



Research Article

The Relationship between Self-Esteem and Self-Forgiveness: Understanding the Mediating Role of Positive and Negative Self-Compassion

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Abstract

Self-forgiveness (letting go of the feelings of victimization, resentment, and vengeance) is possibly shaped in its nature and extent by self-esteem and self-compassion, through various mechanisms. The latter two represent well-known affirmative self-resources with significant implications for life outcomes in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. However, the literature linking self-forgiveness and self-esteem is limited, and whether self-compassion mediates this relationship is not known. The present study addressed this gap by examining the mediating



role of Positive and Negative Self-compassion (PSC & NSC, respectively) in the relationship between Self-esteem and Self-forgiveness. Employing convenience sampling, 144 males (*Mean age* = 22.10 years, *SD* = 1.66 years) and 124 females (*Mean age* = 21.98 years, *SD* = 1.90 years) participants were chosen. Correlation and regression analyses along with the path analytic method were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that both Self-esteem and PSC significantly and positively correlated with the dimensions of self-forgiveness (except Guilt). NSC correlated positively with self-esteem but negatively with PSC. NSC significantly and negatively correlated with some self-forgiveness dimensions like Realization and Reparation, and Attribution but positively with the Guilt dimension. Both PSC and NSC significantly mediated the relationships among Self-esteem, Realization and Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution. Findings suggest the association between self-esteem and self-forgiveness could be explained by elevated PSC and reduced NSC, highlighting the coexistence and simultaneous functioning of both self-esteem and self-compassion in a collectivist culture like India, with more pronounced effects of the latter. Future studies should verify these preliminary correlational findings using diverse cross-cultural samples and methodology.

Keywords: self-compassion; self-esteem; self-forgiveness; path analysis; individualism; collectivism.

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Forgiveness represents a human virtue that reflects a lack of resentment and involves generosity, kindness, and love towards a transgressor (e. g., [Thompson et al., 2005](#)). Research suggests that it facilitates the development and restoration of self and interpersonal relationships ([McCullough, 2008](#); [Tiwari et al., 2023](#)), mental health and well-being ([Griffin et al., 2020](#); [Webb & Toussaint, 2020](#)), and physical health (e. g., [Toussaint et al., 2020](#)) for people with diverse backgrounds. Although interpersonal forgiveness is a well-studied phenomenon, there is limited research on the nature and dynamics of self-forgiveness (e. g., [Toussaint et al., 2020](#)). With its effectiveness in clinical interventions, self-forgiveness has recently attracted the attention of researchers (e. g., [Scherer et al., 2011](#); [Webb & Toussaint, 2020](#)). Self-forgiveness refers to the desire to give up anger and grudges directed towards self as a result of perceived wrongdoings of one's own, on one hand, and to cultivate compassion, self-kindness and care toward oneself, on the other ([Enright, 1996](#)). Self-forgiveness initiates a set of motivational changes that inbreed preventive and promotive strengths enabling a person to enhance positive cognition, behaviour and affect for self and affected others ([Hall & Fincham, 2005](#)). Self-forgiveness is positively related to decreased depression and anxiety ([Hirsch et al., 2011](#); [Maltby et al., 2001](#)), as well as well-being, close relationships, self-esteem, and interpersonal engagement ([Coates, 1996](#)).

Based on the interpersonal model of forgiveness, Hall and Fincham ([2005](#)) proposed the earliest self-forgiveness model that suggested it originates from shame and guilt caused by attributions and the severity of the transgressions. They further argued that guilt and conciliatory behaviours toward a sufferer and perceived forgiveness might facilitate or inhibit self-forgiveness. Further empirical validation of the model showed self-forgiveness to be closely linked with guilt, conciliatory behaviours, the severity of wrongdoings and perceived interpersonal forgiveness while it exhibited weaker relationships with attributions, empathy, and shame ([Hall & Fincham, 2008](#)).

In their investigation, Ranganadhan and Todorov ([2010](#)) found the self-forgiveness model ([Hall & Fincham, 2005](#)) to reflect inadequate empirical validity and put forth their own model which suggested other-oriented empathy and conciliatory behaviour to be mediating the relationship between guilt and self-forgiveness. The study also concluded that shame adversely affects self-forgiveness in the face of empathy resulting from personal distress or the perceived distress of others. McConnell et al. ([2012](#)) further empirically tested the original model suggested by Hall and Fincham ([2005](#)) for the third time and proposed an alternative model which pronounced the

significant role of severity of transgressions, conciliatory behaviours, guilt, and perceived interpersonal forgiveness from the victim in shaping the nature and extent of self-forgiveness. McGaffin et al. (2013) combined the findings of all the three previous self-forgiveness theories and suggested guilt and shame lead to two distinct consequences. According to these researchers, guilt promotes conciliatory behaviours, acceptance and empathy directed towards others whereas shame may lead to acceptance of offence and empathy resulting from personal distress. Thus, the study provides that the acceptance of offence predicts self-forgiveness and empathy may be a resultant of the perceived personal distress and the distress of others.

All these models of self-forgiveness have much in common and they all provide for the importance of the severity of the transgression, conciliatory behaviours, guilt, shame and perceived forgiveness from the victims. Recently, a model of self-forgiveness was proposed by Mudgal and Tiwari (2017a) who employed exploratory research design on the Indian population and came up with three components of self-forgiveness: Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution. The uniqueness of this model lies in the empirical validation of these components of self-forgiveness which suggested it to be significant predictor of general health and quality of life of Indian adults (Mudgal & Tiwari, 2017b).

