avoidance, and positively to benevolence. Subjective temporal distance correlated negatively with rumination and revenge. Rumination correlated positively with revenge and avoidance.

We next tested the saturated model where rumination and subjective temporal distance would mediate the association between self-compassion and forgiveness, using a path analysis model (Figure 2). Results showed that subjective temporal distance was not a significant mediator. Therefore, the expected relation of self-compassion to

Table 1. Correlations among the study variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-compassion	—								
2. Closeness	.00	—							
3. Time since the event	-.06	.04	—						
4. Past emotional reactions	-.08	-.01	-.02	—					
5. Subjective temporal distance	.09	.06	.24***	-.16*	—				
6. Rumination	-.17**	-.01	-.08	.20**	-.48***	—			
7. Revenge	-.01	-.17**	-.08	.31***	-.20**	.37***	—		
8. Avoidance	-.14*	-.14*	-.08	.25***	-.05	.23***	.49***	—	
9. Benevolence	.17**	.16*	-.15*	-.19**	-.02	-.07	-.35***	-.56***	—
10. Responsibility attributions	.00	.10	.06	.12	.05	.03	.21**	.22**	-.13*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

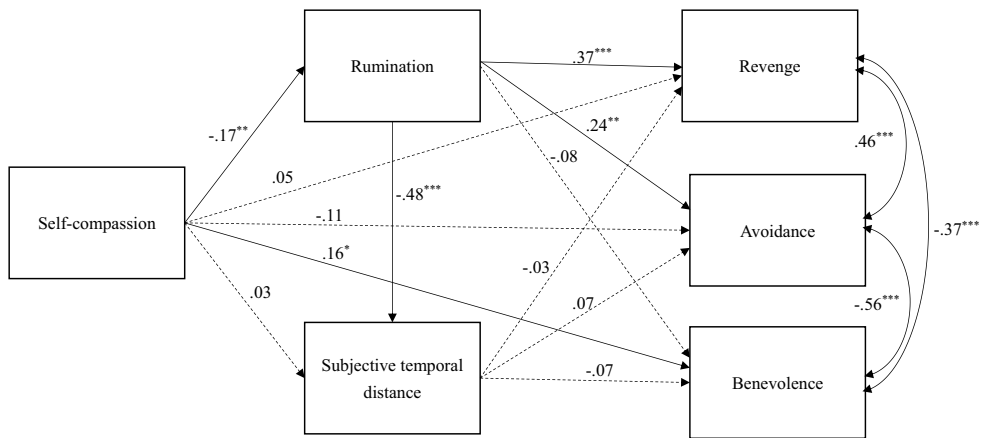


Figure 2. A path analysis model of associations between self-compassion, rumination, subjective temporal distance, and forgiveness. Standardized values are presented. The dotted lines represent nonsignificant paths.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

forgiveness via greater subjective temporal distance and lower rumination was not supported. Specifically, the indirect effects of self-compassion through these two mediators were not significant for revenge, avoidance, and benevolence (Table 2).

On the other hand, rumination was a significant mediator, indicating that self-compassion was associated with greater subjective temporal distance, lower revenge, and lower avoidance via lower rumination (Table 2). Whereas the indirect effect on benevolence was not significant, self-compassion was a significant predictor of benevolence (Figure 2).

We also tested the saturated model with time since the event, closeness, past emotional reactions, and responsibility attributions as covariates. The results were identical to the model without these covariates. Specifically, the indirect effects of self-compassion via rumination remained significant for subjective temporal distance (point estimate = 0.206, $SE = 0.084$, 95% CI [0.052, 0.387]), revenge (point estimate = -0.107 , $SE = 0.047$, 95% CI [-0.221 , -0.029]), and avoidance (point estimate = -0.054 , $SE = 0.030$, 95% CI [-0.141 , -0.011]).

Forgiveness might be a mediator rather than an outcome variable, thus, we ran two alternative models where self-compassion related to subjective temporal distance through forgiveness and rumination (the alternative model A, see SOM Figure 1) and

Table 2. Indirect effects in the proposed and alternative models.

