

Running head: DIVORCE & SELF-COMPASSION

When Leaving Your Ex, Love Yourself: Observational Ratings of Self-compassion Predict the
Course of Emotional Recovery Following Marital Separation

David A. Sbarra, Hillary L. Smith, Matthias R. Mehl

University of Arizona, Department of Psychology

Total word count: 3,969

Tables: 2

Figures: 1

Online Supplemental Information to accompany manuscript (separate file)

References: 39

In Press, *Psychological Science* (August, 2011)

Correspondence should be directed to:

David A. Sbarra, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology

1503 East University Blvd., Rm. 312

Tucson, Arizona 85721-0068

Email: sbarra@email.arizona.edu

Phone: 520-626-6426

Abstract

Marital separation is a highly stressful event and much remains to be learned about the factors that promote psychological resilience when relationships come to an end. In this study, divorcing adults ($N = 109$) completed a 4-minute stream-of-consciousness recording about their separation experience. Four judges then rated participants' self-compassion (defined by high levels of self-kindness, an awareness of one's place in shared humanity, and emotional equanimity) during the recordings. Judges evidenced considerable agreement in their ratings of self-compassion, and these ratings demonstrated strong predictive utility: Higher levels of self-compassion at the initial visit were associated with less divorce-related emotional intrusion at the start of the study, and this effect persisted over nine months. These findings remained after accounting for a number of competing predictors. Self-compassion is a modifiable individual difference variable, and the present findings, if replicated, have translational implications for improving the lives of divorcing adults.

[146 words]

Keywords: Divorce, Marital Separation, Self-compassion, Positive Emotions, Prospective Studies

When Leaving Your Ex, Love Yourself: Observational Ratings of Self-compassion Predict the Course of Emotional Recovery Following Marital Separation

Imagine the following situation: Your spouse decides your marriage is over. You knew your relationship was not going well, but now it is *really* over. For some people, the prospect of a divorce is not so bad, but you are distraught, and find yourself wondering how to put your life back together. What steps can you take to start the healing process? Unfortunately, this situation is all too common, and nearly 2 million adults in the United States are newly impacted by the end of marriage each year (Tajeda-Vera & Sutton, 2010). Most adults manage the transition of divorce well (Amato, 2010; Mancini et al., in press), but, for a small percentage of people, marital separation is associated with lasting decreases in psychological well-being (Lucas, 2005) and increased risk for physical health problems (Sbarra, Law, & Portley, in press). For anyone experiencing divorce, a critical—perhaps *the* critical—question is how to recover well over time.

When marriage ends in divorce, many people turn a harsh light on themselves. *It was my fault-- I should have acted differently; I wasn't good enough; I am not attractive enough.* These recriminations are essentially perceptions, or appraisals, of causality, and it is well-known that the more people become stuck focusing their thoughts on regret and longing, the worse their corresponding outcomes (Emery, 1994; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Sbarra & Emery, 2008). Although we know a good deal about what happens when people become mired in these negative appraisals of their separation, we know little about the correlates of adopting a fundamentally different stance with respect to the end of marriage, one that views the self empathically and more tenderly. The current report examines whether self-compassion, a potentially modifiable

individual difference variable, is associated with the course of psychological recovery following marital separation.

Self-compassion (SC) is an integrative construct that encompasses self-kindness (treating oneself with understanding and forgiveness), recognition of common humanity (acknowledgment that we are not perfect and that one's own experience is part of the larger human experience), and mindfulness (emotional equanimity and avoidance of over-identification with painful emotions) as key components (Neff, 2003a; 2003b). People who are high in SC tend to experience distressing affect without becoming overwhelmed or "stuck" in their experiences; they view themselves and their actions empathetically, and are able to see both the highs and the lows of life as part of the human experience.