Self-esteem and self-forgiveness

Research suggests that individuals with threatened self-esteem are less forgiving. Since self-esteem ascertains the threat level of any transgression, guilt and shame, it is theoretically as well as practically significant to explore processes that drive the relationship between self-esteem and self-forgiveness (Strelan & Zdaniuk, 2015). A lower level of self-esteem encourages people to enter self-protection and develop avoidance that may affect self-forgiveness negatively, and excess self-protection caused by poor self-esteem may decrease the accessibility of psychological resources needed for forgiveness to come out (Strelan & Zdaniuk, 2015). The severity of transgression impedes forgiveness (Fincham et al., 2005; Griffin et al., 2020) which necessitates the assessment of the roles of the positive self-resources in regulating forgiveness (Strelan & Zdaniuk, 2015).

There is limited research regarding the nature of and the extent to which individuals' self-esteem affects forgiveness (Strelan & Zdaniuk, 2015). A meta-analytic review demonstrated a very weak relationship between trait self-esteem and situational forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010). The transgression in which the individuals commit wrongdoing may also affect their self-esteem and

later impact their forgiveness. Research has suggested that people use self-esteem as an intrapersonal resource to cater to the adaptive demands of life (Steele et al., 1993) which act as a standard that is guided by their values and situational cues. Although individuals attempt to maintain a positive self-image, the primary motivation behind this image is to maintain self-integrity, self-worth, and their perceptions of themselves as good, virtuous, and efficacious. Thus, having high self-esteem facilitates individuals to affirm their resources and make lesser use of defensive mechanisms or distort reality.

Moreover, individuals with high self-esteem are also more likely to acknowledge their responsibility in the face of adversity, pain, and wrongdoings. Originating from social comparison, self-esteem denotes one's ranking and reflects one's sense of self-worth and evaluations (Harter, 1999). Having higher self-esteem is not always beneficial for individuals. For example, having higher self-esteem may involve puffing the self up in putting others down, lead to a grandiose view of oneself and narcissistic tendencies that, in turn, may lead to negative outcomes (anger, retaliation) while healthy self-esteem may culminate in positive ones (MacKinnon, 2015; Neff, 2011).

Self-compassion and self-forgiveness

Self-compassion denotes a set of positive self-attitudes and behaviours that enhances the positive relationship with the self and self-worth in the face of failures, pain, and adversity. Self-compassion comprises three interdependent and interrelated dimensions which are bipolar. These are, first, 'self-kindness vs. self-judgement'; second, 'common humanity vs. isolation'; and, third, 'mindfulness vs. over-identification' (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). The first component is characterized by self-care and positive attitudes in adversity while the second facilitates the understanding that pain or failure is a common experience for all. The third aspect represents awareness and presence of one's negative experiences (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). It has been reported to be closely linked with positive physical and mental health outcomes, academic success, well-being, and performance (e. g., Tiwari et al., 2020).

Research suggests that self-compassion and self-forgiveness are closely linked but their nature of association has not been understood properly (Conway-Williams, 2015). Self-forgiveness and self-compassion are similar in their definitions, components, processes and contributions to various life outcomes (Conway-Williams, 2015). Nurturing kindness, generosity, humanity, and love toward oneself comprise the constructs of self-forgiveness and self-compassion (i. e.,

Worthington et al., 2005). These two also have similarities in regulating a broad range of psychological functioning and have an adaptive role in self-regulation, pro-social, and positive virtues (Berry et al., 2005), health functioning (Christensen et al., 2011), and well-being (e. g., Pandey et al., 2021).

It is noticeable that self-compassion and self-forgiveness are closely linked but the empirical validation of their association is not appropriately investigated (Conway-Williams, 2015). Neff and Pommier (2013) reported a close association between forgiveness and self-compassion in a sample comprising students, older adults, and yogic meditators. Intrinsic attributes of self-care, balanced understanding of life realities, and useful focus on problems rather than avoiding them ingrained in self-compassion may facilitate individuals to become more inclined to forgive themselves. Since self-compassion is more frequent, pervasive, and comparatively easy to experience than self-forgiveness, cognitive, emotional, and experiential responses towards committing an offence may be linked with it, that, in turn, may affect the likelihood of self-forgiveness.

The current study

Self-compassion and self-forgiveness occur at the time when an individual is facing adversity, pain, and guilt. Both the processes are closely associated with self-knowledge and self-attitude. Both the processes have positive impacts on the individuals. Thus, they must be linked with each other. Although self-esteem, self-compassion, and self-forgiveness have been linked with a variety of positive life outcomes, there is limited research relating to these three constructs. Recently, some researchers have shown their disagreements with the empirical validity of the dimensions of the self-compassion model proposed by Neff (2003a) and questioned the suitability and usefulness of incorporating self-judgement, isolation as well as over-identification in it (Muris et al., 2016). Similarly, Muris and Petrocchi (2017) showed that PSC ('self-kindness', 'common humanity', and 'mindfulness') exhibited negative associations with problems of mental health whereas NSC ('self-judgement', 'isolation', and 'over-identification') indicated positive relationships with psychopathological symptoms. Similar observations were made by some other researchers who reported comparable findings regarding PSC and NSC (Pandey et al., 2021; Pfattheicher et al., 2017).

