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The Moderating Role of Collectivism on the Relationship Between Self-Compassion and Compassion for Others of Filipino College Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Compassion fosters personal growth and communal well-being, yet its cultural underpinnings, particularly in collectivistic societies, remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the compassionate experiences of Filipino students, focusing on the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others, and the moderating role of collectivism. Using a sample of 367 students, the results revealed moderate levels of self-compassion, indicating students' efforts to care for themselves despite challenges. In contrast, compassion for others was high, reflecting strong group-oriented values. This high level of compassion for others was also associated with high collectivism, indicating that students' compassion is deeply rooted in cultural values that emphasize group welfare. Correlational analysis showed a positive relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others (r = 0.41), indicating that greater self-compassion is linked to increased compassion for others. While overall collectivism did not moderate this relationship, horizontal collectivism, which stresses equality and harmony, strengthened the association (B = 0.32, p < .001). These findings suggest that Filipino students' compassion is shaped by cultural values that prioritize egalitarian relationships rather than hierarchical structures. The study's implications are significant for both academic and practical applications. Integrating compassion into higher education curricula, particularly in general education courses like Understanding the Self, is crucial for promoting personal well-being and fostering a supportive campus environment. Moreover, educational institutions should prioritize the promotion of equality and inclusivity, ensuring that these values permeate campus culture and reduce hierarchical barriers. By focusing on horizontal collectivism, institutions can cultivate spaces that value collaboration and interpersonal care, not just academic achievement. This research contributes to the understanding of how collectivist values influence compassion, filling a notable gap in literature on culture and compassion. **Keywords:** Self-compassion, compassion for others, horizontal collectivism, vertical collectivism, moderation analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Compassion has long been recognized as a cornerstone of human survival and well-being, essential for fostering social cohesion, personal resilience, and societal progress [1]. Literature has described compassion as involving patience, kindness, non-judgment, and the acceptance of human imperfections [2]. Through this positive nature, compassion functions as an effective coping strategy, helping individuals to navigate life's challenges by fostering a sense of connectedness [3]. Suffering and adversity are perceived as shared, universal experiences rather than isolated burdens, enhancing empathy and solidarity [4].

The interpersonal nature of compassion has traditionally received the most focus. However, the increasing popularity of Buddhist philosophy has highlighted the importance of self-compassion. When an individual responds to their own suffering with kindness, understanding and a sense of shared humanity, they are engaging in self-compassion

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[5, 2]. Consequently, compassion may be directed towards others or the self [6]. Regardless, numerous studies have recognized the benefits of both orientations. Self-compassion has been shown to alleviate symptoms of psychological distress [7-11], while compassion for others similarly promotes psychological resilience [12]. Both forms of compassion are associated with enhanced happiness [13, 14] and life satisfaction [4, 15], and they contribute to reduced rumination, improved stress resilience, better interpersonal relationships, and greater overall well-being.

Despite these well-documented benefits, the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others remains a topic of debate, with conflicting findings in the literature. Some scholars suggest a close link between the two constructs, as self-compassion can foster a compassionate attitude toward others [16]. Neff and Pommier [17], for example, propose that "common humanity," a key component of self-compassion, serves as a bridge, enabling self-compassionate individuals to better empathize with others' flaws and suffering [18].

In contrast, other researchers argue that these constructs are distinct. Lopez et al. [19] contend that compassion for others, an evolutionarily driven social behavior, developed to nurture offspring and forge social bonds, while self-compassion, being introspective, operates independently of others. This distinction implies that individuals may naturally exhibit compassion for others while maintaining self-criticism [20].

Additionally, differences in compassionate behavior may be shaped by culture [21-22]. Cultural norms influence how individuals express compassion by defining what motivates compassionate behavior [23]. One prominent cultural dimension is individualism-collectivism, which reflects whether individuals prioritize autonomy or interconnectedness in their relationships [24]. The Philippines, a predominantly collectivistic society, emphasizes family and community bonds, often placing communal well-being above individual concerns [25-26].