	Point estimate	SE	Bias-corrected CI (95%)
The proposed model			
SC→rumination→subjective temporal distance	0.232	0.089	[0.063, 0.415]
SC→rumination→subjective temporal distance→revenge	-0.006	0.013	[-0.037, 0.016]
SC→rumination→subjective temporal distance→avoidance	0.009	0.010	[-0.004, 0.038]
SC→rumination→subjective temporal distance→benevolence	-0.009	0.010	[-0.038, 0.004]
SC→rumination→revenge	-0.127	0.052	[-0.253, -0.043]
SC→rumination→avoidance	-0.067	0.034	[-0.159, -0.016]
SC→rumination→benevolence	0.020	0.022	[-0.011, 0.081]
The alternative model A			
SC→revenge→rumination→subjective temporal distance	0.006	0.036	[-0.062, 0.081]
SC→avoidance→rumination→subjective temporal distance	0.019	0.018	[-0.002, 0.080]
SC→benevolence→rumination→subjective temporal distance	-0.033	0.021	[-0.086, -0.003]
SC→revenge→subjective temporal distance	0.003	0.022	[-0.027, 0.068]
SC→avoidance→subjective temporal distance	-0.026	0.036	[-0.128, 0.022]
SC→benevolence→subjective temporal distance	-0.023	0.036	[-0.119, 0.034]
SC→rumination→subjective temporal distance	0.232	0.081	[0.083, 0.405]
SC→revenge→rumination	-0.010	0.056	[-0.126, 0.091]
SC→avoidance→rumination	-0.031	0.027	[-0.112, 0.004]
SC→benevolence→rumination	0.051	0.032	[0.004, 0.133]
The alternative model B			
SC→revenge→subjective temporal distance→rumination	-0.003	0.016	[-0.037, 0.025]
SC→avoidance→subjective temporal distance→rumination	0.002	0.010	[-0.016, 0.028]
SC→benevolence→subjective temporal distance→rumination	0.017	0.014	[-0.001, 0.057]
SC→revenge→subjective temporal distance	0.009	0.053	[-0.087, 0.123]
SC→avoidance→subjective temporal distance	-0.007	0.034	[-0.096, 0.053]
SC→benevolence→subjective temporal distance	-0.056	0.045	[-0.175, 0.007]
SC→revenge→rumination	-0.007	0.041	[-0.093, 0.070]
SC→avoidance→rumination	-0.033	0.027	[-0.109, 0.002]
SC→benevolence→rumination	0.035	0.026	[-0.003, 0.103]
SC→subjective temporal distance→rumination	-0.087	0.055	[-0.198, 0.012]

SC = self-compassion. The alternative model A represents the relations of self-compassion to subjective temporal distance through forgiveness and rumination. The alternative model B represents the relations of self-compassion to rumination through forgiveness and subjective temporal distance.

where self-compassion linked to rumination through forgiveness and subjective temporal distance (the alternative model B, see SOM Figure 2). We did not find mediating roles of revenge and avoidance in the associations between self-compassion, rumination, and subjective temporal distance (Table 2). On the other hand, the alternative model A showed that self-compassion related positively to rumination through higher benevolence, which in turn was linked to feeling subjectively close to the recalled events (Table 2).

Discussion

The present study was designed to investigate the psychological processes through which self-compassion helps people forgive transgressors. The mediation analyses indicated that rumination, but not subjective temporal distance, mediated the relationship between self-compassion and forgiveness. Specifically, this study implies that people with high self-compassion might be less likely to dwell on interpersonal transgressors and, thus, be less motivated to take revenge on and to avoid them. These mediated paths remained significant even when we controlled for time since the event, closeness, past emotional reactions, and responsibility attributions. The proposed path model also

indicated that people with high self-compassion were more willing to show benevolence toward transgressors, although rumination did not mediate this association.

The present study extends past findings on self-compassion and forgiveness in several ways (Allen et al., 2015; Chung, 2016; Neff et al., 2018; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Wu et al., 2019). First, whereas previous studies focused on the trait-level association between self-compassion and forgiveness (Chung, 2016; Neff et al., 2018; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Wu et al., 2019) and the link between self-compassion and forgiveness in a hypothetical scenario (Allen et al., 2015), our study found that trait self-compassion related positively with forgiveness of the actual transgressions that had happened to people. This finding is also consistent with previous research on self-compassion and coping with interpersonal stressful events (Sbarra et al., 2012; Yarnell & Neff, 2013; Zhang & Chen, 2017).

