

Is caring for oneself relevant to happy relationship functioning? Exploring associations between self-compassion and romantic relationship satisfaction in actors and partners

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Abstract

Self-compassion means being supportive and kind to oneself when experiencing failure or inadequacies. It is associated with adaptive intrapersonal and relational outcomes for individuals. This evidence was extended by using an Actor-Partner Interdependence framework. Other-sex couples ($N = 209$) completed measures of self-compassion, relationship-specific self-compassion, and relationship satisfaction. Both self-compassion measures were related to global relationship satisfaction and facets thereof (e.g., sexuality, engagement, trust) for actors. Relationship-specific self-compassion was also positively related to the partner's relationship satisfaction (particularly for men). It is suggested that

Statement of Relevance: This study is the first to thoroughly test reciprocal effects of self-compassion in couples. We found that a person's self-compassion is related to the partner's relationship satisfaction, but this effect pertains only to self-compassion in the context of the relationship, not to self-compassion in general. Apparently, when people are accepting of their own shortcomings and failures in a relationship, it benefits not only themselves but also the relationship and their partner's relationship satisfaction. The findings are relevant for couples therapy.

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researchers (a) consider the interdependence of the partners when analyzing self-compassion in relationships and test for partner effects and (b) use fine-grained and domain-specific measures to develop a more complete understanding of self-compassion's associations with criterion variables.

KEYWORDS

Actor-Partner Interdependence Model, positive psychology, relationship satisfaction, self-compassion, self-concept

1 | INTRODUCTION

Individual differences in *self-compassion* are related to personal well-being (Neff, 2022) and also seem to have an impact on how people experience their romantic relationships and how they interact with a romantic partner (e.g., conflict resolution styles, jealous reactions, level of verbal aggression; Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Tandler et al., 2021). Prior studies have also indicated that self-compassion plays a role in how satisfied people are in their romantic relationships (global romantic relationship satisfaction; Baker & McNulty, 2011; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Whereas these initial findings have led to suggestions about the importance of self-compassion for romantic relationship satisfaction (e.g., Jacobson et al., 2018; Tandler & Petersen, 2020), research that has employed dyadic data is scarce. Yet, it seems extremely important to consider the interdependence between relationship partners in order to develop a more complete understanding of the link between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction. We thus aimed to narrow this gap by using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) to study how two measures of self-compassion (i.e., general self-compassion and relationship-specific self-compassion) are associated with global romantic relationship satisfaction as well as romantic relationship satisfaction domains within and between romantic partners.

1.1 | Self-compassion

When people find themselves in uncontrollable situations or when they are confronted with personal failure, they use different strategies. Some people react to difficulties with self-criticism, whereas other people treat themselves in a friendly manner by showing understanding and cordiality (Neff, 2003a, 2022). The latter reflects an emotionally positive way of dealing with oneself and was termed self-compassion by Neff (2003b). According to Neff (2003a, 2003b), self-compassion consists of three bipolar components that mark the endpoints of three different dimensions. These dimensions capture different ways that people relate to themselves: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. (a) As the emotional component, *self-kindness* enables people to be understanding and kind in dealing with themselves in difficult situations, rather than being self-critical and judgmental (*self-judgment*). (b) The cognitive component *common humanity* means acknowledging that failure, suffering, and inadequacies are part of human existence and should

not be viewed as personal defeat (*isolation*). (c) The attention-controlling component *mindfulness* refers to the ability to control one's own feelings that may arise in difficult situations and to respond with understanding and a nonjudgmental attitude instead of suppressing feelings, denying them, or experiencing them as uncontrollable or feeling that one is at their mercy (*over-identification*). Dealing with oneself in a positive manner enables people to experience their feelings in a state of equilibrium (Neff, 2003a, 2009). These three bipolar components of self-compassion have demonstrated high intercorrelations and are therefore conceptually assigned to the overarching factor of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b; Neff et al., 2017). Further, empirical results have strongly pointed toward using a single total score instead of one score for the positive facets and one score for the negative facets. Therefore, we chose to focus on total self-compassion (Neff et al., 2019).

On an intrapersonal level, numerous studies have identified adaptive correlates of self-compassion across various aspects of people's lives. For example, self-compassion has been found to be positively associated with aspects of mental health, such as optimism, cheerfulness, and life satisfaction (Neff et al., 2007; Zessin et al., 2015), and negatively associated with depressiveness and anxiety (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). Comparable results have been demonstrated on the physiological level. Rockliff et al. (2008) detected reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol for people who were trained in self-compassion.

In the educational field, self-compassion in university students was negatively related to stress (Y. Zhang et al., 2016) and fear of academic failure and positively related to perceived competency. Further, students' self-compassion was positively related to mastery goals and negatively related to performance goals (Neff et al., 2005). In the occupational field, self-compassion has been found to be negatively linked to burnout across occupations, such as clergy (Barnard & Curry, 2012) or health workers (Montero-Marín et al., 2015; Richardson et al., 2016).

On the interpersonal level, prior research has also demonstrated adaptive associations for self-compassion (see Lathren et al., 2021). For various types of relationships (e.g., mother, father, best friend), self-compassion was found to be positively associated with relational well-being and the tendency to resolve interpersonal conflicts with conflict resolution styles that involved compromising (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). With respect to attachment, mothers' self-reported self-compassion was positively related to their own secure attachment and to their children's self-reported quality in life (Moreira et al., 2015). Initial studies have also considered self-compassion's role in romantic relationships, which we visit next.

1.2 | Self-compassion in romantic relationships

One of the most important human goals is to enter into and maintain a satisfying romantic relationship (Clark & Mills, 2011). According to prior research, an individual's self-compassion can help fulfill this goal (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Neff and Beretvas (2013) studied the associations of people's self-reported self-compassion with their romantic partners' reports on relationship behavior in heterosexual couples. On the one hand, individuals high in self-compassion were described as low in verbal aggression, controlling behavior, and detachment, and on the other, they were described as high in expressing acceptance and relatedness (affinity) as well as in expressing autonomy. These findings show a good fit with previous research on the role of self-compassion in romantic relationships. For example, it was shown that during conflicts in romantic relationships, self-reported self-compassion was positively related to functional

(compromising) conflict resolution styles and negatively related to dysfunctional (conflict engagement, compliance) styles (Tandler et al., 2021). Also, self-compassionate individuals were shown to be less prone to experiencing various types of romantic jealousy, such as reactive (emotional type) and anxious (cognitive type) jealousy (Tandler & Petersen, 2020).