It is now well-established that positive emotions have an "undoing" effect on negative affect by promoting a greater range of behavioral action and broadening one's perspective on coping resources (Fredrickson, 2001). There is increasing interest in how SC may serve this function in the face of stressful life events (Allen & Leary, 2010; Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts Allen, & Hancock, 2007). Allen and Leary (2010) recently argued that one reason people high in SC cope well with stressful events is that they tend to rely on positive cognitive restructuring when thinking about difficult experiences. For example, in an internet-based experience sampling procedure, Leary et al. (2007) found that participants high in SC were significantly less likely to endorse negative thoughts (e.g., thinking one's life is more "screwed up" than other people's) following ratings of the "worst event" that happened between ratings. Self-compassion appears distinct from self-esteem (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003b) with the latter construct being more highly correlated with inflated views of self-worth and hubris. In terms of coping

behaviors, high SC people tend to use more emotion-focused and less avoidance-oriented strategies for dealing with personal setbacks (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Although SC has quickly emerged as an important construct for understanding well-being, most of what we know about this individual difference variable comes from self-reports on the Self-compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003a). It is clear that SC is a reliably measured subjective state, but like all evaluative self-report assessments, subjective reports of SC are subject to social desirability, which renders the most commonly used tool for assessing the construct open to a variety of response biases (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Observational assessments have the potential to remedy these biases and have proven useful for a variety of social and clinical assessments (e.g., Mehl, 2006). In the current study, we examine the extent to which judges agree about recently separated adults' use of SC when discussing their relationship history and divorce experience.

An important task for the divorce literature is to identify moderating variables that predict positive outcomes (Amato, 2010), and we believe SC may be a critical (but unstudied) construct for doing so. Asking people to speak directly about their relationship history and separation experiences provides a rich context to understand variability in SC with respect to how people view the end of their marriage. At face value, the ability to be kind to oneself amid distressing events, to locate and view one's divorce as part of the slings and arrows that challenge all people, and to experience the emotional pain of divorce without becoming entrenched in it appear vital for promoting well-being and for protecting against lasting distress. If this is indeed the case, the specificity of SC must be examined in a rigorous manner: Is adopting a SC stance uniquely associated with positive outcomes following marital separation, or is the construct merely a correlate of feeling good in general?

Based on the literature reviewed above we hypothesize that (a) judges will be able to reliably identify behavioral indicators of SC (in recently separated adults), and (b) these ratings will moderate the course of emotional adjustment over time such that adults judged to be higher in SC at study entry will evidence greater declines in divorce-related distress over a 9-month follow-up period. We expect that this prospective effect will hold after accounting for self-reported indices of well-being (e.g., general mood symptoms, self-esteem, optimism), trait-like variables that are generally associated with divorce adjustment (attachment anxiety and avoidance), as well as the positive and negative emotion words participants use when describing their experience and the degree to which participants find talking about their separation to be emotionally difficult.

Method

Participants

The sample and procedures used in this study are described in detail elsewhere (Mason, Sbarra & Mehl, 2010). In brief, participants (targets) were 105 (38 men) community-dwelling adults (mean age = 40.4 years, $SD = 10$ years) who reported having been in a relationship with their former partner for over 13.5 years ($SD = 103.10$ months) and having experienced a marital separation, on average, 3.8 months before entering the study ($SD = 2.1$ months).

Procedure

During a laboratory visit, participants were asked to mentally recall a detailed image of their former partner for 30 seconds and then to speak into a digital recorder in a stream-of-consciousness (SOC) manner for four minutes continuously about any and all thoughts and feelings regarding their separation experience. Four trained coders (judges) who were unacquainted with the participants and all aspects of the study coded SOC audio files and rated

each participant on all of the Self-compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003b) short form items, which were adapted from the self-report scale for behavioral coding (see the description below). The coders, all undergraduate research assistants, were blind to the study hypotheses but were familiar with literature on self-compassion and were provided detailed training, including a scoring manual, for identifying variability in the construct.