Neff and her associates defended this criticism and argued that the bifactor model with six dimensions reflects the most suitable conceptualisation of self-compassion (Cleare et al., 2018;

Neff et al., 2017). The opponents argued that NSC ('self-judgement', 'isolation', and 'over-identification') represents negative attributes and carries a close connection with self-condemnation (Zuroff et al., 1990), loneliness, social withdrawal (e. g., Rubin & Coplan, 2004), and rumination (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). Conversely, PSC was positively correlated with social support seeking and supportive thoughts (Allen & Leary, 2010), and adaptive behaviours and negatively with self-blame and disengagement (Sirois et al., 2015). These findings were contrary to the claim of Neff et al. (2018). Thus, conceptualising self-compassion in terms of positive and negative dimensions may be more efficacious to underscore its role in shaping various life outcomes (Muris et al., 2018; Pandey et al., 2021).

Although some preliminary efforts have been made to understand the relationship between self-esteem, self-compassion, and self-forgiveness, a more detailed and close investigation involving diverse populations is lacking (Conway-Williams, 2015). Limited research has addressed the role of self-compassion in shaping the self-forgiveness process (Wenzel et al., 2012). In this backdrop, the current study aimed to explicate the mediating role of positive and negative dimensions of self-compassion in determining the relationships of self-esteem with self-forgiveness, along with its three components, namely Realization & Reparation, Guilt and Attribution, as proposed by Mudgal and Tiwari (2017a).

Aims/Goals

The present study aims to explore the relationship between self-esteem and self-forgiveness dimensions such as Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution in Indian population. The overarching goal of this study was to investigate the mediating role of positive and negative self-compassion in exploring the relationship between the dimensions of self-esteem and self-forgiveness.

The following hypotheses were formed on the basis of the literature reviewed:

H1: Self-esteem would correlate positively with self-forgiveness dimensions such as Realization & Reparation, Attribution, and negatively with Guilt.

H2: Positive self-compassion (PSC) would correlate positively with self-forgiveness dimensions such as Realization & Reparation, Attribution, and negatively with Guilt.

H3: Negative self-compassion (NSC) would correlate positively with self-forgiveness dimensions

such as Realization & Reparation, Attribution, and negatively with Guilt.

H4: Both PSC and NSC would potentially mediate the relationship between self-esteem and self-forgiveness dimensions.

Method

Participants

The present study employed a convenience sampling method to choose the participants of the study. Initially, 351 participants pursuing their graduation and post-graduation programmes at schools of Arts, Science, Law, and Commerce at Doctor Hari Singh Gour University, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh (India) gave their consent to participate. Out of these, only 300 participants with the age spanning from 18 years to 30 years ($M = 20.04$ years, $SD = 1.77$) consented to their final participation. The scores of these participants were screened for outliers with the help of SPSS v26 as per the procedure outlined by Donald (2016). After the screening of the outliers, only data of 144 males (Age range = 18-25 years; $M = 22.10$ years, $SD = 1.66$) and 124 females (Age range = 19-30 years, $M = 21.98$ years, $SD = 1.90$) were left for final analyses.

Measures

The psychometric measures utilised for collecting data are described below:

Self-esteem scale

The self-esteem of the participants was measured with Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This scale comprises 10-items (e.g., item 4- '*I am able to do things as well as most other people*', item 9- '*All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.*') which purports to measure overall self-worth by assessing both positive and negative feelings about the self (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale seeks responses on a 4-point scale (*Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Agree*, and *Strongly Agree*). The higher the score obtained, the higher the self-esteem. Internal consistency reliability of the scale was .77 (Rosenberg, 1965) and test-retest reliability over a 2-week and a 7-month period were .85 and .63, respectively (e. g., Whiteman & Shorkey, 1978). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of this scale in the current study sample was .81. The scale has a good convergent validity. A correlation of .44 was obtained

between Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale and the Academic Self-Concept Scale (Reynolds, 1988). Correlations ranging from moderate to high between scores on measures of theoretically-correlated constructs are considered indicative of convergent validity (Gregory, 2014).

Self-compassion scale

Participants' self-compassion was measured with the help of the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003a). Items of the self-compassion scale comprise thoughts, emotions and behaviours representing the various components of self-compassion. The scale consists of 26 items that comprise self-kindness (e.g., *I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.*), self-judgment (e.g., *When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.*), common humanity (e.g., *When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.*), isolation (e.g., *When I'm really struggling I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.*), mindfulness (e.g., *When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.*) and over-identification (e.g., *When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.*) with a five-point scale from 1= *almost never* to 5= *almost always*. Higher scores indicate higher levels of that attribute on each of the six subscales. The total scores on 'self-kindness', 'common humanity', and 'mindfulness' represent positive self-compassion whereas an aggregate of the scores on 'self-judgement', 'isolation', and 'over-identification' indicate negative self-compassion.

Studies involving diverse population groups have reported desirable internal consistency reliability for the scale (e. g., Allen et al., 2012). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale in the current study sample was .84. The translated versions of this measure have also observed a six-factor structure of the scale across various cultural groups (Arimitsu, 2014; Castilho et al., 2015). The scale has good construct validity (Neff, 2003b). Self-compassion shows a significant negative correlation (-.65) with self-criticism and significant positive correlation (.41) with a sense of social connectedness, indicating convergent validity (Neff, 2003b).