An important aspect of romantic relationships is satisfaction. Romantic *relationship satisfaction* is defined as the subjective evaluation of one's romantic relationship (Gerlach et al., 2018) and is closely connected to people's overall mental and physical well-being (Doyle et al., 2021; Jardine et al., 2022; Tolmacz et al., 2022). For example, Russell and Wells (1994) demonstrated that marriage quality is by far the best predictor of happiness, explaining more than 50% of individuals' self-reported happiness. To the best of our knowledge, only a few studies have examined self-compassion's associations with relationship satisfaction in couples, but these studies did not use dyadic data or did not report interpersonal associations. Tandler et al. (2021) showed that self-compassion in adults between the ages of 30 to 55 is linked to relationship satisfaction. Self-compassion's association with relationship satisfaction was further supported by other studies that used samples of undergraduate students (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Jacobson et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2022).

However, hardly any studies on the relationship between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction have taken the dyadic nature of romantic relationships into account. To the best of our knowledge, there is only one exception: Neff and Beretvas (2013) studied this link in 104 couples, but they used a global measure of relationship satisfaction and did not consider the facets of relationship satisfaction; they also studied only general self-compassion. Their study provided initial evidence that analyzing data from both members of a couple is most appropriate for accounting for the dyadic nature because a person's own personality traits affect not only their own relationship satisfaction (actor) but also the relationship satisfaction of their partner (partner; i.e., How does the actor's self-compassion contribute to the partner's relationship satisfaction?) because the two people interact. However, their findings were also limited by their small sample size and the fact that they reported only one partner effect that was probably small in size ($p < .05$). Thus, they were not able to determine whether an actor's self-compassion is robustly related to the partner's relationship satisfaction. To overcome these shortcomings, we assessed relationships between different self-compassion scales and several aspects of relationship satisfaction in a large sample.

Thus, one aim of the current study was to add knowledge to the field by taking into account the dyadic nature of romantic relationships and utilizing an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). Using this technique helped us estimate associations between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction within an individual (actor effect) and between partners (partner effect) and also allowed us to test whether gender was a moderator of these associations. Typically, partner effects are smaller than actor effects, but partner effects help provide additional information for understanding a couple's relationship satisfaction (Chopik & Lucas, 2019). Importantly, because many test statistics can be inaccurate when the assumption of nonindependence is violated (Cook & Kenny, 2005), the APIM is the appropriate framework for studying self-compassion and relationship satisfaction in couples. Also, on a theoretical level, it is important to consider mutual influences in romantic relationships because dyadic theories have for many years emphasized that it is important to account for the interdependence of the two members of a couple (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). We designed this study as it had the potential to show that self-compassion (or relationship-specific self-compassion) is not only a self-related variable but is also reflected in the ways each partner experiences the relationship. Thus, with this study, we tackled the question of whether self-compassion

provides benefits not only for oneself but also for others—an understudied yet important research question (Cha et al., 2023).

The second aim of the current study was to consider relationship satisfaction on a more fine-grained level than previous research has done while taking into account various facets of a couple's relationship life. Several previous studies have identified an association between self-compassion and a global measure of relationship satisfaction (Jacobson et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2022; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). However, there is robust evidence that relationship satisfaction is best understood as a multidimensional construct that takes into account a couple's evaluations of various aspects of their romantic relationship, such as constraints, the long-term potential of the relationship, or sexuality (Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002; Lawrence et al., 2011; Siffert & Bodenmann, 2010). For example, Fletcher et al. (2000) reported that a hierarchical model with six subdimensions and a higher order factor is most plausible for conceptualizing relationship satisfaction. Thus, when researching relationship satisfaction, it is important to consider that people make evaluative judgments about various aspects of their relationships and that these domains may have different relationships with other variables, such as self-compassion. For example, self-compassionate individuals have been suggested to have found a balance between independence and closeness (Neff & Beretvas, 2013), and this balance may account for why self-compassion may be negatively related to the experience of constraints in a relationship. Yet, self-compassionate individuals might not necessarily admire their partners, which is why this facet of relationship satisfaction might not be as strongly linked to self-compassion as other facets are (e.g., constraint). Only when considering different facets of relationship satisfaction can researchers provide practitioners with guidance regarding which aspects of relationship satisfaction may benefit from self-compassion trainings.

Our third aim was to test the association between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction while using a relationship-specific measure of self-compassion. In other areas of research (e.g., social power, forgiveness, or authenticity), the use of relationship-specific measures is common practice (Anderson et al., 2012; Kifer et al., 2013; Körner et al., 2023; McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019; Sheldon et al., 1997). Thus, researchers do not necessarily ask whether individuals feel powerful, forgiving, or authentic in general but whether they experience these feelings or have these attitudes in specific relationships (e.g., romantic relationships, work relationships, friendships). Such approaches account for the fact that people behave differently in different spheres of life (Chen et al., 2006; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Roberts & Donahue, 1994). With respect to self-compassion, we believe that it is just as important to distinguish between different kinds of relationships and that a measure of self-caring attitudes toward oneself when experiencing distress or failure in a relationship should have associations with relationship satisfaction that are at least equal to relationship satisfaction's link with general self-compassion. In fact, stronger associations may be expected when both measures are on the same level of specificity. Also, researchers have asked for the development and application of further conceptualizations and measures of self-compassion beyond (Neff's, 2023; Cha et al., 2023) scale, which is most frequently used. Thus, we aimed to advance measurement practices in self-compassion research by relying on a new, relationship-specific scale. Moreover, there is initial evidence for the relationship-specificity of self-compassion: For example, there may be differences between how self-caring an individual is after a conflict in a romantic relationship and how self-caring the person is after a conflict at work (Zuroff et al., 2021). Thus, it makes sense to assess self-compassion with respect to certain types of relationships.