Emphasizing the significance of culture in compassion, cross-cultural studies reveal significant variations in self-compassion and compassion for others, even within collectivistic contexts [27-28]. In one instance, Chen [29] found varying levels of self-compassion across collectivistic societies, such as Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. In another instance, Neff et al. [30] found differences in self-compassion levels between collectivistic cultures like Thailand and Taiwan, despite their shared interdependent orientations. While both cultures value interdependence, Taiwanese individuals' higher self-criticism was associated with lower self-compassion, whereas the Thai emphasis on kindness promoted greater self-compassion.

Despite collectivistic cultures' self-criticism leading to lower self-compassion, Zhao et al. [31] found that among Chinese individuals, this self-judgment could be reframed as constructive self-reflection aimed at fostering social harmony. Viewing self-criticism – one component of self-compassion – as a motivation to have better relationships with others elicits better perceived social support, relationship quality, and lower levels of loneliness in collectivistic societies [32, 22]. However, these social benefits may be less pronounced in collectivistic contexts, where self-compassion is not as socially valued as in individualistic societies [22]. This lower valuation may reflect the nuanced social dynamics within "tight" collectivistic cultures, where personal forms of self-compassion are less emphasized.

Moving on to compassion for others, despite the strong emphasis on communal values, lower levels are sometimes observed within collectivistic cultures. Trommsdorff et al. [28] reported that children in collectivistic societies engage in less direct prosocial behavior, potentially to avoid imposing help and to preserve the dignity of others. Prosocial responses tend to increase, however, when there is a direct request for assistance, invoking a sense of social responsibility. Cultural attitudes also vary with perceived social norms; Steindl et al. [33] noted that collectivistic individuals may be less inclined to assist others if they perceive their suffering as resulting from socially deviant behaviors [34].

Despite the recognized benefits and cultural relevance of compassion, there remains a notable gap in research on these constructs within collectivistic societies, particularly in the Philippines [22]. Given the profound role of culture in shaping expressions of self-compassion and compassion for others, this study seeks to deepen understanding of these dynamics among Filipino students, examining how collectivistic values influence compassion. By investigating these relationships, the study aims to inform the development of educational programs, curricula, and activities that foster compassion in schools. Compassion, including self-compassion, is a learnable skill that holds the potential to promote resilience and social cohesion within educational systems [35]. This study thus highlights the importance of

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embedding compassion within a collectivistic context, recognizing its capacity to bridge individual and communal well-being in the Philippines.

1.1) Theoretical perspective and hypotheses

1.1.1) The relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others

The Social Mentality Theory explains the link between self-compassion and compassion for others [21]. It suggests that both types of compassion arise from social mentalities—innate systems developed through relationships with others. These systems include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns that guide how individuals interact with others and understand their responses. When individuals try to connect with others, these internal systems are activated, influencing how they feel and act. For example, when people care for others, their emotions are triggered by the other person's needs and feelings, motivating them to offer help.

Human beings also use these social mentalities to relate to themselves. One example is the caregiving mentality, which forms the basis of self-compassion [36]. This mentality involves caring for others, recognizing their needs, understanding their emotions, and responding with support. When applied to the self, this caregiving mentality guides individuals in offering the same care to themselves, fostering self-compassion. In this way, when these social mentalities are activated, compassion can be directed both toward others and the self. It can therefore be deduced and hypothesized that:

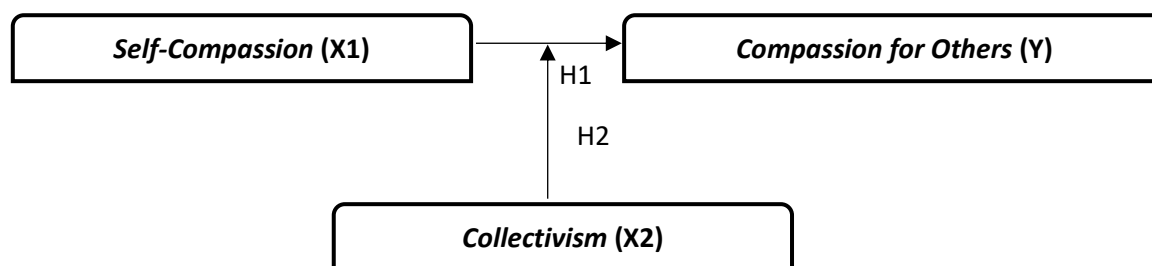Hypothesis 1. High levels of self-compassion are associated with higher levels of compassion for others.