Second, rumination mediated the associations between self-compassion, revenge, and avoidance. Furthermore, the alternative models did not show mediating roles of revenge and avoidance in the associations between self-compassion, rumination, and subjective temporal distance. Self-compassion might prevent people from ruminating about transgressors, which might, in turn, reduce motives for revenge toward and avoidance from them. Self-compassion offers emotional equilibrium and kindness toward one's suffering (Neff, 2011), which likely regulates ruminative thoughts that are linked to unforgiveness (McCullough et al., 2007; Wu et al., 2019). Wu et al. (2019) found that self-compassion related positively to trait forgiveness through lower trait rumination and anger. We extended their finding on the cognitive pathway, wherein self-compassion buffered against rumination and thus mitigated the revenge and avoidance motives that underlie unforgiveness.

Self-compassion was significantly associated with benevolent motivation for transgressors. This finding is consistent with past findings on the positive associations between self-compassion, altruism, and compassion (Neff et al., 2018; Neff & Pommier, 2013). Combined with these past findings, the present study suggested that self-compassion is beneficial for healthy interpersonal functioning. It should be noted, however, that rumination did not mediate the association between self-compassion and benevolence. On the other hand, the alternative model A suggested that benevolence mediated the relationship between self-compassion and rumination. People with high self-compassion showed benevolent motives toward their transgressors that, in turn, promoted rumination about them. This unexpected finding might imply that people with this motive might continue to think about transgressors to find out a way to reestablish damaged relationships. One direction for future studies may be to examine whether this benevolent-rumination pathway is beneficial for one's intrapersonal well-being, because rumination makes people vulnerable to psychopathology (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000).

Although greater subjective temporal distance was correlated with lower revenge, as shown by Wohl and McGrath (2007), a path model did not support our hypothesis that temporal appraisal would help people forgive transgressors. One probable reason is that both self-compassion and rumination were entered into the model. In other words, the indirect effect of self-compassion via rumination might have surpassed the influence of subjective temporal distance on revenge (see SOM Table 1). Therefore, rumination is considered a stronger predictor of revenge than subjective temporal distance. Rumination fuels unforgiveness, which becomes a mental health burden (McCullough et al., 2007; Stackhouse et al., 2016; Witvliet et al., 2001). Our findings replicated the

aversive influence of rumination on forgiveness. Meanwhile, the present study implied that subjective temporal distance could have a small influence on forgiveness once the influence of rumination was simultaneously considered.

Whereas previous research shows that people with high self-compassion feel a greater distance from past stressful events (Miyagawa & Taniguchi, 2020), we did not find a significant correlation between self-compassion and subjective temporal distance from interpersonal transgressions. This difference could be due to the type of past events. Whereas Miyagawa and Taniguchi (2020) included both achievement-related and interpersonal events, the present study focused exclusively on interpersonal transgressions. Unlike achievement-related events, such as failing exams, interpersonal transgressions might be characterized as continuous encounters with stressors. In other words, people might see or communicate with transgressors even after the transgressions, and such encounters would likely activate the painful memories. The frequencies of such activation might differ among participants and attenuate the relationship between self-compassion and subjective temporal distance. For example, when a person often sees his or her partner after a quarrel, this person might feel like the event happened just yesterday, regardless of the level of self-compassion. Indeed, we found that rumination, which might be a sign of activating transgression memories, was associated with perceiving the transgressions as being temporally close. Additionally, self-compassion was indirectly related to greater subjective temporal distance through lower rumination. Therefore, the activation of stressful interpersonal memories might account for the association between self-compassion and subjective temporal distance. Future work may focus on whether rumination or the activation of memories is also involved in the association between self-compassion and temporal perception of achievement-related events.