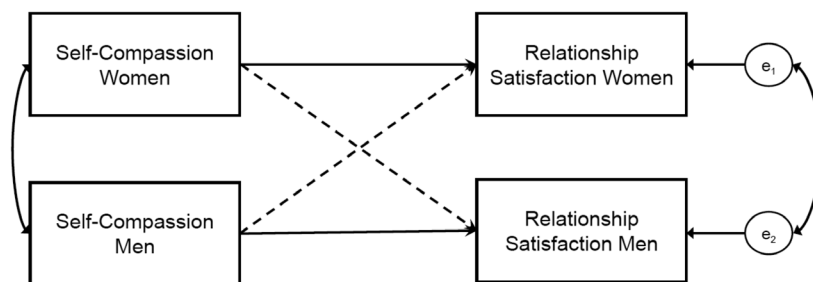
1.3 | The present research

This study was designed to extend previous research on the association between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction in three ways: (a) First, we took into account the dyadic nature of a romantic relationship and tested the association within and across relationship partners by using the APIM framework to simultaneously estimate actor and partner effects (see Figure 1). We tested for the moderating role of gender because men were reported to be slightly more self-compassionate than women (Yarnell et al., 2015). More importantly, several studies have shown that associations between self-compassion and criterion variables are moderated by gender (Amemiya & Sakairi, 2020; Bluth et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2016), and researchers called for analyses of the moderating effect of gender (Lathren et al., 2021). (b) Beyond testing this association on a global level of relationship satisfaction, we additionally used a fine-grained measure of relationship satisfaction to take into account various aspects of romantic relationships. (c) Finally, we considered the association on a relationship-specific level by also examining relationship-specific self-compassion. In the first step, we pilot-tested the new Relationship-Specific Self-Compassion Scale to determine whether it showed good evidence of reliability and nomological validity. Then, we conducted the main study, in which we asked couples about their self-compassion and relationship satisfaction.

2 | PILOT STUDY

Beyond testing for the reliability of the new Relationship-Specific Self-Compassion Scale, we also conducted an in-depth exploration of its nomological validity. We expected that relationship-specific self-compassion would demonstrate positive associations with global self-compassion, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and self-esteem and a negative link with neuroticism. These hypotheses are in line with the idea of an adaptive personality profile of self-compassionate individuals (Neff et al., 2007)—also on a relationship level. Further, general self-compassion has been found to be negatively linked to negative affect and positively

Actor-Partner Interdependence Model With Relationship Satisfaction Predicted by Self-Compassion



Note. Continuous arrows = actor effects. Dashed arrows = partner effects.

FIGURE 1 Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with relationship satisfaction predicted by self-compassion. Continuous arrows = actor effects. Dashed arrows = partner effects.

linked to optimism and happiness (Neff et al., 2007). On the basis of these links, we expected negative associations with depression and anxiety and a positive link to well-being on the relationship level, too. General self-compassion is strongly associated with authenticity (J. W. Zhang et al., 2019) and is by definition about mindfulness (Neff, 2023). Thus, we expected positive links with these constructs. In addition, as the new self-compassion scale focuses on the context of romance, we hypothesized that it would be positively linked to relationship-specific variables: We expected a positive link with relationship-specific authenticity and with the tendency to forgive a partner's transgressions (Mansfield et al., 2015).

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Data were collected from September to October, 2023. A total of 156 individuals took part, but three were excluded due to processing times that were too fast, leaving us with a final sample size of 153 (78% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.24$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.16$, range: 18–73). The inclusion criterion for the online survey was that the participant was involved in a romantic relationship. Participants' average relationship duration was 7.79 years ($SD = 10.63$, range: 1 month to 51 years). Most participants were not married (in a dating relationship, 62%), followed by married participants (25%), individuals in open relationships (10%), and engaged participants (2%). A post hoc power analysis indicated that we were able to detect effects of $r = .20$ with a power of .80 ($\alpha = .05$, one-tailed). The materials and procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of Bamberg.

2.1.2 | Instruments

We created the Relationship-Specific Self-Compassion Scale comprising six items (e.g., “In my relationship with my partner ... I see difficulties as a part of every relationship that everyone goes through at least once”; the full scale can be found on the OSF). Each of the three positive self-compassion subscales was measured with two items. The response options ranged from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*).

Global self-compassion was measured with the Short Self-Compassion Scale (Raes et al., 2011). The scale consists of 12 items (e.g., “When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance”). Cronbach's α in this study was .91. The response options ranged from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*).

Personality was assessed with the short version of the Big Five Inventory (Rammstedt & John, 2005). With 21 items (all items preceded by “I”), the scale captures openness (e.g., “Am interested in many things,” $\alpha = .84$), conscientiousness (e.g., “Am efficient and work quickly,” $\alpha = .72$), extraversion (e.g., “Am outgoing, sociable,” $\alpha = .81$), agreeableness (e.g., “Tend to criticize others,” $\alpha = .76$), and neuroticism (e.g., “Worry a lot,” $\alpha = .72$). The response options ranged from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*).

We used the German Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to assess self-esteem (von Collani & Herzberg, 2003) with 10 items (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” $\alpha = .91$). The response options ranged from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 4 (*applies fully*).

We used single items for depression and anxiety from the Screening Tool for Psychological Distress (Young et al., 2015). Participants were instructed to answer the following items: “Over the last month, how much have you been bothered by... (1) feeling sad, down, or uninterested in life [targeting depression], (2) feeling anxious or nervous [targeting anxiety].” The response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*severely*).

We assessed well-being with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985; Janke & Glöckner-Rist, 2014). The response options for the five items (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life,” $\alpha = .84$) ranged from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 5 (*applies fully*).

Mindfulness was assessed with the short form of the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (Sauer et al., 2013). A two-factor solution (presence, five items, e.g., “I am open to the experience of the moment,” $\alpha = .79$; acceptance, nine items, e.g., “I can value myself,” $\alpha = .88$) and a total score are possible ($\alpha = .91$). The response options ranged from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*).

We employed the Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008), which has three subscales with four items each: authentic living (e.g., “I always stand by what I believe in,” $\alpha = .73$), accepting external influences (e.g., “Other people influence me greatly,” $\alpha = .83$), and self-alienation (e.g., “I don’t know how I really feel inside,” $\alpha = .89$). The response options ranged from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 5 (*describes me very well*).

We also assessed relationship-specific authenticity with three items (see Fleenon & Wilt, 2010; or Kifer et al., 2013, for a similar approach). The items are, “I am the real me in my romantic relationship,” “I feel authentic in the way I act in my romantic relationship,” and “I feel that I am truly myself in my romantic relationship” ($\alpha = .92$). The response options ranged from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*).

