

## **The relationship between compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism and verbal aggressiveness**

Merhamet, kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı, narsizm ve sözel saldırganlığın ilişkisi

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### **Abstract**

This investigation explores the relationship between compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness in friendship relationships. First, it discusses the novel construct of compassion for others and its inverse relationship to constructs such as interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness in friendship communication. Second, it examines whether there are gender differences in compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension (CA), narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness. Participants were 613 undergraduate students who completed the Compassion Scale, PRCA-24, Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale, and the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product-moment correlations to examine the associations among the variables of interest and Independent-sample t-tests to investigate sex differences. The results of this study revealed that compassion was inversely correlated with interpersonal CA, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness. Sex differences were also found in compassion, interpersonal CA, and verbal aggressiveness.

**Keywords:** Compassion, other-compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, verbal aggressiveness

### **Özet**

Bu çalışmada, arkadaşlık ilişkilerinde merhamet, kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı, narsizm ve sözel saldırganlığın ilişkisi incelenmiştir. Öncelikle, yeni bir kavram olan başkalarına duyulan merhamet kavramı ve onun zıt ilişkili olduğu kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı, narsizm ve sözel saldırganlık gibi kavramlar arkadaşlık ilişkilerinde tartışılmıştır. Daha sonra, merhamet, kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı, narsizm ve sözel saldırganlıkta cinsiyet farklılıklarının olup olmadığı incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın katılımcıları 613 lisans öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılar, Merhamet Ölçeği, PRCA-24, Narsizm Ölçeği ve Sözel Saldırganlık Ölçeği'ni doldurmuşlardır. Verilerin analizinde Pearson Product Moment korelasyon yöntemi kullanılarak araştırma değişkenleri arasındaki ilişki incelenmiş ve Bağımsız Örneklem T Testi kullanılarak cinsiyet farkları incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, merhametin kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı, narsizm, ve sözel saldırganlık ile negatif ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Aynı zamanda merhamet, kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı ve sözel saldırganlıkta cinsiyete göre anlamlı farklılıklar bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Merhamet, başkasına merhamet, kişilerarası iletişim kaygısı, narsizm, sözel saldırganlık

### **Introduction**

“If you can, help others; if you cannot do that, at least do not harm them.” This quote has been made famous by the Dalai Lama who has sent out a call to study compassion to help alleviate the suffering of individuals in human relationships. Because suffering is shared by all humanity we understand that

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suffering is an undesirable state. Compassion is about being nonjudgmental toward others, tolerant of our human flaws, and being willing to connect with those who are in distress (Neff, 2003a). With compassion, individuals are able to promote comfort and social support in their relationships by understanding other people's states of distress (Neff, 2004). Conversely, those who lack compassion may negatively impact their relationships with others by possessing traits such as narcissism, or by having inflated perceptions of themselves with a need for others' admiration (Kernis & Sun, 1994). Individuals with no compassion for others may also display a lack of effective communication skills such as interpersonal communication apprehension, or the anxiety of communicating with others, and verbal aggressiveness, the use of harmful verbal attacks on others (Venable & Martin, 1997; McCroskey & Beatty, 1998).