Limitations and future directions

Several limitations constrained the results of this study. First, the study relied on self-reported measures and cross-sectional data. Therefore, we cannot confirm the causal influences among the variables. To test and validate our model, future studies should employ experimental manipulations to boost self-compassion, such as writing compassionate messages to oneself (Butz & Stahlberg, 2018; Zhang & Chen, 2017), and to change temporal distance, such as thinking about events from temporally close or distant positions (Bruehlman-Senecal & Ayduk, 2015). Although we statistically ruled out the possibility that revenge and avoidance were mediators, subsequent longitudinal studies may advance the understanding of the temporal consequences of self-compassion and forgiveness. Additionally, to address response biases in self-report measures, future work should employ other research paradigms, such as the Forgiveness Implicit Association Test (Goldring & Strelan, 2017). Second, we relied on self-reported memories of past transgressions. This methodology has been used in previous studies (McCullough et al., 2003; Stackhouse et al., 2016). We did not find significant correlations between self-compassion and the characteristics of the transgressions, such as time since the event, and controlling these variables did not change the significance levels of the indirect effects. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the other unmeasured variables relating to the transgressions, such as contact frequencies with the transgressors, might affect the main results of this study. Future research might combine the retrospective method with

the vignette method (see Wohl & McGrath, 2007). Third, we measured rumination about transgressors, whereas previous studies focused on ruminative thoughts on transgressions (McCullough et al., 2007). It could be that ruminating about transgressions might be a stronger predictor of forgiveness. In addition, benevolence might not mediate the relation of self-compassion to this event-focused rumination. Nevertheless, we found significant relations of rumination to self-compassion, revenge, and avoidance, which is consistent with past findings (Butz & Stahlberg, 2018; McCullough et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2019). To further confirm our model depicted in Figure 2, future work should replicate our findings with a measure of rumination about interpersonal transgressions. Finally, participants recalled the transgressors they had known before. People might react differently to interpersonal transgressions by strangers, such as receiving complaints from a customer. In this case, even people with high self-compassion might not feel benevolent toward their customer. Future work should test whether the type of relationship moderates the associations between self-compassion, revenge, avoidance, and benevolence.

Despite these limitations, the present study is significant in that it describes cognitive pathways through which self-compassion links to forgiveness toward transgressors, which should be pursued in future studies. Through self-compassion, people might overcome interpersonal transgressions and reestablish peaceful relationships with transgressors.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The study was supported by Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists by Otemon Gakuin University to Yuki Miyagawa

ORCID

Yuki Miyagawa  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0529-3124>

References

- Allen, A. B., Barton, J., & Stevenson, O. (2015). Presenting a self-compassionate image after an interpersonal transgression. *Self and Identity*, 14(1), 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2014.946958>
- Arimitsu, K., Aoki, Y., Furukita, M., Tada, A., & Togashi, R. (2016). Construction and validation of a short form of the Japanese version of the self-compassion scale. *Komazawa Annual Reports of Psychology*, 18, 1–9. <http://repo.komazawa-u.ac.jp/opac/repository/all/35874/>
- Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., O'Connor, L. E., Parrott, L., & Wade, N. G. (2005). Forgiveness, vengeful rumination, and affective traits. *Journal of Personality*, 73(1), 183–226. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2004.00308.x>