Following the initial visit, participants returned to the laboratory for a 3-month, then either a 6-month or 9-month follow-up assessment. To decrease participant burden and reduce attrition, this study used a planned-missingness design (see McArdle & Nesselroade, 1994). Eighty-five percent ($n = 89$) of the initial sample returned for the 3-month assessment, and 75% of the sample was retained over the entire follow-up period (with 37 participants assessed at the 6-month follow-up and 43 participants assessed at the 9-month follow-up). There were no significant differences in initial divorce-related distress among those participants who completed the final (i.e., 6- or 9-month) assessment and those who did not; however, adults who were not retained in the follow-up samples were judged to evidence significantly less SC at the initial visit relative to those adults who completed all three study assessments, $t(103) = 2.25, p = .03$.

Measures

All self-report inventories used in this study demonstrated adequate internal consistency ($\alpha s = .75-.93$).

Outcome Variable

Divorce-related psychological adjustment. Psychological adjustment was operationalized using the 22-item Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997), which includes items such as “Any reminders brought back feelings about it” and “I was jumpy and

easily startled.” Higher scores reflect greater emotional intrusion, somatic hyperarousal, and avoidance behaviors following the recent separation experience.

Focal Predictor Variable

Observer-rated self-compassion. Four judges listened to each participant’s 4-minute SOC audio recording about their relationship history and separation experience. Judges rated each participant’s SOC recording using a modified version of the short-form SCS (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2010). The short-form of the SCS (SCS-SF) was developed using multiple samples, it includes a single, higher-order factor of SC, and it is highly correlated with the full SCS. In the present study, all SCS-SF items were reworded from first-person (self-report) to third-person and made to correspond, when applicable, specifically to a divorce experience. For example, the SCS-SF item tapping mindfulness, “*When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation,*” was re-worded to read, “*When describing something painful about the divorce, this person seems to take a balanced view of the situation.*” Similarly, a self-kindness item was re-worded to read, “*When describing hard times during their divorce, this person tries to give themselves the caring and tenderness they need,*” and a common humanity item was re-worded to read, “*This person seems to accept their failings as part of the human condition.*” The Online Supplemental Information provides verbatim examples of participants’ stream-of-consciousness recordings that were judged to be high and low in SC; each example was selected to be illustrative of a specific SC sub-scale. Judges scored each of the 12 modified SCS-SF items using the same 5-point Likert-type scale as used in the self-report inventory, and, identical to the self-report inventory, participants scoring higher on the total summary score were judged to evidence greater SC ($M = 3.43, SD = .35$).

Inter-coder agreement (ICC[2,k]) for each the 12 items was computed and averaged across the judges. Judges demonstrated considerable agreement in identifying variability in participants' SC during the SOC (ICC = .77). No significant differences in judge-rated SC were observed by participant sex, $t(103) = 1.62, p = .21$.

Covariates/Competing Predictors

All self-report measures, with the exception of the task-rated emotional difficulty (TRED) scale, were completed at study entry when participants also completed the IES-R inventory.

The Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The BDI assesses depressed mood and higher scores on this inventory reflect greater mood disturbance in the 2 weeks prior to the initial visit, including, for example, sustained sadness, loss of appetite, irritability, and poor sleep.

Divorce-related demographics. Participants reported on the length of the relationship prior to the separation, as well as the time (in months) since the end of the separation (descriptive statistics reported above).

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003). The 10-item ERQ is a widely used measure designed to assess the trait-like propensity to use two emotion-regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression.

Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R, Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000). The ECR-R assesses attachment-related anxiety and avoidance (two dimensions that underlie individual differences in adult attachment patterns). The anxiety scale captures hyper-vigilance to attachment-related themes within relationships. The avoidance scale captures the degree to which people tend to minimize attachment-related behaviors, thoughts, and feelings.

Self-esteem and optimism. Participants completed divorce-specific self-report versions of Rosenberg's Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) as indices of divorce-related self-esteem and optimism at the initial lab visit (i.e. each item began with "Since this separation..."; e.g., "Since this separation, I take a positive attitude toward myself and life."). High scores reflect high levels of self-esteem and optimism with respect to one's marital separation experience.