Forgiveness was assessed with the Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (Haversath et al., 2017; Paleari et al., 2009), which consists of two dimensions: Benevolence reflects a conciliatory motivation after transgressions (four items; e.g., “I soon forgave her/him,” $\alpha = .78$). Resentment-avoidance is characterized by retaliation, avoidance, and vengeful motivation (six items; e.g., “Since my partner behaved that way, I get annoyed with her/him more easily,” $\alpha = .84$). We adapted items to render them appropriate for unmarried individuals as well. Participants were instructed to remember a conflict with their partner as vividly as possible. The response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

2.2 | Results and discussion

The reliability of the new Relationship-Specific Self-Compassion Scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .73$). The items had average to high endorsement rates ($M = 3.82$, range: 3.57–4.14) and showed variability ($SD = 0.89$, range: 0.76–1.06). Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .30 to .64.

Regarding nomological associations with broad personality traits, we found a strong positive link between relationship-specific self-compassion and general self-compassion, $r(148) = .65$, $p < .001$. Thus, the two concepts shared 42% of their variance, suggesting that they refer to similar concepts but are not identical. As expected, relationship-specific self-compassion was positively related to extraversion, $r(150) = .13$, $p = .059$; conscientiousness, $r(150) = .14$, $p = .044$; and agreeableness, $r(150) = .21$, $p = .005$. Openness was positively linked to relationship-specific self-compassion, $r(150) = .25$, $p = .001$. There was also a strong positive link to self-esteem, $r(150) = .53$, $p < .001$.

With respect to affective measures, we found that relationship-specific self-compassion was negatively linked with depression, $r(148) = -.38$, $p < .001$, and anxiety, $r(148) = -.30$, $p < .001$, and highly positively linked with well-being, $r(148) = .41$, $p < .001$.

We also found a series of hypothesis-confirming associations between relationship-specific self-compassion and mindfulness (total: $r(148) = .64$, $p < .001$; presence: $r(148) = .53$, $p < .001$; acceptance: $r(148) = .63$, $p < .001$) and authenticity (authentic living: $r(147) = .56$, $p < .001$; accepting external influences: $r(147) = -.22$, $p = .004$; self-alienation: $r(147) = -.52$, $p < .001$).

With respect to the relationship-specific validity constructs, we found a strong positive link between the new self-compassion scale and authenticity as experienced in the romantic relationship, $r(150) = .51$, $p < .001$. Relationship-specific self-compassion was positively correlated with benevolence, $r(150) = .46$, $p < .001$, and negatively related to resentment-avoidance, $r(150) = -.22$, $p = .004$.

Overall, the new Relationship-Specific Self-Compassion Scale showed acceptable reliability, good item statistics, and expected links to several other relevant psychological variables. All in all, the scale showed convincing nomological validity, and therefore, its use in the main study was justified.

3 | MAIN STUDY

In the main study, we tested how global and relationship-specific self-compassion were linked with relationship satisfaction in romantic couples. In line with previous research (Neff & Beretvas, 2013), for both self-compassion measures, we expected positive associations with global relationship satisfaction and the facets of relationship satisfaction on an intrapersonal level (Hypothesis 1). Such associations would also mirror previous robust findings of positive correlates of self-compassion, such as positive affect, well-being, optimism (Neff, 2022), and relationship satisfaction (Assad et al., 2007).

Next, we expected positive relationships between general and relationship-specific self-compassion and the respective partners' global relationship satisfaction and relationship satisfaction facets (Hypothesis 2). Self-compassionate individuals have been reported to show more perspective taking, trust, and forgiveness (Miyagawa & Taniguchi, 2022), and they were described as accepting and emotionally connected (J. W. Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, self-compassion is linked to several desirable characteristics in a romantic relationship. A partner of a highly self-compassionate individual may thus experience acceptance and closeness and may therefore be more satisfied than people who do not have self-compassionate partners with the relationship as a whole as well as with specific aspects of the relationship. Examining how general and relationship-specific self-compassion are related to various facets of relationship satisfaction could also offer new insights into practical implications for self-compassion interventions.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

From January to December 2022, we collected data as part of a larger research project on romantic relationships. A total of 209 other-sex couples participated (men: $M_{\text{age}} = 29.02$,

$SD_{\text{age}} = 10.93$, range: 18–69; women: $M_{\text{age}} = 27.10$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.20$, range: 17–65). The average relationship duration was 5.25 years ($SD = 7.19$, range: 1 month to 45 years). Most individuals were in their second romantic relationship ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 2.19$, range: 1–20). A total of 35 couples were married (16.7%), eight were engaged (3.8%), and 152 were not married (79.4%). A post hoc power analysis indicated that we were able to detect effects of $\beta_{\text{Actor/Partner}} = .20/.15$ with a power of .99/.89 ($\alpha = .05$, correlations between the actor and partner variables and errors = .30; Ackerman et al., 2020). The materials and the procedure were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of Bamberg.

3.1.2 | Procedure

German-speaking couples were recruited via word-of-mouth recommendations (i.e., participants in a psychology course were asked to recruit couples) and email lists. As an incentive, we offered participation in a lottery for online shop vouchers. Only individuals in an other-sex relationship with a minimum duration of 1 month were allowed to participate. After providing informed consent, participants completed the online survey using the software SoSciSurvey. First, participants provided demographic data. The relationship variables were collected with questionnaires about self-compassion and relationship satisfaction. An individual code was generated to match data between the respondent and the partner. For each individual, the survey took approximately 15 min to complete. We conducted and designed our research in accordance with the code of good practice in online-based testing (Coyne & Bartram, 2006).

3.1.3 | Instruments

General self-compassion was assessed with the Self-Compassion Scale (Hupfeld & Ruffieux, 2011; Neff, 2003a, 2003b). The 26 items encompass three positive subscales—self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (e.g., “When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance”)—and three negative subscales—self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification (e.g., “When I’m feeling down, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong”). The response options ranged from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). For the total score, the author (Neff, 2003a, 2003b) reported a Cronbach’s α of .91. In this study, the Cronbach’s α values were similar for men and women (see Table 1).

In addition, we used the Relationship-Specific Self-Compassion Scale, which was presented in the Pilot Study. Cronbach’s α in the current study was .72 for women and .71 for men.