Fig. 1. Research framework

1.1.2) The moderating role of collectivism between self-compassion and compassion for others

The influence of collectivism on the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others can be explained through the self-construal theory of Markus and Kitayama [24]. This theory suggests that the way individuals view their relationship with others differs across cultures, and self-construals play a key role in shaping psychological processes such as compassion. Markus and Kitayama [24] identified two types of self-construal: the independent self-construal, associated with individualism, and the interdependent self-construal, associated with collectivism.

The independent self-construal focuses on behaviors based on one's own thoughts, feelings, and actions, with less concern for others' perceptions. On the other hand, the interdependent self-construal views the self as connected to others, with behaviors shaped by an understanding of others' thoughts, emotions, and actions. In this view, the group's needs and expectations take precedence. While independent self-construal is common in Western cultures, interdependent self-construal is typical in East Asian cultures. These two construals align with Hofstede's dimensions of individualism and collectivism [37].

According to this theory, self-compassion and compassion for others are influenced by the self-construal of a cultural group. For example, Neff et al. [30] found that individuals with an interdependent self-construal were more likely to practice self-compassion. The interdependent nature of these individuals helps expand self-compassion, which, in cultures like Thailand, encourages extending compassion to others. Similarly, Niiya et al. [38] found that the interdependence of Japanese participants promoted compassionate goals, where self-compassion naturally extended to others. This cycle of compassion is driven by a desire to support and contribute to the group [33]. In collectivist cultures, therefore, compassion for the self is often extended to others, reinforcing the link between self-compassion

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and compassion for others. Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows and the research framework can be seen in Fig. 1.

Hypothesis 2. Collectivism moderates the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others wherein the collectivism amplifies the link between self-compassion and compassion for others.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1) Participants and sample

The study utilized a quantitative design and employed convenience sampling to gather data from respondents via surveys. A total of 402 Filipino college students were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. However, 35 respondents were removed after data cleansing due to incomplete data, resulting in a final count of 367. These students satisfied the inclusion criteria of being currently enrolled during the second semester and third trimester of the 2021-2022 academic year at the recognized universities or colleges in Baguio City, Benguet, Philippines. As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were females (n = 284; 77.4%) and in their second year of college or university (n = 66; 18%).

2.2) Procedures

The study received ethical and administrative approval from the relevant universities and colleges. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents through the faculty and staff of these institutions, utilizing both online and paper-and-pencil methods. Prior to obtaining informed consent, the purpose and procedures of the study were thoroughly explained to participants, with a strong emphasis on ensuring confidentiality through the anonymity of responses. No financial compensation or other forms of remuneration were provided to participants for their involvement in the study. Efforts were made to prevent harm, exploitation, or bias throughout the study, including during respondent selection, data collection, and the administration of the survey instruments. Data was collected and analyzed from May 1, 2022, to July 30, 2022, with all collected data securely stored in an encrypted online drive maintained by the researcher.

2.3) Measures

2.3.1) Self-compassion

The 26-item Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Neff [39] was utilized to assess self-compassion, encompassing its six subscales: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. The validity and reliability of the SCS have been well-established through various studies. Neff [39] conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to support the scale's construct validity, demonstrating that the SCS adequately fit the proposed model. Further cross-validation confirmed the appropriateness of a higher-order model. More recently, a study by Neff et al. [40] validated the theoretical model of the SCS, finding an excellent fit for both overall self-compassion and the subscale factors using exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM).

In terms of reliability, a pilot test was conducted, and the reliability analysis of the SCS revealed an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.75, indicating high and acceptable reliability [41]. Reliability coefficients for the individual subscales were as follows: self-kindness (0.63), self-judgment (0.57), common humanity (0.50), isolation (0.59), and mindfulness and over-identification (0.67). These values suggest that the subscales possess moderate to acceptable reliability [41].

2.3.2) Compassion for others

The 16-item Compassion Scale (CS) developed by Pommier et al. [42] was employed to assess compassion for others, encompassing its four subscales: kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, and indifference. The validity and reliability of the CS have been well-established, supporting its use to measure compassion for others. For validity, Pommier et al. [42] utilized confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM), both of which demonstrated that the CS appropriately aligns with the theoretical model of compassion for others and the associated subscale factors.