Compassion is a recently developed variable in the field of social psychology that can stimulate the understanding of the alleviation of suffering in relationships in the area of interpersonal communication. Compassion is defined as "being touched by the suffering of others, opening one's awareness to others' pain and not avoiding or disconnecting from it, so that feelings of kindness towards others and the desire to alleviate their suffering emerge" (Neff, 2003a, p. 86-87). Cole-King and Gilbert (2011) augment the definition to "a sensitivity to the distress of self and others with a commitment to try to do something about it and prevent it" (p. 30). Although compassion and self-compassion may be conceptually different, both constructs share the theoretical elements of kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness using Buddhist principles (Pommier, 2010; Neff, 2003a). Kindness is the first element of compassion that demonstrates caring and understanding toward others when they are in distress (Neff, 2003a). Common humanity is the second element of compassion that focuses on the awareness that our experiences are shared with others (Neff, 2003a). Mindfulness is the third element of compassion and it emphasizes being emotionally aware of one's own pain and the pain of other people, as such that the pain does not consume a person's overall emotional state (Neff, 2003a). Within the realms of this non-Western definition, these three elements are used to define compassion and self-compassion more generally (Pommier, 2010; Neff, 2003a). Thus, when practicing compassion one must abstain from the tendency of negatively judging others who may be engaging in questionable communicative behaviors (e.g., deception), and instead practice compassion by being mindful about the distress that another person may be experiencing, which may be triggering a particular behavior (Neff, 2004). Furthermore, the aim of this paper is to explore the correlations between the social psychological constructs of compassion and narcissism with social communication constructs such as interpersonal communication apprehension and verbal aggressiveness in friendship relationships.

### **Compassion and Interpersonal Relationships**

Research has shown that compassion can be a valuable practice in close relationships. In a study, Crocker and Canevello (2008) found that having compassionate goals in one's relationships can promote social connection and social bonds in friendship and romantic relationships. Compassion can also lead to the feelings of positive emotions such as happiness and optimism in individuals, which can promote healthy relationships that may sponsor effective communication in relationships (Wang, 2005). Similarly, compassionate individuals may display social support and empathy in their relationships during times of personal and interpersonal distress (e.g., grief; divorce) (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Neff (2003b) found that self-compassion is associated with great social connectedness and emotional intelligence that may promote relational maintenance behaviors. Compassion has also been shown to be positively related to individual's overall mental health and quality of life (Neff, 2003a; Neff, 2004). Further, Neff and Beretvas (2012) found that compassionate individuals tend to be more

compassionate toward their romantic partners by expressing more physical affection, which may lead to relational satisfaction. Another study found that compassion may promote relational maintenance practices in friendship, dating, and romantic relationships (Murray et al., 1996). Therefore, the study of the construct of compassion can significantly contribute to friendship communication.

Compassion can also serve to deter negative emotional states in relationships. For example, compassion can serve as a buffer against negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and anger that is often triggered in close friendships and romantic relationships (Goleman, 2003). Other research has found that self-compassion has been negatively correlated with anxiety and narcissistic tendencies, which are traits that can negatively impact close relationships (Neff, 2003b). In addition, Neff, Kirkpatrick, and Dejithirat (2004) found that self-compassion triggers the coping mechanisms needed to deal with social rejection in friendships. Likewise, compassion has been shown to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression in individuals, which can aid close relationships (Allen & Knight, 2005; Neff, 2003b). Compassion has also been found to be inversely correlated with depression and anxiety (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Allen and Knight (2005) also found that compassion can be effective in treating social anxiety and withdrawal symptoms that can help individuals initiate relationships. Thus, compassion can help cope with negative psychological states that can have a negative impact on friendship relationships.

### **Compassion and Sex Differences**

The investigations on the role of sex differences in compassion for others have been afflicted with mixed findings. A growing body of research suggests that women tend to exhibit more compassionate behaviors towards others than do men, but tend to exhibit less self-compassion toward themselves (Neff et al., 2005; Neff et al., 2008). These studies suggest that women may be expected to possess the trait of compassion toward others because women may be expected to nurture others' well-being in families and in close relationships (Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Zuo & Tang, 2000). On the other hand, other researchers have found no sex differences in compassion (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Neff et al., 2008; Iskender, 2009). These studies challenge the idea that there might be sex differences in compassion and suggest that there is still a gap in the literature to determine if these differences exist.