To assess relationship satisfaction, we employed the Relationship Quality Questionnaire (RQQ; Siffert & Bodenmann, 2010). The scale consists of six subscales with a total of 26 items. Fascination assesses admiration for and attraction to the partner (three items, e.g., “I find my partner attractive and desirable”). Engagement captures commitment to and investment in the relationship (five items, e.g., “I am willing to work for our partnership”). The Sexuality subscale is about sexual fulfillment in the relationship (five items, e.g., “I enjoy sex with my partner”). The Future subscale assesses the duration and potential of the relationship (five items, e.g., “I doubt the longevity of our relationship” [reversed]). Mistrust captures a lack of trust in the partner (three items, e.g., “I struggle to fully trust my partner”). The experience of restrictions is captured by Constraint (five items, e.g., “I have enough freedom and opportunities for self-development within our partnership”). Answers are given on a scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*)

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations), Cronbach's α s, partner similarity (Pearson correlations), and partner differences (paired-samples t tests with Cohen's d) for the self-compassion measures and relationship satisfaction.

Variable	Range	Women			Men			r	t	df	d
		M	SD	α	M	SD	α				
SC	1–5	3.00	0.66	.92	3.17	0.65	.90	.00	2.71**	208	0.27
Relationship-specific SC	1–5	3.57	0.64	.72	3.74	0.64	.71	.17*	3.07**	207	0.27
Total RS	1–5	4.35	0.54	.93	4.31	0.54	.93	.53***	−1.20	206	−0.08
Fascination	1–5	4.32	0.69	.82	4.45	0.63	.77	.35***	2.26*	206	0.18
Engagement	1–5	4.48	0.55	.84	4.34	0.58	.83	.31***	−2.91**	206	−0.24
Sexuality	1–5	3.94	0.97	.90	3.94	0.96	.92	.57***	−0.11	206	−0.01
Future	1–5	4.53	0.76	.94	4.53	0.69	.91	.45***	−0.04	206	0.00
Mistrust	1–5	1.53	0.81	.77	1.45	0.74	.75	.24***	−0.08	206	−0.01
Constraint	1–5	1.62	0.65	.83	1.80	0.79	.87	.05	2.72**	206	0.26

Note: $N = 207$ – 209 couples.

Abbreviations: SC, self-compassion; total RS, Relationship Quality Questionnaire total score.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

to 5 (*strongly agree*). The authors reported Cronbach's α values that ranged from .75 to .94 for the subscales and a value of .78 for the global score. Reliabilities in this study are presented in Table 1.

3.1.4 | Data analysis strategy

To test for differences and similarities in the measured variables, we calculated paired-samples t tests and Pearson correlations. APIMs (Kenny et al., 2006) were computed to explore associations between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction. Actor effects are intrapersonal effects and describe associations between the predictor (self-compassion) and outcome (relationship satisfaction) for the respondent. Partner effects are interpersonal effects and describe associations between the respondent's self-compassion and the partner's relationship satisfaction (Kenny et al., 2006; see Figure 1). To be consistent with APIM terminology, we use the term “effect,” but it does not imply causality. The APIM accounts for the interdependence of the predictor and criterion for the respondents and their partners. Analyses were computed with Mplus 8.8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) with Maximum Likelihood estimation and structural equation modeling. Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals are reported ($k = 5000$ samples). In the APIM analyses, we tested a saturated model (all effects freely estimated) against a nested equal-actor-equal-partner-effects model. The equal-effects model indicates the absence of gender effects and is favored when the Likelihood Ratio Test is nonsignificant ($p > .20$; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010, see Table 2). If the saturated model was favored, but the b coefficients were still very similar for men and women (difference $< .10$), we tested an equal-actor-different-partner-effects model or a different-actor-equal-partner-effects models against the saturated model. As an effect size measure, we calculated the coefficient Δ (Brauer & Proyer, 2018; Körner

TABLE 2 Results of likelihood ratio tests for Actor-Partner Interdependence Models predicting relationship satisfaction from general and relationship-specific self-compassion (Saturated Model vs. Equal-Actor-Equal-Partner Effects Model).

	Relationship-specific self-compassion		Self-compassion	
	$\chi^2(2)$	<i>p</i>	$\chi^2(2)$	<i>p</i>
Fascination	0.902	.637	0.905	.636
Engagement	3.092	.213	4.472	.107
Sexuality	5.622	.060	2.847	.241
Future	1.203	.548	0.944	.624
Mistrust	3.507	.173	1.460	.482
Constraint	1.088	.580	3.212	.201
Total RQQ	3.912	.142	2.551	.279

Note: $N = 209$ couples. Analyses of likelihood ratio tests (also comparing Saturated Models vs. Equal-Actor-Different-Partner-Effects Models vs. Different-Actor-Equal-Actor-Effects Models) are also on the OSF (<https://osf.io/stb8w/>). Abbreviation: RQQ, Relationship Quality Questionnaire.

et al., 2022). The coefficient Δ describes the change in the outcome (relationship satisfaction) in standard deviations when the predictor (self-compassion) changes by 1 point. We calculated the coefficient separately for men and women ($\Delta_{F/M} = b/SD_{F/M}$) because they had different variances on the outcomes. For example, when participants have a score of “3” as compared with a score of “2” on the self-compassion scale, then total relationship satisfaction increases 0.22 SDs for women and men. All data and the syntax files are available on the OSF (<https://osf.io/stb8w/>).

3.2 | Results

3.2.1 | Preliminary analyses

Cronbach's α was acceptable for all the scales. Descriptive statistics for all study variables are displayed in Table 1. Men reported higher self-compassion and relationship-specific self-compassion than women ($ds = 0.27$), a finding that is in line with previous research (Yarnell et al., 2015). There was no gender difference in total relationship satisfaction. Men reported more fascination with their partner ($d = 0.18$) and higher constraints from the relationship ($d = 0.26$) than women. The latter difference is in line with previous research on gender differences in relationship satisfaction (Siffert & Bodenmann, 2010). Women reported higher engagement than men ($d = -0.24$). Partners were similar in total relationship satisfaction, $r(206) = .53$, indicating strong interdependence between men and women. Men and women were also similar in relationship-specific self-compassion, $r(207) = .17$, but not in general self-compassion, $r(208) = .00$. Within- and between-partner correlation for all study variables can be found in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Bivariate zero-order correlations within and between partners for self-compassion and relationship satisfaction.