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In terms of reliability, the CS exhibited a high overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.88, indicating strong internal consistency [41]. The reliability coefficients for the subscales were as follows: kindness (0.85) and mindfulness (0.87), both of which indicate high and acceptable reliability [41]. For common humanity, the reliability coefficient was 0.92, suggesting excellent internal consistency and reliability [41]. However, the subscale for indifference yielded Cronbach's alpha of 0.57, indicating moderate but still acceptable reliability [41].

2.3.3) Collectivism

Eight items from the Culture Orientation Scale (COS) developed by Triandis and Gelfand [43] were utilized to measure collectivism. The validity and reliability of the COS have been well-established, supporting its application in measuring collectivist tendencies. For validity, Triandis and Gelfand [43] provided evidence of convergent validity, noting strong correlations among the scale items, thereby confirming the internal consistency of the construct.

Regarding reliability, the eight-item COS demonstrated a high reliability coefficient of 0.85, indicating robust and acceptable internal consistency [41].

A Likert scale ranging from 1 (representing "Never") to 5 (representing "Always") was used to assess all constructs.

RESULTS

3.1) Self-compassion, compassion for others, and collectivism

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables. The mean scores for both compassion for others (M = 3.97) and collectivism (M = 4.09) are high while it was moderate for self-compassion (M = 3.18). Correlational analyses reflect that self-compassion and compassion for others are positively correlated (r = .41, p <.01).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation of variables

Variables	F	%	Mean	SD	SC	CFO
Sex						
Male	83	22.6	-	-	-	-
Female	284	77.4	-	-	-	-
Year Level						
1st	211	57.5	-	-	-	-
2nd	66	18.0	-	-	-	-
3rd	64	17.4	-	-	-	-
4th	16	4.4	-	-	-	-
5th	1	.3	-	-	-	-
Irregular/International	9	2.5	-	-	-	-
Self-compassion – SC			3.18	.45	-	.41*
Compassion for others – CFO			3.97	.50	-	-
Collectivism			4.09	.64	-	-

Notes

* p is significant at less than .01

Summarized in table 1 are the demographic and psychological variables of the participants. The sample consists of 367 students, mostly female (77.4%) and first-year students (57.5%). The mean scores for self-compassion, compassion for others, and collectivism are 3.18, 3.97, and 4.09, respectively. A significant positive correlation (r = .41, p < .05) is observed between self-compassion and compassion for others.

3.2) Moderating analysis

Table 2 presents the results of the moderation analysis, using JAMOVI [44]. Hierarchical regression was conducted to assess the direct and interaction effect of the predictor and the moderator on the outcome variable. The predictor and moderator were centered to improve the interpretability of the continuous variables [45].

Table 2. Direct and moderating effects results

Constructs	R	ΔR^2	B	SE	T	Sig	95% BC	
							LLCI	ULCI
Outcome: Compassion for others – CFO	.31	.31						
Self-compassion - SC			.36	.05*	7.34	<.001	.26	.46
Collectivism			.30	.03*	8.78	<.001	.24	.26
Interaction effects			.07	.08	.913	.362	-.08	.22
Outcome: Compassion for others – CFO	.34	.33						
Self-compassion - SC			.33	.05*	6.56	<.001	.24	.43
Horizontal collectivism			.32	.03*	9.94	<.001	.26	.46
Interaction effects			.16	.08*	2.10	<.001	.01	.31
Outcome: Compassion for others – CFO	.25	.24						
Self-compassion - SC			.41	.05*	7.70	<.001	.31	.51
Vertical collectivism			.19	.03*	6.28	<.001	.14	.39
Interaction effects			.01	.07	-.14	.893	-.12	.14

Note.

* p < .001.

Summarized in table 2 are the regression results predicting compassion for others using self-compassion, collectivism, and their interaction effects. Both self-compassion and collectivism significantly predict compassion for others (p < .001). Horizontal collectivism moderates the self-compassion and compassion for others relationship (B = .16, p < .001), while general and vertical collectivism do not show significant interaction effects.