### **Compassion, Communication Apprehension, Narcissism, and Verbal Aggressiveness**

Gilbert's (2009) 'compassionate mind' approach grounds the study of compassion with affiliative behaviors in friendships. The 'compassionate mind' approach suggests that individuals have innate abilities to develop cooperative friendships in order to survive and they must have the social skills for compassion (Gilbert, 2009). Individuals' compassion may be developed, or delayed given individuals' internal attributes, or traits (e.g., narcissism) that allow individuals to be capable of understanding another person's suffering (Gilbert, 2009; 2010). The 'compassionate mind' approach also suggests that compassion can be related to social skills that can enable or disable individuals ability to alleviate another's suffering (Gilbert, 2009; 2010). Thus, compassion's inverse relationship to an internal trait (e.g., narcissism) and to the lack of communication skills to engage in compassion (e.g., interpersonal CA, verbal aggressiveness) will be explored in the following literature.

Thus far, research needs to examine the association between compassion and the anxiety present when communicating with other people in human relationships. Past research suggests that a lack of compassion toward the self may worsen the anxiety that is felt during human interactions (Allen & Knight, 2005). Communication apprehension is defined as the general "anxiety related to oral communication" (McCroskey, 1970, p. 270). From a dyadic perspective, interpersonal communication

apprehension (CA) is the anxiety felt when one is communicating with another person in a relationship (e.g., acquaintance, friend) (McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978). CA tends to lead to uncomfortable interactions between initiating relationships (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998). Interpersonal communication apprehension research in dating relationships revealed that after the “big fight” conflict episode in dating relationships those who survive this conflict lessen their apprehension overtime (Loveless, Powers, & Jordan, 2008). Individuals with high interpersonal CA are shown to have less ability to manage their own emotions and have difficulty in maintaining self-esteem (Butler, 1986). Research has also found that interpersonal CA in friendship may result in lack of empathy and lack of self-disclosure, which can negatively affect the relationship (e.g., low satisfaction) (Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Rubin & Rubin, 1989). Thus, given that compassion research has widely shown that it can reduce anxiety and fear in individuals (Werner, Jazaieri, Goldini, Ziv, Heimberg, & Gross, 2012), compassion may be inversely associated with interpersonal CA.

Another important construct that impacts relationships negatively is narcissism. Narcissism is defined as “tendencies toward grandiose ideas, fantasied talents, exhibitionism, and defensiveness in response to criticism; interpersonal relationships are characterized by feelings of entitlement, exploitativeness, and a lack of empathy” (American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p. 1). The communicative properties of narcissism have been examined and have found that those with narcissistic tendencies tend to control the conversation using both active and passive strategies (Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990). Narcissistic individuals have been associated with low self-esteem and with the sense of entitlement in their relationships (Cooper, 1998). Similarly, narcissism has been correlated with lack of empathy in relationships (Kernis & Sun, 1994). Narcissism lack both perspective-taking and the ability to suspend judgment to other people (Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984). Further, narcissism has been found to cause disturbances in intimate relationships (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Robbins & Dupont, 1992). Based on this previous research, then it is likely that narcissism should be inversely associated with compassion.

Verbal aggressiveness is another construct that impacts relationships negatively. Verbal aggressiveness can be defined as the attacks of the self-concepts of other people to inflict suffering on others (Infante & Wigley, 1986). These attacks include the exchange of harmful messages (i.e., character attacks, insults, profanity) that occur in interpersonal relationships, which lead to psychological harm (Infante & Wigley, 1986; Infante, Riddle, Horvath, & Tumlin, 1992). For example, teasing a friend about his/her weight may hurt this friend’s self-concept, which can lead to psychological ramifications. Research on verbal aggressiveness has demonstrated its negative impact in romantic relationships, friendship relationships, and family relationships (Sutter & Martin, 1998; Martin & Anderson, 1995; Copstead, Lanzetta, & Avtgis, 2001; Roberto, Carlyle, & Goodall, 2013). Verbal aggressiveness has been shown to be associated with self-esteem (Rancer, Kosberg, & Silvestri, 1992) and other research has suggested that low-self-esteem can sometimes predict verbal aggressiveness (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). While the relationship between self-esteem and verbal aggressiveness is still questionable (Rill, Baiocchi, Hopper, Denker, & Olson, 2009), verbal aggressiveness is still been shown to predict emotions of anger and hostility in relationships (Venable & Marti, 1997). Further, there is evidence that verbal aggressiveness is negatively associated with listening in relationships (Worthington, 2005). Several studies have also indicated that high verbal aggressiveness is linked to relationship dissatisfaction (Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993; Venable & Martin, 1997). Based on these findings we should be able to explore whether there is an inverse relationship between verbal aggressiveness and compassion for others. The next section will discuss the present study which seeks to investigate the inverse intercorrelations between compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness.