Self-forgiveness scale

Standardized on the Indian population with exploratory mixed-methods design, the Self-



Forgiveness Scale (Mudgal & Tiwari, 2017a) was used to assess the self-forgiveness of the participants. The self-forgiveness measure comprises 30 items with a seven-point scale (1-very strongly disagree, 2-strongly disagree, 3-somewhat disagree, 4- neutral, 5-somewhat agree, 6- strongly agree, 7-very strongly agree). This self-forgiveness measure entails three dimensions: Realization & Reparation (19 items; e.g., *I realize my mistakes immediately.*), Guilt (6 items; e.g., *I own the responsibility of my mistakes.*), and Attribution (5 items; e.g., *I easily seek forgiveness from others for my mistakes.*). Higher scores on the three subscales of self-forgiveness are indicative of higher levels of attributes. The reliability coefficients were estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha for the three subscales and the overall scale of self-forgiveness, which were .90, .70, .62, and .77, respectively. Likewise, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients of Realization & Reparation, Guilt, Attribution, and Overall Self-Forgiveness scale on the study sample were .93, .64, .60, and .86, respectively.

Construct validity (specifically, convergent validity) was estimated by computing the correlation between the scores of the overall self-forgiveness scale and physical, psychological, spiritual, and environmental dimensions of the abbreviated World Health Organization Quality of Life Brief Version (WHOQOL-BREF) scale (World Health Organization, 1996) and those came to be .362, .366, .303, and .333, respectively (Mudgal, 2017). Similarly, it also showed a significant positive correlation with a positive mental health (well-being) measure (Keyes, 2005) in a recent study (Pandey et al., 2020). Since it is important to demonstrate both convergent and discriminant validities in order to provide evidence for construct validity (Hubley & Zumbo, 1996), discriminant validity was also calculated. Since low correlations between measures that should not theoretically correlate highly provide evidence for discriminant validity (Hubley, 2014), correlations of scores on various dimensions of self-forgiveness with those on general health were calculated. These correlations ranged between .004 and .251 (Mudgal, 2017). Thus, taken together, the self-forgiveness scale was found to have acceptable construct validity.

Procedure

The proposal of the study was submitted for approval before the Ethics Committee of Doctor Hari Singh Gour University, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, India. After the receipt of ethical approval, the participants were contacted for recruitment. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study and the general procedure, following which written informed consent was obtained from each participant. The data was collected in small groups of 5 to 10 participants at a time for

accuracy and ease. Accordingly, the scales were provided to each participant, and they were asked to read the instructions printed on each scale. The scoring was completed as per the guidelines provided in the manuals of the scales. No compensation was given to the participants for their participation in the study.

Data analyses

The data were analysed as per the objectives of the study using SPSS v26. Data analyses were carried out in two phases: preliminary analysis, and path analyses. In the first phase, Pearson's correlations were calculated on the scores obtained from self-esteem, PSC and NSC, and the dimensions of self-forgiveness in order to comprehend the nature and extent of the association among the variables. In the second phase, the path analysis was carried out assuming self-esteem as the predictor, self-compassion components (PSC & NSC) as the mediators and self-forgiveness components (Realization & Reparation, Guilt, & Attribution) as outcome variables. The path analysis was conducted using AMOS software (version 20) and the maximum likelihood method was used to assess the fitness of the model.

Results

The results of the present study have been presented in two sub-sections: preliminary analyses, and path analyses.

Preliminary analyses

At the stage of preliminary analyses, zero-order correlations were computed to decipher the nature and extent of association among the variables of self-esteem, components of self-forgiveness (Realization & Reparation, Guilt, & Attribution) as well as PSC and NSC (Table 1).

Table 1.

Correlation Matrix Depicting Correlations Among Self-Esteem, Dimensions of Self-Forgiveness, and Positive & Negative Self-Compassion

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	1						
2	.523**	1					
3	.269**	-.140*	1				
4	.289**	.446**	-.180**	1			
5	.002	-.151*	.227**	-.394**	1		
6	-.148*	.150*	-.310**	.218**	-.256**	1	
7	.280**	.442**	-.165**	.955**	-.138*	.301**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

¹Self-esteem, ²Positive self-compassion, ³Negative self-compassion, ⁴Realization & Reparation, ⁵Guilt, ⁶Attribution, ⁷Overall Self-forgiveness

The analyses revealed significant inter-correlations among Self-esteem and the dimension Realization & Reparation, Attribution as well as the total score of Self-forgiveness. However, Guilt did not yield a significant correlation with Self-esteem. PSC and NSC differentially correlated with the dimensions of Self-forgiveness. While PSC correlated positively and significantly with all the three dimensions of Self-forgiveness (except guilt), NSC followed the opposite pattern of correlation. Further, Self-esteem correlated positively with both PSC and NSC (see Table 1).