Within partners									
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 SC	-	.67***	.20**	.05	.12	.18**	.12	-.24***	-.13
2 RSC	.56***	-	.32***	.20**	.32***	.22**	.21*	-.30***	-.21**
3 Total RS	.10	.21**	-	.78***	.83***	.77***	.82***	-.53***	-.64***
4 Fascination	-.04	.12	.79***	-	.65***	.54***	.65***	-.27***	-.43***
5 Engagement	.11	.23***	.73***	.58***	-	.53***	.70***	-.42***	-.43***
6 Sexuality	.02	.08	.79***	.60***	.44***	-	.46***	-.27***	-.35***
7 Future	.12	.17*	.79***	.62***	.62***	.47***	-	-.38***	-.42***
8 Mistrust	-.15*	-.18*	-.49***	-.34***	-.16*	-.30***	-.32***	-	-.25***
9 Constraint	-.07	-.18*	-.71***	-.43***	-.40***	-.42***	-.45***	.25***	-

Between partners									
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 SC	.00	.01	.10	-.01	.17*	-.01	.13	-.06	-.10
2 RSC	.02	.17*	.18**	.09	.21**	.09	.20**	-.12	-.10
3 Total RS	-.06	-.01	.53***	.39***	.37***	.49***	.46***	-.39***	-.21**
4 Fascination	-.07	.09	.42***	.35***	.28***	.40***	.32***	-.25***	-.20**
5 Engagement	-.03	.07	.49***	.40***	.31***	.42***	.45***	-.41***	-.19**
6 Sexuality	-.08	-.12	.50***	.35***	.34***	.57***	.36***	-.22**	-.22**
7 Future	.03	.10	.44***	.31***	.34***	.32***	.45***	-.38***	-.18*
8 Mistrust	.01	.00	-.25***	-.21**	-.14*	-.20*	-.26***	.24***	.09
9 Constraint	.07	.01	-.18*	-.07	-.14*	-.15*	-.14*	.25***	.05

Note: Within-partner correlations are presented separately for men (below the diagonal) and women (above the diagonal). Between-partner correlations were computed across partners (rows = women, columns = men). *N* = 207–209 couples.
 Abbreviations: RSC, relationship-specific self-compassion; SC, self-compassion; total RS, Relationship Quality Questionnaire total score.
 p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

3.2.2 | Associations of self-compassion with relationship satisfaction

In line with our hypotheses, we found several significant actor effects: Self-compassion was positively related to five out of six facets of relationship satisfaction ($0.10 \leq |b_s| \geq 0.23$, $0.15 \leq |\Delta_F| \geq 0.28$, $0.14 \leq |\Delta_M| \geq 0.31$) and the total relationship satisfaction score ($b = 0.12$, $\Delta_{F/M} = 0.22$; see Table 4).

Contrary to our expectations, there were barely any significant interpersonal associations. Only women's self-compassion was positively related to men's engagement ($b_F = 0.15$, $\Delta_F = 0.27$). This was the only gender difference across all the actor and partner associations (see Table 2).

3.2.3 | Associations of relationship-specific self-compassion with relationship satisfaction

As expected, we found several significant associations between relationship-specific self-compassion and relationship satisfaction for actors. Relationship-specific self-compassion was positively and significantly related to the fascination, engagement, and future subscales ($0.15 \leq b_s \geq 0.23$, $0.22 \leq \Delta_F \geq 0.42$, $0.24 \leq \Delta_M \geq 0.40$). Relationship-specific self-compassion was negatively related to constraint ($b = -0.21$, $\Delta_F = -0.32$, $\Delta_M = -0.27$) and mistrust, whereby the latter showed a stronger association for women than for men ($b_F = -0.39$, $\Delta_F = -0.48$; $b_M = -0.19$, $\Delta_M = -0.26$). Women's relationship-specific self-compassion was positively associated with sexuality ($b_F = 0.37$, $\Delta_F = 0.38$), but no such association was found for men (see Table 5). The actor effect on total relationship satisfaction was more pronounced for women ($b_F = 0.28$, $\Delta_F = 0.52$) than for men ($b_M = 0.15$, $\Delta_M = 0.28$), but both associations were positive and significant.

There was also a gender-independent positive association between an actor's relationship-specific self-compassion and the partner's future subscale score ($b = 0.14$, $\Delta_F = 0.18$, $\Delta_M = 0.20$). Further, men's relationship-specific self-compassion was negatively related to women's sexuality subscore ($b_M = -0.24$, $\Delta_M = -0.25$), whereas women's relationship-specific self-compassion was positively but not significantly related to men's sexuality subscore (see Table 5). Women's relationship-specific self-compassion was positively associated with their male partner's total relationship satisfaction ($b_F = 0.13$, $\Delta_F = 0.24$).

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated the association between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction with an APIM design. We studied relationship satisfaction at the global and facet levels and used general and relationship-specific measures of self-compassion. Results showed that the two self-compassion measures were similarly related to relationship satisfaction within romantic couples. Yet, the two self-compassion measures showed different links to partners' relationship satisfaction. Overall, our findings support the notion that self-compassion is relevant to relationship satisfaction as well as the importance of considering the association between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction in more fine-grained ways by studying the domain-specificity of self-compassion. Finally, dyadic approaches offer a way to better

TABLE 4 Results (unstandardized regression coefficients, bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals, standard errors, *p*-values for two-tailed Wald tests, effect sizes) of Actor-Partner Interdependence Model analyses predicting relationship satisfaction from self-compassion.

Variable	Actor				Partner					
	<i>b_{F/M}</i>	95% CI	SE	<i>p</i>	$ \Delta_{F/M} $	<i>b_{F/M}</i>	95% CI	SE	<i>p</i>	$ \Delta_{F/M} $
Fascination	0.00	[-0.10, 0.10]	0.05	.937	0.00/0.00	-0.04	[-0.14, 0.06]	0.05	.456	0.06/0.06
Engagement	0.10	[0.03, 0.18]	0.04	.011	0.18/0.17	0.15 /-0.02	[0.04, 0.27]/[-0.15, 0.10]	0.06/0.07	.011/.726	0.27/0.03
Sexuality	0.15	[0.00, 0.30]	0.08	.045	0.15/0.16	-0.06	[-0.21, 0.07]	0.07	.374	0.06/0.06
Future	0.13	[0.04, 0.23]	0.05	.008	0.17/0.19	0.09	[-0.02, 0.20]	0.06	.114	0.12/0.13
Mistrust	-0.23	[-0.35, -0.11]	0.06	<.001	0.28/0.31	-0.03	[-0.15, 0.10]	0.06	.685	0.04/0.04
Constraint	-0.11	[-0.21, -0.01]	0.05	.032	0.17/0.14	-0.01	[-0.12, 0.11]	0.06	.897	0.02/0.01
Total RQ	0.12	[0.05, 0.20]	0.04	.002	0.22/0.22	0.02	[-0.07, 0.11]	0.05	.679	0.04/0.04

Note: *N* = 209 couples.
Abbreviation: RQ, Relationship Quality Questionnaire.

understand how partners experience their relationships depending on the personality of the respective other.