## **The Present Study**

Given that research in compassion has been growing in other fields such as psychology and sociology, research on compassion with an interpersonal communication perspective is needed to fill this interdisciplinary gap. Thus far, there is still no communication research examining compassion with variables relevant to same-sex friendships such as interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness. Therefore, this present investigation pursues the examination of the inverse interrelationships between compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness. Gilbert's (2009) 'compassionate mind' approach will be used to explore the potential inverse associations in the present study. Thus, the following research questions and hypotheses will be investigated.

H1: Interpersonal communication apprehension is negatively associated with compassion in same-sex friendships.

H2: Narcissism is negatively associated with compassion in same-sex friendships.

H3: Verbal aggressiveness is negatively associated with compassion in same-sex friendships.

RQ1: Do men and women perceive their own use of compassion toward others differently in same-sex friendships?

RQ2: Do men and women perceive their own use (a) communication apprehension, (b) narcissism, and (c) verbal aggressiveness differently in same-sex friendships?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study recruited a total of 613 undergraduate students from a large southwestern university in 2014, which included 303 men and 310 women between the ages of 18 to 42 ( $M = 19.61$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ). The ethnic background of the participants included 422 Caucasian/White, 71 Hispanic/Latino(a), 22 African-American/Black, 63 Asian American, 2 Native-American, and 31 Other. Upon Institutional Review Board approval, participants who were at least 18 years old were invited to participate in the study via an electronic recruitment announcement from their lower-division communication courses. Participants who met the age inclusion criteria were invited to complete a questionnaire about compassion and friendship in exchange for a small amount of extra credit.

### **Procedures**

Participants were provided with a recruitment script from their professors, which instructed students to complete the questionnaire on compassion and relationships through the Survey Monkey website. Participants were asked basic demographic questions such as their age, sex, and ethnicity. Participants were also asked to respond to questions on the questionnaire as if they were thinking about a same-sex friend.

### **Measures**

*Compassion Scale:* Compassion for others was measured using the Compassion Scale from Pommier's (2010) 5-point Likert-type scale. Sample items include "If I see someone going through a difficult time, I try to be caring toward that person" and "Everyone feels down sometimes, it is part of being human." The scale ranges from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*), with higher scores representing

greater compassion toward others. The alpha reliability is  $\alpha = .90-.95$  (Neff & McGehee, 2009) and  $\alpha = .91$  in the present study.

*Communication Apprehension:* The communication apprehension is generally measured using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24; Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey, 1997), but given that this study focused on relationships, the interpersonal subscale was used in this study. This scale is a Likert-type item scale that asks individuals about their degree of anxiety in various settings including interpersonal settings. Sample items include, “Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations” and “I am afraid to speak up in conversation.” The study adapted these to participants’ interactions with a same-sex friend. The scale ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and higher values indicate greater interpersonal CA. The alpha reliability is  $\alpha = .95$  (Bodie & Villaume, 2013) and  $\alpha = .80$  in this study.

*Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale:* Narcissism was measured using Hendin and Cheek’s (1997) Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS). This short version 10-item, 5-point scale was polished from Murray’s (1938) 20-item Narcissism scale. Sample items include “I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others” and “I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way.” The scale ranges from 1 (*very uncharacteristic or untrue*) to 5 (*very characteristic or true*). The alpha reliability for this scale is .97 (Hendin & Cheek, 1997) and  $\alpha = .77$  in this study.