Path analyses

The overarching goal of our study was to test the mediating roles played by PSC and NSC in the relationship between Self-esteem and Self-forgiveness. The same proposition was tested (Figure 1) using path analysis. Before conducting path analysis, it was ensured that the basic assumptions of path analysis were met, which are that all relationships are linear as well as additive; residual error terms are uncorrelated with the variables in the model and with one another; causal direction is one-way; variables included in the model are measured at least at the interval scale; and variables are measured in an error-free manner (Fidelis & Sunday, 2018). The percentile bootstrap method (2000 samples) was used for assessing the indirect (mediated) pathways.



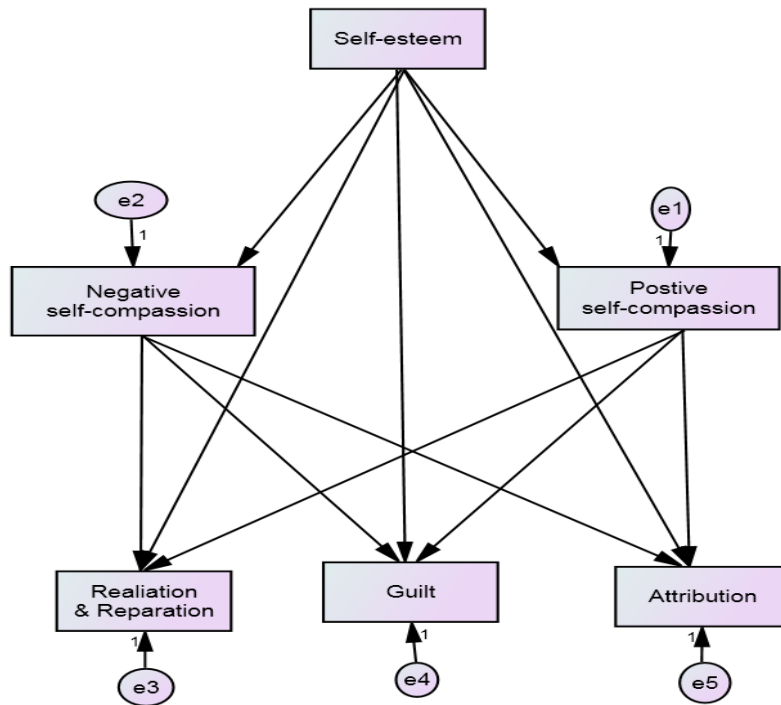


Figure 1. (Base Model): A path model taking PSC and NSC as mediators in the relationship between Self-Esteem and the three dimensions of Self-Forgiveness (Realization & Reparation, Guilt, & Attribution).

$\chi^2(4) = 82.5$; $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 20.62$; $p < .001$ GFI=.91, AGFI=.51, CFI=.737, RMSEA=.231, SRMR=.113

The base model did not receive adequate empirical support. Chi-square ($\chi^2(4) = 82.50$, $N = 268$, $p < .001$) reflected that the model was not a good fit to the data. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI, acceptable value ≥ 0.954 ; Hu & Bentler, 1999), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI, acceptable value $> .95$; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) and the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI, acceptable value $> .90$) values of the present model were below the acceptable limit. The base model yielded a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of .271 (acceptable cut-off value for RMSEA is ≤ 0.06 , according to Hu & Bentler, 1999) and a Standardized Root Mean-squared Residual (SRMR) value of 0.113 (acceptable value ≤ 0.08 ; Hu & Bentler, 1999), both of which were much below the acceptable range. The ratio of Maximum-Likelihood Chi-Square to the degrees of freedom (χ^2/df , acceptable value < 5) was also found to be unacceptable ($\chi^2/df = 20.62$).

A local-level revision of the base model was preferred (Figure 1) by adding and removing some regression paths instead of global modification (reworking the theory). Such local revisions of model by adding and removing some regression paths are well-accepted practice in path analyses (Savalei & Bentler, 2006). Observing a strong association between Guilt and Attribution, Guilt was presented as a predictor of Attribution. The error variances of Realization & Reparation and Guilt, as well as PSC and NSC, were correlated. Lastly, the regression path leading from self-esteem to Guilt was removed after observing a non-significant and marginal correlation. Only a single modification was adapted at a time. These modifications produced a perfect-fit model.

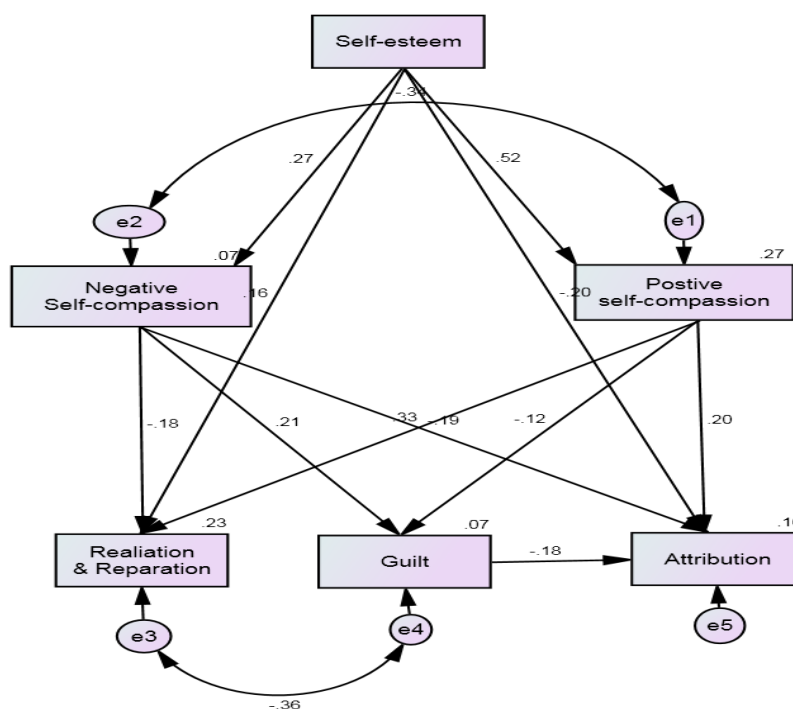


Figure 2. (Revised Model) A path model taking PSC and NSC as mediators in the relationship between Self-Esteem and the three dimensions of Self-Forgiveness (Realization & Reparation, Guilt, & Attribution).