Task-rated emotional difficulty during the stream-of-consciousness (SOC) recording. Immediately following the SOC recording period, participants completed a four-item task-rated emotional difficulty (TRED) scale (e.g., "How upsetting did you find this task?"). People scoring higher on the summary scale indicated that the SOC task was emotionally difficult for them and that they exerted considerable effort trying to control their emotional experience.

Text-derived positive emotions. All SOC recordings were transcribed by independent transcribers (not judges), and corresponding text was analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count system (LIWC; Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001). The LIWC system compares each word of a text to an internal dictionary consisting of 74 standardized linguistic categories (e.g., personal pronouns, positive and negative affect words), and then outputs word use (in a given category) as a percentage of total words in a given text that fall into that category. In the present report, we focus on the positive emotion, which includes words reflecting positive feelings (e.g., happy, good, love, joy) and optimism (e.g., certainty, pride, and win), as well as negative emotion, which includes words reflecting negative anxiety (e.g., nervous), anger (e.g., hate), and sadness (e.g., sad), categories.

Results

Bivariate correlations among the study variables are displayed in Table 1. The judge-rated self-compassion (SC) composite was significantly negatively correlated with self-reported IES-R scores at study entry and significantly negatively associated with the self-report variables assessing negative affect.

Using multilevel modeling, we observed systematic declines in IES-R scores over time, including a significant linear decrease, $B = -.87$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$, as well as a significant quadratic increase, $B = .21$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$. In combination, the linear and quadratic effects reflect a systematic decrease in IES-R scores that slows over the course of the 9-month assessment period; as time moves forward, the quadratic component of change serves to increase IES-R scores at the final assessment.

The first set of conditional models examined the effect of SC on IES-R scores at the start of the study and relevant interactions with the two time parameters; these models included no control variables. Consistent with the cross-sectional correlation, participants judged to be higher on SC reported fewer symptoms of hyperarousal and divorce-related emotional intrusion at study entry, $B = -1.35$, $SE = .15$, $p < .001$. Both two-way interactions (SC X Time and SC X Time²) were significant: Adults lower in SC evidenced faster linear decreases in IES-R scores over time, $B = .85$, $SE = .30$, $p = .005$, and those people lower in SC also evidenced faster quadratic increases in IES-R scores over time, $B = -.22$, $SE = .10$, $p = .03$. This latter effect indicates that, as time goes on, participants begin to evidence an increase in their IES-R scores and this effect is stronger for participants judged to be low in SC (see Figure 1).

We next sought to determine if the effects of interest were eliminated after accounting for relevant covariates/competing predictors (see Table 2). The effects of interest changed very little after accounting the 12 covariates/competing predictors. Thus, although judge-rated SC is

positively correlated with self-reported self-esteem and optimism and negatively correlated with many of the indices of affective distress, none of these variables accounted for the initial association between IES-R scores and self-compassion or the SC X Time interactions. Taken together, these findings indicate that judge-ratings of SC contain variance that is unique relative to participants' subjective psychological states as well as their use of positive and negative emotion words during the SOC task.

Because the SC X Time interactions are focal aspects of the model presented in Table 2, we explored the competing possibility that the covariates might also interact with Time in a similar way, thus reducing the significant SC X Time effects. Because of the large number of covariates, we used a forward selection stepwise procedure to determine if any of the covariate X Time or covariate X Time² variables would eliminate the significant SC X Time and/or SC X Time² effects. If a covariate X Time or covariate X Time² was significant, it was retained in the model. Of the 24 covariates, only the attachment anxiety X Time variable was significant, $B = -.06$, $SE = .03$, $p = .01$. People who reported higher levels of attachment anxiety evidenced slower linear decreases in IES-R scores over time. This effect was unique to the two SC X Time interactions but did not eliminate either of the SC X Time effects; therefore, we retained a final model with three significant interaction terms.