The findings, as shown in Table 2, reveal that collectivism (B = 0.07, SE = 0.08, p = 0.362) and vertical collectivism (B = 0.01, SE = 0.07, p = 0.893) did not moderate the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others. However, it was revealed that horizontal collectivism moderates the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others (B = 0.16, SE = 0.08, p < .05). The model explained 33.8% of the variance in compassion for others, R2 = .34, Adj. R2 = .33, F (3, 363) = 61.9, p <.001.

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Furthermore, as separate predictors, self-compassion (B = 0.36, SE = 0.05, p < .001), collectivism (B = 0.30, SE = 0.03, p < .001), vertical collectivism (B = 0.19, SE = 0.03, p < .001), and horizontal collectivism (B = 0.32, SE = 0.03, p < .001) were found to be significant predictors of compassion for others.

For better understanding of this moderation, a simple slopes analysis was conducted. The analysis was done on three levels and results are significant when horizontal collectivism is one standard deviation below its mean (B = .225, 95% CI [.082, .368], p = .002), when it is as its mean (B = .334, 95% CI [.239, .430], p <.001), and when it is one standard deviation above its mean (B = .444, 95% CI [.307, .581], p <.001). Figure 2 illustrates the interaction of the variables at differing levels of collectivism.
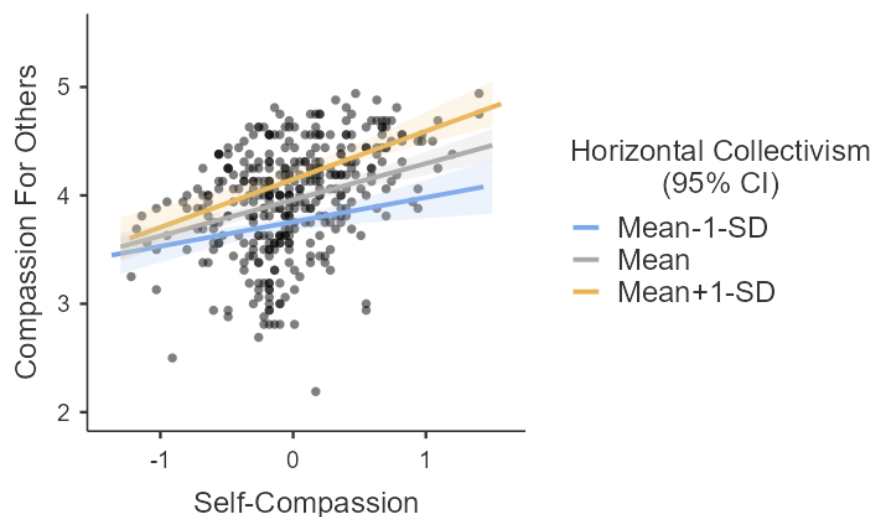

Fig. 2. Simple Slopes Analysis

DISCUSSION

The study explored the interconnectedness of self-compassion, compassion for others, and collectivism among Filipino college students, revealing how cultural values influence compassionate behavior. By examining self-compassion, the study found that students generally exhibited moderate levels, indicating that while they may experience self-criticism, it is balanced by a mindful, kind approach to themselves [46]. This nuanced self-reflection allows students to mitigate negative effects, fostering a compassionate inner dialogue that tempers harsh self-judgment. Such findings align with Bedoria and Marañon's [47] "yin-yang" conceptualization, where the positive elements of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) counterbalance negative aspects (self-judgment, isolation, over-identification), offering a robust framework for self-care.

When it came to compassion for others, the respondents displayed high levels, suggesting that acts of empathy and care are deeply rooted in their social behavior. This aligns with Filipino cultural values, particularly *pakikiramdam*—the practice of deep empathy and the avoidance of actions that could harm others [48]. The respondents' ability to connect with and ease others' suffering promotes a sense of social responsibility and reinforces interpersonal harmony. The findings echoed the observations of Pommier et al. [42], who noted that high levels of compassion are linked to enhanced kindness and mindfulness, diminishing emotional detachment and fostering deeper connections.

Filipino students also reported high levels of collectivism, reflecting their strong inclination toward interdependence and prioritization of group harmony over personal goals. This cultural orientation supports behaviors that protect the interests of others, even at the individual's expense [49]. Values like *hiya*, or a sense of propriety that involves self-restraint to maintain social approval [50], underscore this self-sacrificing behavior. Such cultural norms contribute to a collective sense of duty, encouraging individuals to fulfill obligations and assist others, even if it means personal hardship [51]. These values translate into everyday practices, such as the customary financial support Filipino students extend to their families [52].