4.1 | Relationship satisfaction

In line with our expectations, general self-compassion was robustly related to global relationship satisfaction and to almost all the facets of relationship satisfaction. These findings are in line with previous research on the link between self-compassion and global relationship satisfaction on an intrapersonal level (Jacobson et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2022; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Thus, within partners, self-compassion seems to be a resource for experiencing a happy relationship. With respect to their romantic relationship, highly self-compassionate individuals report investing more into their relationship and experiencing higher sexual fulfillment, evaluate their relationship as enduring and as having potential, report less mistrust, and less often report feeling constrained. Previous research on the association between self-compassion and global relationship satisfaction can offer an explanation for how these intraindividual effects are transmitted. Tandler et al. (2021) reported that functional and dysfunctional conflict resolution styles can fully explain the link between self-compassion and relationship satisfaction. Solving romantic relationships problems by compromising and refraining from personal attacks helps to maintain satisfying relationships. Conflicts are inevitable in romantic couples, and a partner's style in how they resolve their conflicts is more predictive of relationship satisfaction than the content of the conflict itself (Markman et al., 2001). Future research could, for example, use experience sampling methods to test whether conflict resolution styles (e.g., dyadic coping) also mediate effects of self-compassion on the facets of relationship satisfaction.

The strongest link between self-compassion and facets of relationship satisfaction pertained to mistrust. Apparently, more so than others, self-compassionate people tend to trust their partners. An explanation for this finding may be that self-compassion is characterized by feeling connected to other people (Neff, 2003a) and is related to agreeableness (Neff, 2003b). Both aspects help people see good intentions in others' actions. Our findings also show that self-compassion is not associated with every facet of relationship satisfaction. In fact, highly self-compassionate individuals do not admire their partners more than less self-compassionate individuals. Self-compassion promotes acceptance of one's own imperfections as well as those of one's partner (J. W. Zhang et al., 2020). It is likely that accepting one's partner's flaws is a mechanism that might hinder self-compassionate individuals from admiring their partners but instead helps them *accept* their partners.

When self-compassion was measured in a relationship-specific manner (i.e., with the new relationship-specific self-compassion measure), we also found robust associations with the facets of relationship satisfaction and global relationship satisfaction. Only one out of 10 regression coefficients was not significantly predictive of relationship satisfaction, but even the non-significant coefficient was still in the predicted direction. Overall, these results are in line with the relational pattern obtained for general self-compassion. Thus, the self-compassion individuals experience in their romantic lives benefits them. More specifically, relationship-specific self-compassion was particularly strongly related to engagement. Perhaps the constructive conflict resolution styles of self-compassionate individuals (Tandler et al., 2021) increase their perception that they are invested in the relationship. Women's relationship-specific self-compassion was also strongly related to their sexual satisfaction and trust. These findings

TABLE 5 Results (unstandardized regression coefficients, bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals, standard errors, *p*-values for two-tailed Wald tests, effect sizes) of Actor-Partner Interdependence Model analyses predicting relationship satisfaction from relationship-specific self-compassion.

Variable	Actor				Partner					
	<i>b</i> _{F/M}	95% CI	SE	<i>p</i>	Δ _{F/M}	<i>b</i> _{F/M}	95% CI	SE	<i>p</i>	Δ _{F/M}
Fascination	0.15	[0.05, 0.26]	0.05	.005	0.22/0.24	0.07	[-0.05, 0.17]	0.06	.235	0.10/0.11
Engagement	0.23	[0.13, 0.33]	0.05	<.001	0.42/0.40	0.08	[-0.02, 0.19]	0.05	.117	0.15/0.14
Sexuality	0.37/0.09	[0.15, 0.08]/[-0.14/0.31]	0.12/0.12	.001/.438	0.38/0.09	0.13/-0.24	[-0.10, 0.34]/[-0.47, -0.02]	0.11/0.12	.263/.037	0.13/0.25
Future	0.19	[0.09, 0.31]	0.06	.001	0.25/0.28	0.14	[0.03, 0.25]	0.06	.012	0.18/0.20
Mistrust	-0.39/-0.19	[-0.56, -0.21]/[-0.35, -0.03]	0.09/0.08	<.001/.008	0.48/0.26	-0.11/0.06	[-0.28, 0.04]/[-0.16, 0.28]	0.08/0.11	.185/.587	0.14/0.08
Constraint	-0.21	[-0.32, -0.11]	0.05	<.001	0.32/0.27	-0.02	[-0.13, 0.09]	0.06	.742	0.03/0.03
Total RQQ	0.28/0.15	[0.16, 0.41]/[0.03, 0.28]	0.07/0.07	<.001/.017	0.52/0.28	0.13/-0.04	[0.01, 0.25]/[-0.17, 0.10]	0.06/0.07	.031/.609	0.24/0.07

Note: *N* = 209 couples.
Abbreviation: RQQ, Relationship Quality Questionnaire.

highlight the importance of considering gender as a moderating factor (Lathren et al., 2021; Yarnell et al., 2015).

Our findings on partner effects further the understanding of the role of self-compassion in romantic relationships by providing additional information about interpersonal associations and gender differences in these links. Women's general self-compassion was positively related to men's engagement. In other words, being with a female partner who accepts her weaknesses and failures and shows mindfulness is linked to greater investment and commitment by the male partner. Self-compassion has been found to be negatively related to egoism, and the absence of egoism could stimulate pro-relationship behavior in perceivers (Park et al., 2011; Stellar et al., 2014). Therefore, having a self-compassionate partner who is not egoistic or narcissistic seems to trigger pro-relationship behavior (e.g., engagement) in men. In either case, the link we found between women's general self-compassion and men's engagement needs to be interpreted with caution because this partner effect may have emerged due to chance.