Finally, we conducted an end-point analysis by re-centering Time around the 9-month assessment. The SC main effect remained significant at the final assessment, $B = -.32$, $SE = .15$, $p < .03$.¹ Nine months after their initial assessment, participants who were rated as speaking with more SC regarding their separation experienced evidenced significantly less divorce-related emotional intrusion and hyperarousal.

Discussion

Because the incidence of divorce is high, it is critical to understand the factors that promote resilience and enhance well-being when marriage dissolves. In this report, we found that SC can be assessed observationally (with high inter-rater agreement) based on adults' verbal accounts of their relationship history and separation experience. Self-compassion, in turn, evidenced predictive utility: A high degree of SC at the initial laboratory visit was associated with less divorce-related distress up to nine months after the initial assessment. Over time, participants judged to be low in SC evidenced significantly faster rates of linear decline, but these same people also evidenced significantly faster rates of quadratic increase toward the end of the study period. We sought to eliminate the SC effects by including a wide-range of covariates/competing predictors (cf. Miller & Chapman, 2001), but the effects remained robust after accounting for relationship-specific demographics, self-reported mood states, habitual patterns of emotion regulation, adult attachment styles, self-reported emotional difficulty during the stream-of-consciousness (SOC) task, and the positive and negative emotion words participants used during the SOC. Thus, SC evidenced a high degree of specificity for predicting positive adjustment to one's marital separation.

From these findings a critical follow-up question emerges: To what degree can separating/divorcing adults *become* self-compassionate? Self-compassion is believed to be a teachable skill (see Neff, 2011), and the literature on loving-kindness (e.g., Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008), compassion-focused (e.g., Gilbert & Proctor, 2006), and mindfulness-based (e.g., Baer, 2003; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007) interventions is growing quickly. In combination with experimental research demonstrating that self- and other-foregiveness can speed the course of mood symptom recovery after divorce (Rye, Pargament, Pan, Yingling, Shogren, & Ito, 2005), the current findings suggest

that it may be advisable to encourage divorcing adults to cultivate the skills of SC. Basic approaches can involve noticing and accepting negative thoughts about the end of marriage (without becoming mired in a cycle of self-recrimination), cultivating self-kindness even while experiencing emotional pain (e.g., moving from states such as, “I should have tried harder. I am so heartbroken because I quit this relationship.” to, “I did the best I could given the circumstances, and I am going to find a way to forgive myself.”) and, attempting to develop an awareness that difficult experiences, including divorce, are part of the ups-and-downs of the overall human experience.

To the extent that these processes induce positive mood states, divorcing adults may find opportunities to grow and even flourish from the experiences surrounding the end of their marriage (see Tashiro, Frazier, & Berman, 2006). Thus, SC may serve to disarm potentially noxious emotional states and, like other positive emotions, exert an “undoing” effect (Fredrickson, 2001) on the negative mood states that can arise in the aftermath of difficult social transitions. People high in SC feel the pain of their separation a very real way, but at the same time they also avoid ruminating about their negative mental states, punishing themselves for real or perceived transgressions, and/or wallowing in their isolation and loneliness. Although future research is needed to determine the precise mechanisms linking SC and positive divorce adjustment, the present results indicate that this construct may serve a powerful protective function when marriage comes to an end.

When evaluating the role of positive emotions in the context of adjustment to a stressful life event, care must be taken to avoid circular, potentially tautological conclusions. For example, at face value, a possible criticism of the current research is that people who “feel better” at the start of the study “do better” over time, regardless of how the predictor or outcome

variables are measured. Our approach to data analysis argues against this concern; if judge-rated SC merely reflected positive affect or the lack of negative affect, the SC effects would be eliminated by any number of the covariates/competing predictors, and we did not observe this to be so at the start of the study or for either of the SC X Time interactions. Of course, care must be taken in interpreting the SC variable and its interactions with Time, and it is most accurate to conclude that, in the fully controlled model, people who are judged to have more SC *than would be expected after accounting for their scores on relevant covariates/competing predictors* evidence the least distress at study entry, slower rates of linear decline, and slower rates of quadratic increase over time.