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The study found a moderate positive correlation between self-compassion and compassion for others, suggesting that students' ability to care for themselves extends outward, nurturing empathy for those around them [16]. This correlation reinforces Yip et al.'s [53] findings that the positive dimensions of self-compassion bolster one's capacity for compassion toward others. Gilbert's [21] social mentality theory supports this by proposing that caregiving involves a balanced approach to responding to both personal and others' needs. In this context, acts of compassion not only enhance well-being but also strengthen social bonds, validating the reciprocal nature of care [54-55].

The moderation analysis provided more nuanced insights: while self-compassion and overall collectivism significantly predicted compassion for others, only horizontal collectivism served as a moderating factor, amplifying the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others as it increased. This form of collectivism, which values equality and shared responsibility [37], promotes deeper connections and reciprocal care, distinguishing it from vertical collectivism, which is driven more by adherence to authority and group conformity [56]. The findings align with Steindl et al.'s [33] view that the practice of self-compassion is more impactful in cultures where shared experiences and mutual support are emphasized. Horizontal collectivism, with its emphasis on interpersonal equality, creates an environment where compassionate practices flourish more naturally, fostering both individual and collective well-being [57].

In summary, the study illuminated how Filipino students' cultural orientation shapes their self-compassion and compassion for others, with horizontal collectivism playing a pivotal role in strengthening this relationship. These insights contribute to understanding the nuanced ways that collectivistic values foster compassion, not just as a cultural norm but as a pathway to reinforcing social bonds and nurturing a balanced, caring self.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for higher education institutions aiming to foster positive and supportive learning environments. By highlighting the importance of compassion, the study underscores how integrating compassionate practices can contribute to student well-being and academic success. Including compassion fosters a healthier response to adversity, allowing individuals to treat their difficulties with warmth and care, which in turn strengthens their resilience. Resilience, as they describe, enables individuals to endure and recover from hardships with authenticity and nurturing concern [58].

First, incorporating compassion-focused content into university curricula is essential. Despite its benefits, such integration remains limited [59]. One actionable strategy is embedding compassion education within mandatory general education courses outlined by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). For example, CHED's memorandum order no. 20, series of 2013, mandates all students to take *Understanding the Self*, a course that explores identity formation and personal development. This course provides an ideal platform for cultivating self-compassion, as it aligns with the themes of self-care and personal growth.

Second, higher education institutions should aim to create an environment where equality and inclusivity are prioritized, as these conditions amplify compassionate behaviors. Reducing rigid hierarchies and fostering policies that promote equal opportunities, accessibility, and recognition—particularly for marginalized groups—can nurture a culture of empathy and cooperation. Such measures support the concept of shared humanity, strengthening interpersonal bonds and maintaining a sense of connectedness among students, thereby cultivating a compassionate academic community.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed at filling in the gap in the literature on the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others and the moderating role of the collectivism of Filipino college students. By nature, the findings describe the respondents as having both self-compassionate and self-critical tendencies. Furthermore, they exhibit high regard for others, consistently prioritizing their needs, which is reflected in their profound care and concern for those around them. This tendency to place others' needs before their own may, in part, explains why they sometimes neglect their personal requirements. However, the relationship of self-compassion and compassion for others was founded, as guided by the Social Mentality Theory. Any care for the self extends to others such that individuals learn to nurture and care for themselves, this capacity naturally extends to others.

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In identifying the role of culture in compassion, results indicate that for collectivistic individuals, the perception of equality among peers enhances the transfer of self-compassion to compassion for others. A shared sense of equality fosters mindfulness, kindness, and connection, making it easier for individuals to express compassion toward others. In contrast, the hierarchical structure inherent in vertical collectivism, which emphasizes inequality and authority, does not facilitate the same amplification of compassion. Conversely, the self-construal theory explains that the interpersonal self of collectivistic individuals spreads any compassion for the self to others. However, implications in the theory may be considered as the presence of vertical collectivism within the broader construct of collectivism may have also influenced the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others, attenuating the effect observed in cultures characterized by more horizontal collectivism.

Data Availability:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author.

Conflict of Interest:

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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