*Verbal aggressiveness Scale:* Verbal aggressiveness was assessed using the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986). The short term 10-item subscale of the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale was used given that it has been shown that using the 10-item subscale has improved predictive validity (Chory-Assad, 2002). The scale asks individuals to respond to questions about statements that apply to themselves. Sample items include “If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character” and “When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften their stubbornness.” The scale ranges from 1 (almost never true) to 5 (almost always true). The alpha reliability for this scale is .72 (Rancer, Baukus & Amato, 1986) and  $\alpha = .87$  in this study.

## Results

Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to assess the three hypotheses in this study (see Table 1). The first hypothesis examined the negative correlation between compassion and interpersonal communication apprehension, which was supported,  $r = -.37, p < .001$ . The second hypothesis examined the negative correlation between compassion and narcissism, and this hypothesis was also supported,  $r = -.27, p < .001$ . Lastly, the third hypothesis, which examined the negative association between compassion and verbal aggressiveness was also supported,  $r = -.40, p < .001$ .

**Table 1.** Reporting descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Compassion	-			
2. Interpersonal Communication Apprehension	-.37**	-		
3. Narcissism	-.027**	0.30**	-	
4. Verbal Aggressiveness	-.40**	0.20**	0.39**	-
Mean	92.63	71.64	29.39	25.95
Standard deviation	13.3	5.63	5.95	7.28

\*\* $p < 0.001$

To examine the first research question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare sex with compassion for others. The results showed a significant difference in the self-reported scores of compassion for males ( $M = 87.45, SD = 12.70$ ) and for females ( $M = 97.69, SD = 11.87$ ),  $t(574) = 3.02, p < .001$ . These results suggest that there may be sex differences in individuals' perceptions of their own use of compassion in same-sex friendships. Specifically, the results suggest that females reported to be more compassionate toward others than males did.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare males and females with interpersonal communication apprehension, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness from the second research question (see Table 2). There were significant differences in the scores of males ( $M = 27.48, SD = 6.63$ ) and females ( $M = 24.44, SD = 7.58$ ) in their reports for verbal aggressiveness,  $t(597) = 5.22, p < .001$ . Thus, males reported being more verbally aggressive than females did. Additionally, there were significant differences in scores of males ( $M = 18.56, SD = 3.60$ ) and females ( $M = 17.8, SD = 3.8$ ) in their reports for interpersonal communication apprehension,  $t(602) = 2.50, p < .01$ . More specifically, males reported having more interpersonal communication apprehension in their same-sex friendships than did females. On the other hand, there were no significant differences in the scores for males and females in their reports for narcissism. The results suggest that females and males do not differ in their perceptions of their own narcissism within same-sex friendships, but may differ in compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension, and verbal aggressiveness.

**Table 2.** Reporting sex differences in compassion, communication apprehension, social phobia, narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness

Variable	Male ( $n = 303$ )		Female ( $n = 310$ )		$t$	$df$	$p$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			
Compassion	87.45	12.7	97.7	11.87	-10.01	574	0.001**
Interpersonal Communication Apprehension	18.56	3.63	17.80	3.81	2.50	602	.01*
Narcissism	29.39	5.74	29.4	6.15	-0.01	600	0.997
Verbal Aggressiveness	27.48	6.63	24.44	7.58	5.22	597	0.001**