- Buehlman-Senecal, E., & Ayduk, O. (2015). This too shall pass: Temporal distance and the regulation of emotional distress. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(2), 356–375. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0038324>
- Butz, S., & Stahlberg, D. (2018). Can self-compassion improve sleep quality via reduced rumination? *Self and Identity*, 17(6), 666–686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2018.1456482>
- Canevello, A., & Crocker, J. (2017). Compassionate goals and affect in social situations. *Motivation and Emotion*, 41(2), 158–179. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-016-9599-x>
- Chung, M.-S. (2016). Relation between lack of forgiveness and depression: The moderating effect of self-compassion. *Psychological Reports*, 119(3), 573–585. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294116663520>
- Feeney, B. C., & Collins, N. L. (2015). A new look at social support: A theoretical perspective on thriving through relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 19(2), 113–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314544222>
- Goldring, J., & Strelan, P. (2017). The forgiveness implicit association test. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 108, 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.12.006>
- Kanemasa, Y., Arai, T., Shimada, T., Ishida, H., & Yamamoto, I. (2018). Development of risk factor scales for stalking-like behaviors following the end of a romantic relationship, and their predictive capabilities. *The Japanese Journal of Psychology*, 89(2), 160–170. <https://doi.org/10.4992/jjpsy.89.17207>
- MacBeth, A., & Gumley, A. (2012). Exploring compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6), 545–552. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2012.06.003>
- McCullough, M. E., Bono, G., & Root, L. M. (2007). Rumination, emotion, and forgiveness: Three longitudinal studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(3), 490–505. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.3.490>
- McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J.-A. (2003). Forgiveness, forbearance, and time: The temporal unfolding of transgression-related interpersonal motivations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(3), 540–557. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.3.540>
- McCullough, M. E., & Hoyt, W. T. (2002). Transgression-related motivational dispositions: Personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the Big Five. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(11), 1556–1573. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014616702237583>
- McCullough, M. E., Hoyt, W. T., & Rachal, K. C. (2000). What we know (and need to know) about assessing forgiveness constructs. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 65–88). Guilford Press.
- Miyagawa, Y., & Taniguchi, J. (2020). Self-compassion and time perception of past negative events. *Mindfulness*, 11(3), 746–755. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01293-6>
- Neff, K. D. (2011). Self-compassion, self-esteem, and well-being. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00330.x>
- Neff, K. D., Long, P., Knox, M. C., Davidson, O., Kuchar, A., Costigan, A., Williamson, Z., Rohleder, N., Tóth-Király, I., & Breines, J. G. (2018). The forest and the trees: Examining the association of self-compassion and its positive and negative components with psychological functioning. *Self and Identity*, 17(6), 627–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2018.1436587>
- Neff, K. D., & Pommier, E. (2013). The relationship between self-compassion and other-focused concern among college undergraduates, community adults, and practicing meditators. *Self and Identity*, 12(2), 160–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2011.649546>
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2000). The role of rumination in depressive disorders and mixed anxiety/depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 109(3), 504–511. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.109.3.504>
- Ohtsubo, Y., Yamaura, K., & Yagi, A. (2015). Development of Japanese measures of reconciliatory tendencies: The Japanese trait forgiveness scale and the Japanese proclivity to apologize measure. *Japanese Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(2), 135–142. https://doi.org/10.14966/jssp.31.2_135

- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40(3), 879–891. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.40.3.879>
- Sbarra, D. A., Smith, H. L., & Mehl, M. R. (2012). When leaving your ex, love yourself: Observational ratings of self-compassion predict the course of emotional recovery following marital separation. *Psychological Science*, 23(3), 261–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611429466>
- Siedlecka, E., Capper, M. M., & Denson, T. F. (2015). Negative emotional events that people ruminate about feel closer in time. *PLoS ONE*, 10(2), e0117105. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0117105>
- Stackhouse, M. R. D., Ross, R. J., & Boon, S. D. (2016). The devil in the details: Individual differences in unforgiveness and health correlates. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 94, 337–341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.02.005>
- Witvliet, C. V. O., Ludwig, T., & Vander Laan, K. (2001). Granting forgiveness or harboring grudges: Implications for emotion, physiology, and health. *Psychological Science*, 12(2), 117–123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00320>
- Wohl, M. J. A., & McGrath, A. L. (2007). The perception of time heals all wounds: Temporal distance affects willingness to forgive following an interpersonal transgression. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(7), 1023–1035. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207301021>
- Worthington, E. L., Witvliet, C. V. O., Pietrini, P., & Miller, A. J. (2007). Forgiveness, health, and well-being: A review of evidence for emotional versus decisional forgiveness, dispositional forgivingness, and reduced unforgiveness. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 30(4), 291–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-007-9105-8>
- Wu, Q., Chi, P., Zeng, X., Lin, X., & Du, H. (2019). Roles of anger and rumination in the relationship between self-compassion and forgiveness. *Mindfulness*, 10(2), 272–278. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-0971-7>
- Yarnell, L., & Neff, K. D. (2013). Self-compassion, interpersonal conflict resolutions, and well-being. *Self and Identity*, 12(2), 146–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2011.649545>
- Zessin, U., Dickhäuser, O., & Garbade, S. (2015). The relationship between self-compassion and wellbeing: A meta-analysis. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-being*, 7(3), 340–364. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12051>
- Zhang, J. W., & Chen, S. (2017). Self-compassion promotes positive adjustment for people who attribute responsibility of a romantic breakup to themselves. *Self and Identity*, 16(6), 732–759. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2017.1305985>