Moreover, we found the following relevant partner effects for relationship-specific self-compassion: An actor's self-compassion in the relationship was positively linked with the partner's perception of the long-term potential of the relationship. Women's self-compassion was also positively linked with men's total relationship satisfaction. Thus, men seem to experience overall satisfaction with the relationship when their female partner is self-kind and self-caring in difficult situations. Unexpectedly, however, we found that men's relationship-specific self-compassion was negatively associated with women's sexual fulfillment. Why might women report lower sexual relationship satisfaction with a partner who is self-kind and self-caring when experiencing distress and failures? Baker and McNulty (2011) reported that, only for men, a Self-Compassion \times Conscientiousness interaction explained whether the positive effects of self-compassion on the relationship emerged, but such an interaction was not found for women. Highly self-compassionate men who were low in conscientiousness were less motivated than others to remedy interpersonal mistakes in their romantic relationships, and this tendency was in turn related to lower relationship satisfaction in men (Baker & McNulty, 2011). Perhaps this reasoning also applies to the present results regarding the sexuality facet. Altogether, we found some significant partner effects that demonstrate the interdependence of self-compassion and relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships. Yet, the partner effects we found were smaller than the actor effects, a trend that is in line with previous research (Chopik & Lucas, 2019).

Overall, we found more and stronger partner and actor effects for the link between relationship-specific self-compassion and relationship satisfaction than for the link between general self-compassion and relationship satisfaction. The findings add to the literature on other psychological constructs (e.g., authenticity, power, forgiveness) in which relationship-specific approaches were especially good predictors of attitudes and behavior in the corresponding relationship domain (Kifer et al., 2013; Körner & Schütz, 2021). Moreover, self-compassion was strongly correlated with relationship-specific self-compassion (.56 and .67 for men and women, respectively), however, the two measures are not redundant. Individuals' general self-compassion does not fully explain their self-compassionate attitudes in specific types of relationships. Thus, we hope to advance the field by providing a self-compassion measure for the romantic relationship context. Further, our findings suggest that general self-compassion does not necessarily show the same or similar associations with criterion variables as domain-specific compassion does. In other words, global self-compassion, which relies on several types of relationships and situations, cannot be substituted for relationship-specific self-compassion with respect to its explanatory power. To sum up, we believe that taking into account different

relationships (e.g., romantic relationships, friendships, work relationships) in which people can be self-compassionate can further stimulate research on self-compassion because new and robust links can be found (see also Zuroff et al., 2021).

In addition, the findings could be relevant for better understanding the role of self-compassion in interpersonal relationships on a general level. General self-compassion was largely unrelated to partner's relationship satisfaction, thus suggesting that general self-compassion is not a dyadic construct. Instead, general self-compassion primarily explained variance in the actor's criterion. By contrast, how self-compassionate an individual is after experiencing failure or inadequacy in a relationship (i.e., relationship-specific self-compassion) was in fact related to partner's relationship satisfaction. Thus, assessing self-compassion at a relationship-specific level seems relevant to understanding *both* couple member's thoughts and feelings. Future research should further elaborate on the circumstances under which self-compassion is related to outcomes in other people.

Finally, the findings are relevant for practitioners who wish to employ self-compassion interventions. As self-compassion can be trained (see Ferrari et al., 2019), it can be used in relationship training programs or couples therapy because it is related to positive outcomes for the self and the partner (see Neff, 2023, for an overview; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). The present results illustrate which facets of relationship satisfaction may benefit the most from self-compassion interventions (e.g., a partner's admiration and fascination might not be affected by a general self-compassion intervention, but mistrust may be decreased). However, we cannot speak to causality with our study, but as self-compassion was found to lead to reduced depression 6 and 12 months later in a previous study (whereas depression did not impact self-compassion; Krieger et al., 2016), we can speculate that self-compassion training may also have a positive impact on relationship satisfaction.

4.2 | Limitations and future directions

We relied on self-ratings to assess each partner's self-compassion and relationship satisfaction. The ratings of both constructs may have been influenced by socially desirable responding because both constructs have positive connotations. Thus, other-ratings of self-compassion should be included in future research to validate our findings using another information source. This approach might also be helpful to account for blind spots in personality self-ratings (Gallrein et al., 2013).

The partner effects need further replication to gather more information regarding their robustness because there were fewer partner effects, and the effect sizes were smaller than the actor effects we found. To the best of our knowledge, no other self-compassion study has run an APIM analysis that could have been used to validate our results. Our findings also indicate a different pattern of partner effects between the two self-compassion measures. Thus, there is a need to validate the partner effects in another sample of at least the same size.

Our findings were based on German-speaking other-sex couples. Thus, generalizations are restricted, and future research should include same-sex couples and couples from other nations. Such extensions are particularly important to conduct, as it has been shown that expectations of romantic partners depend on culture, relational models, and sex and gender roles (Cionea et al., 2019).

Moreover, incremental effects of relationship-specific self-compassion (beyond general self-compassion) on relationship outcomes should be studied to further determine whether

relationship-specific self-compassion training is more suitable for improving satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Future research should also focus on longitudinal data. Our cross-sectional design limits conclusions about the direction of effects and therefore about how self-compassion contributes to the relationship satisfaction of both partners. However, the literature on personality has demonstrated a clear primacy of personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, self-esteem, and in our case, self-compassion) on relationship satisfaction across various types of relationships (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001) as compared with relationship effects on personality. Yet, there is also the possibility that satisfaction in one's romantic relationships offers opportunities to also enhance one's self-compassion as has already been shown for other personality traits (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001).

4.3 | Conclusion

Self-compassion is linked to psychological adjustment. In this study, we found that self-compassion was positively related to an actor's relationship satisfaction. These findings also generalized to a new self-compassion measure that takes relationship-specificity into account. Moreover, relationship-specific self-compassion also showed relevant associations with the partner's relationship satisfaction (i.e., partner effects). Thus, it is important to consider the interdependence of relationship partners in order to understand the full potential that self-compassion has as a resource for happy relationships. Two people benefit when individuals are able to care for themselves in terms of experienced inadequacies, suffering, and pain. In this manner, it is not just one's own love life that can flourish but also that of one's partner.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/stb8w>.

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