\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$

## Discussion

This friendship study was conducted for two main purposes. The first purpose was to examine the negative associations between compassion, interpersonal communication apprehension (CA), narcissism, and verbal aggressiveness. The second purpose was to explore whether there were sex differences in compassion and the communication variables (e.g., interpersonal communication apprehension) in the context of same-sex friendships. Results demonstrated that compassion was negatively associated with interpersonal CA, but the strength of the association was weak. In other words, individuals who score high in interpersonal CA might score low on compassion, and individuals who score low in interpersonal CA might score high on compassion toward their same-sex friends. If there is evidence of an inverse relationship between compassion and interpersonal CA (Allen & Knight, 2005; Crocker & Canevello, 2008), then compassionate individuals might suffer less from interpersonal CA than individuals who are not as compassionate toward others. This finding is consistent with Gilbert's (2009) 'compassionate mind' approach that suggests that individuals who do not use social skills effectively due to internal fears might be challenged to engage in compassion in

their friendships. Overall, this suggests that interpersonal CA and compassion might be linked, yet this link needs to be furthered examined.

The results also showed that compassion was negatively associated with narcissism, but the strength of the relationship was weak. Individuals who score high on compassion may score low in narcissism, and individuals who score low on compassion may score high in narcissism in friendships. This finding confirms the literature that suggests that some narcissistic individuals may not display empathy or concern for their friends in dyadic settings because individuals may be more concerned with their own issues (Kernis & Sun, 1994; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984). This finding is also consistent with Gilbert's (2009) 'compassionate mind' approach in that internal traits can impact individuals' ability to engage in compassion with others, which suggest that narcissism might hinder some individuals in their ability to be compassionate toward their same-sex friends. To add, if individuals are less prone to possess the trait of narcissism, then might be more supportive toward their friends facing stressful situations in relationships (Kernis & Sun, 1994).

As expected, compassion was shown to have an inverse relationship to verbal aggressiveness and with a strong relationship. One reason for this finding may be because individuals who express verbal aggressiveness in their friendship relationships may score low in compassion. Similarly, those who are high in compassion may be less likely to express verbal aggressiveness in their friendships. Verbal aggressiveness has been observed to be present in friendship relationships during discussions (Semic & Canary, 1997) and when individuals in friendships express verbal aggressiveness this may be because they may not possess the trait of compassion. Thus, displaying poor communication skills such as verbal aggressiveness might disable individuals' ability to alleviate another person's suffering as theorized by the 'compassionate mind' approach (Gilbert, 2010). Overall, these findings indicate that one should continue to investigate compassion and its inverse relationship with verbal aggressiveness in the context of friendships.

Another important finding in this study was the sex differences in compassion. Similar to other compassion research (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997), this study found that women perceive themselves to be more compassionate toward their same-sex friends than did men. This finding also mirrors other findings in compassion research that suggest that women are more likely to engage in compassion toward others who are close to them, but are not compassionate toward themselves in comparison to men (Neff et al., 2005; Neff et al., 2008). While the sex differences research continues to be mixed in the literature (e.g., Baker & McNulty, 2011; Levenson, 2009; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude; 2007), this study adds support that both men and women differ in their use of compassion toward others in the context of friendship relationships.

In addition, this study found that there were only sex differences in the reports of verbal aggressiveness, but not the other constructs. These findings may be interpreted based on the mixed findings in the body of literature. Like other findings (e.g., Burgoon, Dillard, & Doran, 1983; Infante, Wall, Leap, & Danielson, 1984), men have been shown to exhibit higher scores on verbal aggressiveness than do women in friendships and romantic relationships. Other studies have found that men tend to be more verbally aggressive after playing video games (Chory & Cicchirillo, 2007) and in romantic relationships than did the women (Roloff & Greenberg, 1979).

The results suggest that there are sex differences in interpersonal CA in same-sex friendships. This finding reflects other findings that have found sex differences in interpersonal CA that suggest that men may report experiencing more interpersonal CA in relationships than do women (Beatty & Dobos, 1993). Interestingly, men may experience interpersonal CA with their same-sex friendship in comparison to women (Vevea, Perason, Child, & Smlak, 2013; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). One reason for this finding may be because some men might feel discomfort in communicating with other



men in friendships because some men may prefer to bond by engaging in activities (e.g., playing videogames) whereas women may prefer to talk to other women in same-sex friendships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). To contrast, other research suggests that there is a lack of sex differences in both trait and state communication apprehension (McCroskey, Simpson, & Richmond, 1982; McCroskey, 1984), which highlights the need to further examine the sex difference assumption.