The durability of the SC effect is especially notable. At the 9-month assessment, adults who were rated to be one standard deviation below the mean of reported SC averaged a .32 point increase in their IES-R scores, which represents an increase of nearly .5 of a standard deviation on the IES-R at the final assessment. To benchmark this effect, consider the role of attachment anxiety in our analyses. Attachment anxiety was strongly negatively associated with separation adjustment (Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, & Florian, 1997; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003), but was not uniquely associated with the IES-R intercept at the start ($p = .06$) or end of the study ($p = .12$). Thus, relative to a construct that has important implications for understanding well-being following social separations, SC appears to be at least as useful for predicting future adjustment.

The findings from this study should be considered in light of its limitations. A primary limitation of this study is that it did not include a self-report measure of SC, thus it is difficult to determine how judge-rated SC maps onto subjective reports of the same construct. Although the study was prospective, the planned-missingness design precluded assessments from all participants at all occasions; this design feature may have attenuated attrition out of the study

over the 9-month follow-up period, but it would be ideal to include measurements of all participants at all assessments. Finally, the relatively small number of men in the sample prohibited a test of whether the association between SC and divorce adjustment differs by sex.

Conclusion

At an initial laboratory visit divorcing adults made a 4-minute stream-of-consciousness audio recording about their relationship history and separation experience. Four judges later rated participants' self-compassion (SC) after listening to the recordings. In a prospective model of divorce adjustment that spanned nine months, participants rated high in SC at the initial visit also reported less divorce-related emotional intrusion at the start of the study. Furthermore, ratings of SC at the first study visit moderated the course of change over time. Participants judged to be low in SC evidenced significantly faster rates of linear decline over time, but these same people also evidenced significantly faster rates of quadratic increase toward the end of the study period. At the final assessment, adults rated high in SC nine months earlier again reported significantly less divorce-related emotional intrusion. This paper is the first study to assess SC observationally, and the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that may promote resilience in the face of marital separation and divorce.

References

- Allen, A., & Leary, M. (2010). Self compassion, stress, and coping. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 4*, 107-118.
- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 72*, 650-666.
- Baer, R. A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 10*, 125-143.
- Beck, A. T., Steer, R. A., & Brown, G. K. (1996). The Beck Depression Inventory-II. San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Assessment.
- Birnbaum, G. E., Orr, I., Mikulincer, M., & Florian, V. (1997). When marriage breaks-up: Does attachment contribute to coping and mental health? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 14*, 643-654.
- Davis, D., Shaver, P. R., & Vernon, M. L. (2003). Physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to breaking up: The roles of gender, age, environmental involvement, and attachment style. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 29*, 971-884.
- Emery, R. E. (1994). *Renegotiating family relationships: Divorce, child custody, and mediation*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Fraley, R. C. (2002). Attachment stability from infancy to adulthood: Meta-analysis and dynamic modeling of developmental mechanisms. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 6*, 123-151.
- Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, K. A. (2000). An item response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 78*, 350-365.

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56*, 218-226.
- Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*, 1045-1062.
- Furr, R. M. (2009). Personality psychology as a truly behavioural science. *European Journal of Personality, 23*, 369-401.
- Gilbert, P., & Procter, S. (2006). Compassionate mind training for people with high shame and self criticism: overview and pilot study of a group therapy approach. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy, 13*, 353-379.
- Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 348.
- Hetherington, E. M., & Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Hofmann, S. G., Sawyer, A. T., Witt, A. A., & Oh, D. (2010). The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on anxiety and depression: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 78*, 169-183.
- Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Batts Allen, A., & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 887-904.