$\chi^2(2) = 3.13$; $p = .209$, $\chi^2/df = 1.6$, GFI = .996, AGFI = .959, TLI = .972, CFI = .996, RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .018

It was found that self-esteem directly predicted both PSC and NSC ($\beta = .52$ & $.27$ respectively, $p < .01$). Self-esteem significantly and directly predicted Realization & Reparation as well as Attribution ($\beta = .16$ & $-.21$ respectively, $p < .05$). Negative Self-compassion significantly predicted all the dimensions of Self-forgiveness, viz., Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution ($\beta = -.18$, $.21$ & $-.19$ respectively, $p < .01$). Positive self-compassion significantly predicted Realization & Reparation, Guilt as well as Attribution ($\beta = .34$, $-.12$ & $.20$ respectively, $p < .05$). The indirect (mediating) effects of Self-Esteem on the dimensions of Self-forgiveness were calculated and checked for statistical significance. The significant indirect paths are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Mediating Paths Between Self-esteem & the Dimensions of Self-forgiveness

Mediating paths between Self-esteem and Realization & Reparation	Estimate
Through NSC	-.05**
Through PSC	.18**
Total	.125
Mediating paths between Self-esteem and Guilt	
Through NSC	.06**
Through PSC	-.06**
Total	00
Mediating paths between Self-esteem and Attribution	
Through NSC	-.05**
Through PSC	.11*
Total	.06

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). PSC = Positive self-compassion, NSC = Negative self-compassion.

It was found that self-esteem has dual and opposing partial indirect relationships with the dimensions of Self-forgiveness (except Guilt). The relationships of Self-esteem with Realization and Reparation, as well as Attribution were partially and differentially mediated by PSC and NSC. The mediated relationships were partial as, along with the mediated relationships, Self-esteem shares direct relationships with the mentioned dimensions. However, the relationship between Self-esteem and Guilt was fully mediated by PSC and NSC because Self-esteem did not have any significant association with Guilt (Table 2).



Discussion

The basic aim of the study was to comprehend the mediating role of PSC and NSC in shaping the relationships between Self-esteem and Self-forgiveness. The study findings evinced the significant role of Self-esteem as well as Self-compassion and the mediating role of PSC and NSC in determining the participants' three dimensions of Self-forgiveness (Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution).

Self-esteem and Self-forgiveness

The findings showed that Self-esteem exhibited significant positive correlations with Realization & Reparation and overall Self-forgiveness while significant negative or very low positive correlations with Guilt and Attribution. Self-esteem contributed significant variability in Realization & Reparation and was seen to be the most important predictor next to PSC and NSC. Likewise, Self-esteem caused significant variability in Guilt and Attribution. Self-esteem emerged as an important contributor to Realization & Reparation after PSC. The findings showed that Self-esteem has inhibiting effects on Attribution.

The mechanisms underlying the positive impacts of Self-esteem on Self-forgiveness may be understood and explained in terms of the basic properties of these constructs. Self-esteem is characterized by higher self-satisfaction, useful social comparison, self-respect, self-worth, positive self-attitude, self-pride, useful self-perception and perceived feelings of being resourceful, able, and virtuous (Pandey et al., 2021; Rosenberg, 1965). Research suggests that self-esteem reflects close relationships with a person's attributes of positive emotions, self-evaluation, happiness, effective mood regulation, optimism and most favourable functioning that buffer the effects of stress caused by pain, failure, and adversities of life. It also benefits individuals by activating better initiatives and positive feelings (Baumeister et al., 2003; Pandey et al., 2021).

The self-forgiveness measure used in this study has three components: Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution. Realization & Reparation involves a feeling of wrongdoing, taking responsibility and easily accepting wrongdoings, repairing of relationship, tendency and ability to lower negative emotions to self, promise to not repeat wrongdoings in the future, others' good behaviours, remorse, forgetting of past wrongdoings, forgiveness to others, the importance of relationships, self-love, readiness to correct, seeking forgiveness, positive

behaviour towards others, degree of loss, physical and emotional consequences, temporal gain, assessing situational responsibility, and morality (Mudgal & Tiwari, 2017a). Guilt involves self-criticism, accepting the responsibility of transgression and its consequences (Mudgal & Tiwari, 2017a). Attribution comprises the inclination for improvement, nature and relationship, seeking forgiveness to others, perception of social relationships, and moral values (Mudgal & Tiwari, 2017a).