This study found no support for sex differences in narcissism. The narcissism finding in this study is comparable to other research that suggests that there are no sex differences in narcissism (Terrell & Nagoshi, 2008). Because narcissism is a trait, both men and women may possess this trait (Terrell & Nagoshi, 2008). This finding also contrasts with other evidence that suggests that men score higher on narcissism than do women (Blatt & Schman, 1983; Wright, O'Leary, & Balkin, 1989). Overall, this study did not find sex differences in narcissism.

### **Implications for Same-Sex Friendships**

Several implications for compassion in same-sex friendships can be derived from the findings of this study. First, individuals who report being compassionate may nurture quality friendships by not being anxious about communicating with their friends and by not expressing verbally aggressive messages towards their friends. Second, this study found that women might be more inclined to be compassionate toward their friends in comparison to men, which suggests that compassion might be more evident in female friendships. Third, men reported being more verbally aggressive than women with their friends. Given that men tend to be socialized to be aggressive (Isen, McGue, & Iacono, 2015), this result is not surprising; however, this finding does suggest that verbal aggressiveness may be more apparent in male friendships. Fourth, men also reported being more apprehensive toward their communicative interactions with their friends in comparison to women. This may mean that men may need help in lowering their apprehensiveness about their communication in same-sex friendships. Practitioners may help these men by developing interventions or workshops to reduce men's anxieties regarding their same-sex friendship interactions.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

This study has several strengths and limitations that should be mentioned. One of the study's strengths was its large sample size, which was adequate for this study. Another strength was its use of Pommier's (2010) relatively novel construct of compassion in the context of same-sex friendships, which is a variable that has been increasingly used by researchers in the field of social psychology, which transfers this social psychology variable to some commonly used interpersonal communication variables (e.g., interpersonal communication apprehension; verbal aggressiveness). Another important strength was the moderate to high alpha reliabilities of all of the measures used in this study.

While this study has several strengths, this study also has limitations. First, the results from this study must be interpreted with consideration given that these results are not fully generalizable. To provide support for causality future researchers may need to conduct several experimental designs with control and experimental groups to be able to make generalizable claims. Second, this study relied on individual's perceptions of the measured constructs. Future studies should consider exploring the dyadic implications by examining the perceptions of individuals and their friends, or romantic partners to determine if these correlations between the variables are supported. Third, the findings from this study were only measured in one occasion. Future studies should examine the constructs overtime to determine if the length of time or length of relationship might impact compassion in the relationship. Fourth, the study lacked a strong theoretical framework for each of the examined correlations. Future

studies need to develop theoretical frameworks relevant to compassion in relationships and may need to use theoretical frameworks that may inform future scholarship relevant to same-sex friendships. Future researchers should also explore non-university samples and explore clinical, educational, counseling, and organizational settings. Lastly, future studies might also study opposite-sex friendships to determine if compassion and interpersonal CA also applies to opposite-sex friendships.

## Conclusion

The study of compassion and friendships has the potential to contribute positively to the body of literature of interpersonal communication. This investigation explored the relationships between compassion and other constructs that can impact relationships negatively, and research is still needed to explore compassion to further to understand its role in friendship communication. Given that compassion has been used pragmatically to help cope with negative traits such as verbal aggressiveness by the development of compassion workshops, compassion interventions, and compassion training in clinical settings, compassion deserves our attention as researchers (Gilbert, 2009; Bernard & Curry, 2011). Compassion is also a meaningful construct relevant to interpersonal communication and it ought to be explored in other relational contexts such as romantic and family relationships. This study showed that compassion is a fertile construct that merits its investigation by interpersonal communication researchers.

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