- Lucas, R. E. (2005). Time does not heal all wounds: A longitudinal study of reaction and adaptation to divorce. *Psychological Science, 16*, 945-950.
- Mason, A. E., Sbarra, D. A., & Mehl, M. R. (2010). Thin-slicing divorce: Thirty seconds of information predict changes in psychological adjustment over 90 days. *Psychological Science, 21*, 1420-1422.
- McArdle, J. J., & Nesselroade, J. R. (1994). Using multivariate data to structure developmental change. In S. H. Cohen & H. W. Reese (Eds.), *Life-span developmental psychology: Methodological contributions*. (pp. 223-267). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mehl, M. R. (2006). The lay assessment of subclinical depression in daily life. *Psychological Assessment, 18*, 340-345.
- Miller, G. A., & Chapman, J. P. (2001). Misunderstanding analysis of covariance. *J Abnorm Psychol, 110*, 40-48.
- Neff, K. D. (2011). *Self-compassion. Stop beating yourself up and leave insecurity behind*. New York: William Morrow.
- Neff, K..D. (2009). Self-compassion. In M. R. Leary & R. H. Hoyle (Eds.), *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior*. (pp. 561-573). New York, NY US: Guilford Press.
- Neff, K. (2003a). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity, 2*, 85-101.
- Neff, K. D. (2003b). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity, 2*, 223-250.

- Neff, K. D., Hsieh, Y.-P., & DeJitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Self and Identity, 4*, 263-287.
- Paulhus, D. L., & Vazire, S. (2007). The self-report method. In R. W. Robins, R. C. Fraley & R. F. Krueger (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in personality psychology*. (pp. 224-239). New York, NY US: Guilford Press.
- Pennebaker, J. W., Francis, M. E., & Booth, R. J. (2001). *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC): LIWC 2001*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Raes, F., Pommier, E., Neff, K., & Van Gucht, D. (2010). Construction and factorial validation of a short form of the self-compassion scale. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy, 17*, published ahead online, DOI: 10.1002/cpp.702.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rye, M. S., Pargament, K. I., Pan, W., Yingling, D. W., Shogren, K. A., & Ito, M. (2005). Can group interventions facilitate forgiveness of an ex-spouse? A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*, 880-892.
- Sbarra, D. A., & Emery, R. E. (2008). Deeper into divorce: Using actor-partner analyses to explore systemic differences in coparenting conflict following custody dispute resolution. *Journal of Family Psychology, 22*, 144-152.
- Sbarra, D. A., Law, R. W., & Portley, R. M. (in press). Divorce and death: A meta-analysis and research agenda for clinical, social, and health psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A reevaluation of the life orientation test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 1063-1078.
- Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2007). Teaching self-care to caregivers: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on the mental health of therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 1*, 105.
- Tausczik, Y. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2010). The psychological meaning of words: Liwc and computerized text analysis methods. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 29*, 24-54.
- Tejada-Vera B, & Sutton P.D. (2010). Births, marriages, divorces, and deaths: Provisional data for 2009. *National Vital Statistics Reports, 58*. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 86*, 320-333.
- Weiss, D. S., & Marmar, C. R. (1997). The Impact of Events Scale—Revised. In J. P. Wilson & T. M. Keane (Eds.), *Assessing psychological trauma and PTSD*. (pp. 399-411). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Footnotes

1. Because of the planned-missingness design, it is possible that early self-compassion was significantly associated with IES-R scores in participants who completed the 9-month assessment, but not in those who completed the 6-month assessment. We tested this possibility by re-centering Time around the 6-month assessment. Consistent with the effect at 9-months, we observed a significant main effect of early self-compassion at the 6-month assessment, $B = -.32$, $SE = .14$, $p < .03$.

Author Note

This research was supported by grants from the National Institute of Aging (AG#028454), the National Institute of Mental Health (MH#074637), and the National Science Foundation (#0919525) to the first author, and from a University of Arizona Honors College Grant to the second author. The authors are grateful to Aida DeJonghe, Lauren Lee, Lindsey Bupp, Ashley Mason, and Rita Law for their assistance on the marital transitions study. Special thanks to Sara Algoe who provided consultation on the assessment of positive emotions in this study.