The affirmative attributes of self-esteem might be playing a causative role behind its close links with Realization & Reparation, Attribution and overall Self-forgiveness of the participants in this study. The current study findings lend their support to the findings of multiple studies. For example, research suggests that Self-esteem plays a promotive role in Self-forgiveness and individuals with a threat to their Self-esteem have a higher need for self-protection (Leary et al., 2009; vanDellen et al., 2011) and, thus, low Self-esteem is linked with a lower level of forgiveness. Individuals with higher Self-esteem are better able to face adaptively the threats against their self and identity (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). Moreover, people with lower Self-esteem get over-involved in protecting their self and lack required positive self-resources essential for Self-forgiveness while people with higher self-esteem have sufficient self-resources necessary for Self-forgiveness (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Self-compassion and Self-forgiveness

The findings showed that PSC and NSC exhibited dissimilar relationships with Self-esteem and three dimensions of Self-forgiveness (Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution) and significant predictive capacity for the Self-forgiveness dimensions. This may be explained in two ways. One, the dissimilar nature of PSC and NSC may help understand their impacts on Self-forgiveness. Second, it may involve the mechanisms reported by earlier findings. PSC reflects many positive and useful virtues like kindness to self, experiences common to all humanity, and mindfulness which, in turn, nurture higher self-acceptance, care, kindness, tolerance, understanding and patience towards one's negative attributes, common life struggle, collective perception about lack, shared inadequacy, emotional balance, positive attributions, positive thinking, and enhanced progressiveness towards self in the face of adverse life circumstances (Neff, 2003b; Tiwari et al., 2020). On the other hand, NSC represents a critical attitude towards self, unsympathetic behaviour towards self, narrow-mindedness, self-depreciation, solitude, negative habits, inferiority and maximization of small negative events (Neff, 2003b). Thus, the

debilitating tendency associated with the negative component of Self-compassion might be working behind its close association with Guilt and its negative correlation and lowered predictive strength for other aspects of Self-forgiveness. The distinctive features of PSC and NSC may explain the dissimilar impacts they have on Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution as well as overall Self-forgiveness.

The PSC and NSC reflect two distinct mechanisms that have been empirically verified (Muris et al., 2018; Pandey et al., 2021). Self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification demonstrate close resemblance with unkind self-condemnation (Zuroff et al., 1990), feelings of loneliness and withdrawal from social relationships (Rubin & Coplan, 2004), and self-orientated rumination (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). Research suggests that PSC is positively related to healthy coping and adaptive functioning, whereas NSC is related to unhealthy coping and psychopathological symptoms (Muris et al., 2018). This may be because NSC catalyzes passive avoidance and negative expression of emotions (Allen & Leary, 2010). The present study findings suggest that conceptualization of self-compassion in terms of positive and negative dimensions, is more efficacious to underscore its role in Self-forgiveness.

The role of Self-esteem and Self-compassion in determining the nature and extent of Self-forgiveness components may be explained in the light of their conceptualizations. Research suggests Self-compassion to be moderately related to the basic attributes of Self-esteem (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003a; Neff et al., 2007). Self-esteem entails an individual's overall subjective sense of personal worth in comparison to others (Harter, 1999). In other words, having higher Self-esteem reflects a superior position in social situations and being above-average in desirable attributes (Heine et al., 1999). Conversely, Self-compassion is not based on positive or negative evaluations of self but it reflects a way to relate one with oneself. Self-compassion occurs not due to relative evaluation but it happens as people are humans (Neff, 2012). Moreover, Self-compassion comprises being self-caring, warm and considerate towards self in the face of suffering and adversity (Neff, 2012).

Self-esteem also differs from Self-compassion in the benefits it extends to its bearers. For example, Self-compassion facilitates personal adequacy, care, acknowledgement of problems, common experience, receptive mind-state, and identification with feelings and thoughts (Bishop et al., 2006). It emphasizes interrelationship rather than dissociation. In addition, Self-compassion extends higher emotional resources, relatedness, self-acceptance, greater autonomy, higher relationship satisfaction and positive attachment on one hand and lowers

negative detachment, unnecessary control and aggression on the other (Neff, 2012). Self-esteem benefits individuals in another way also. For instance, people with higher Self-esteem exhibit lessened depressive tendencies and anxiety symptoms (McKay & Fanning, 2016).

The mediating role of self-compassion

The indirect effects observed in the path analysis revealed that Self-compassion components (positive and negative) mediated the relationships of Self-esteem and Self-forgiveness (Realization & Reparation, Guilt and Attribution). Self-esteem represents an overall subjective sense of personal worth and values of individuals. It may have strengthened positive Self-compassion since it is characterized by warmth and self-respect, an understanding of the universality of human conditions and common humanity, and a balanced awareness of the sufferings of life which, in turn, may have enhanced Self-forgiveness. Conversely, the positive link between Self-esteem and negative Self-compassion may not have yielded the same benefits for Self-forgiveness. It may be due to the inherent nature of negative Self-compassion which entails self-criticism, connectedness with sufferings and failures of life and with their consequent thoughts and emotions.

Taken together, the study findings show that both Self-esteem as well as Self-compassion are desirable attributes and differ in their mechanisms that may underlie their dissimilar roles in determining the nature and extent of Self-forgiveness. In crux, Self-compassion is a positive self-attitude of individuals that carries a close connection with Self-esteem (Neff, 2003a, 2011) and helps them to initiate an adaptive response to threats. Self-esteem is assumed to be close to self-affirmation as the latter involves balanced and open-minded appraisal (Burson et al., 2012). Thus, the findings show that Self-esteem along with Self-compassion plays significant roles in determining the nature as well as the extent of Self-forgiveness.

Research suggests that Self-esteem is pertinent to understand and explaining the various performance indices of individuals brought up in societies with individualistic culture (Fiske et al., 1998; Triandis, 1989, 2001). Conversely, self-compassion may provide a similar relevance for understanding people's life outcomes belonging to societies professing collectivistic culture (Birkett, 2013; Kitayama & Uskul, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Neff et al., 2008). An individualistic culture views individuals as an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity and lays a stronger focus on the personal goal pursuit and autonomy, internal attributes expression and satisfaction of needs to understand and predict their behaviours and actions



(i.e., [Chiu et al., 2008](#)). Conversely, collectivistic culture lays more emphasis on individuals' identity with a group (e.g., family, country, occupation, or caste), relationships and social harmony to understand their behaviours and life outcomes (e.g., [Hofstede et al., 2010](#)). Collectivistic culture focuses on interdependent self, connectedness, flexibility, exteriority (statuses and roles), other-orientation and significance of social contexts in realizing wrongdoings, consequent guilt and attributions uniquely leading to self-forgiveness. Thus, the differences in the self-construal of people of individualistic and collectivistic cultures may have a set of specific consequences for cognition, emotion, and motivation for people ([Markus & Kitayama, 1991](#)).

Sandage and Wiens ([2001](#)) suggest that individualists possess an independent self, value self-esteem, view relationships as contractual, have self-focused orientation, view self-forgiveness as vital and relevant for personal well-being, and enhance self-forgiveness through personal coping skills and self-help resources. Conversely, collectivists carry an interdependent self-construal, are community and harmony oriented, other-oriented in relationships, view self-forgiveness as less significant, use it for social well-being and achieve it through resources like communal narratives, rituals and symbols. The two also differ in religiosity and emphasis on self-attributes. These differences in individualistic and collectivistic cultures may differentially shape the realization of wrongdoings by the offender, reduce guilt with the help of others, enhance self-worth, self-esteem, self-compassion, religious and relational resources. The attribution of the causes and consequences of transgressions may significantly affect self-forgiveness. For example, collectivists are more religious and their religiosity may help them to realize transgressions, guilt, and attributions through religious support and arrangements to understand transgression and practice Self-forgiveness ([Krause, 2017](#)). Research suggests that people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures also differ significantly in their forgiveness behaviours. For instance, people from collectivistic cultures understand forgiveness in the context of reconciliation, social harmony, and relational repair; their forgiveness is more decisional and unforgiveness may not reduce their negative emotions ([Hook, 2007](#); [Hook et al., 2009](#)). Besides, collectivistic cultures promote greater feelings of shame and guilt than individualistic cultures ([Carducci, 2012, 2015](#)).

These descriptions of individualistic and collectivistic cultures are general patterns of thinking and behaviour related to specific cultural guidelines. Studies argue that both cultures may coexist and a person's behaviours may be guided by both individualistic and collectivistic values



(Tripathi, 2019; Tripathi & Leviatan, 2003). This coexistence of individualistic and collectivistic cultures may be seen here in the case of the current study findings that show the relevance of both the constructs (Self-esteem and Self-compassion) in understanding Self-forgiveness. This may be because Self-esteem, as well as Self-compassion, maybe working together as individualism and collectivism are suggested to coexist in countries like India (Pandey et al., 2021; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). Thus, the study findings may be indicative of the fact that Indian society is in transition as reflected by the coexistence of Self-esteem and Self-compassion that positively shaped the Self-forgiveness.

Limitations and further implications

The findings may prompt future researchers to have a fresh look at many other psychological constructs that have not been studied in the light of the individualism and collectivism dichotomy. Future researchers may consider suggestions of more recent research which argues that the individualism-collectivism paradigm is very complex and need further conceptual and empirical expansion (Fatehi et al., 2020). Future researchers may carry out qualitative studies to search for the true nature of other psychological constructs to come up with their novel understanding and measures. The study findings are preliminary which necessitate further research to establish more firmly the nature and direction of the relationships between variables using diverse and cross-cultural samples.

The current study is not without limitations. Recruitment of student participants from a limited geographical area is the first limitation. The second limitation is that the study findings are based on only a single correlational study. The use of a small number of variables entails another limitation. Keeping these limitations in mind, generalization of the findings will need precautions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it may be said that Self-esteem and also Self-compassion carry significant relevance in understanding Self-forgiveness. Self-esteem and the positive aspect of Self-compassion are positively correlated with Self-forgiveness. Conversely, the negative dimension of Self-compassion signifies negative correlations with these measures. Self-esteem accounts for significant positive variance in Realization & Reparation and overall Self-forgiveness and significant negative variability in the Attribution. Positive Self-compassion accounts for positive significant variances in Realization & Reparation and overall Self-forgiveness and negative

variance in Guilt and Attribution. On the other hand, negative Self-compassion accounts for a positive significant variance in Guilt and negative significant variability in Realization & Reparation and Attribution. Besides, both PSC and NSC partially mediate the relationship between Self-esteem and Realization & Reparation, Guilt, and Attribution in dissimilar manners.

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