Table 1.

Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. IES-R at Time 1	1.0													
2. Judge-rated self-compassion	-.57**	1.0												
3. Time since the separation	.05	-.13	1.0											
4. Relationship length	.03	-.11	.09	1.0										
5. Self-reported self-esteem	-.61**	.52**	-.04	-.10	1.0									
6. Self-report optimism	-.58**	.47**	-.12	-.14	.72**	1.0								
7. BDI	.68**	-.59**	.05	.04	.78**	.69**	1.0							
8. Attachment anxiety	.49**	-.32**	.06	-.00	.51**	.51**	.48**	1.0						
9. Attachment avoidance	.03	-.01	.03	.09	.13	.16	.09	.40**	1.0					
10. ERQ-Reappraisal	-.26**	.17	-.25**	.04	-.33**	.39**	-.35**	-.25**	-.10	1.0				
11. ERQ-Suppression	.02	.01	.00	-.03	.18	.26**	.20*	.11	.27**	-.23*	1.0			
12. TRED Index	.43**	-.51**	.14	.07	.45**	.39**	.48**	.40*	.11	-.26**	.18	1.0		
13. LIWC Positive Emotion	.00	.01	-.00	.16	.02	-.04	.05	.08	-.07	.07	-.16	.26**	1.0	
14. LIWC Negative Emotion	.27**	-.41**	.10	-.11	.12	.17	.34*	.05	-.12	-.16	-.08	.33**	.13	1.0

Note. ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$. BDI = Beck Depression Inventory; ERQ = Emotion Regulation Questionnaire; TRED = Task-rated Emotional Difficulty during the stream-of-consciousness (SOC) recording; LIWC = Linguistic Inquiry Work Count text analysis program.

Table 2.

Final Multilevel Model Results Predicting Changes in IES-R Scores Over the 9-month Follow-up Period

Parameter	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	1.48	.05	30.47	<.001
Time	-.84	.10	-8.86	<.001
Time ²	.20	.03	6.20	<.001
Judge-rated self-compassion	-.61	.17	-3.46	.001
Time since the separation	-.033	.02	-2.06	.05
Relationship length	-.00	.00	-.61	.52
Self-reported self-esteem	-.03	.12	.26	.79
Self-report optimism	-.11	.06	2.08	.04
BDI	.02	.007	2.70	.008
Attachment anxiety	.08	.04	1.88	.06
Attachment avoidance	-.04	.05	-.92	.35
ERQ-Reappraisal	.01	.03	.38	.70
ERQ-Suppression	-.02	.04	-.79	.42
TRED Index	.05	.03	1.67	.10
LIWC Positive Emotion	-.05	.03	-1.47	.14
LIWC Negative Emotion	.01	.04	.33	.74
Self-compassion X Time	.76	.27	2.70	.006
Self-compassion X Time ²	-.19	.09	-2.15	.03

Note. All predictor variables were grand-mean centered prior to being entered in the analysis. BDI = Beck Depression Inventory; ERQ = Emotion Regulation Questionnaire; TRED = Task-rated Emotional Difficulty during the stream-of-consciousness (SOC) recording; LIWC = Linguistic Inquiry Work Count text analysis program. Akaike's Information Criteria (AIC) for this model was 488.55.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Changes in IES-R scores over the 9-month follow-up period as a function of judge-rated self-compassion (SC). Participants judged to be lower in SC reported significantly greater levels of divorce-related emotional intrusion and somatic hyperarousal at study entry. End-point analyses revealed that this effect was robust across the entire follow-up period. Thus, relative to those judged to be lower in SC, recently-separated adults judged to be higher in SC at study entry reported significantly fewer IES-R symptoms up to 9 months later.

