

The Role of Personal Growth Initiative in the Relationship between Self-Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Self Compassion can be regarded as looking with kindness and being mindful of one's aspects. Self Esteem is the personal value attributed to self. Personal Growth Initiative is defined as one's active and intentional involvement in changing as a person and is a meta-cognitive construct that describes an orientation towards engaging in the growth seeking process. Literature reviewed show that Personal Growth Initiative, Self Compassion and Self Esteem are interconnected. As there were no studies which revealed about how these variables influence each other, this study aims to explore the role of Personal Growth Initiative in the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students. The study was conducted on 120 Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in Mangalore city using convenient sampling method. The tools used for data collection were Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, Neff's Self Compassion Scale (short form) and Personal Growth Initiative Scale. Mediation analysis was used for statistical analysis. Results show that Personal Growth Initiative partially mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem.

Keywords: *Personal Growth Initiative, Self-Compassion, Self Esteem, College Students*

Individuals who are enrolled in any college or university are called College Students. As evident in the current world, it is at this vulnerable age that they are challenged by a number of factors such as social comparison, reflected appraisal, and identification which affects Self-Esteem (Goethals, 1999). A low level of Self Esteem is associated with poor mental wellbeing (Ditto, & Griffin, 1993; Malle & Horowitz, 1995; Furegato et al, 2006; Saleh, 2013). Most researchers have recognized the important role played by high levels of Self-Esteem in one's performance and perceptions about academic achievement, as well as

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Received: January 25, 2019; Revision Received: February 5, 2019; Accepted: February 10, 2019

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personal and social responsibilities (Spinath, Spinath, Harlaar, & Plomin, 2006). In the present study, one of our focus is on the aspect of Self Esteem as having a strong influence on interpersonal relationships, behavior, and learning.

Rosenberg in 1965, has defined Self Esteem as “an individual’s overall positive evaluation of the self.” He further said that high Self Esteem results in respect for the self. Self-Esteem is used to refer to the value of the overall self or to specific aspects of the self. This may be how one feels regarding various aspects of life such as his social class, racial or ethnic group, features, skills, and attributes. According to the information collected by the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Latent growth curve analyses proved that Self-Esteem increases at the time of adolescence and then continues to slowly increase in young adulthood (Erol & Orth, 2011).

Among the many variables which have an impact on the development of Self Esteem, Self Compassion is found to be one among them. Quoting the words of Carl Rogers, “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change” (1961). Being compassionate to oneself can initiate a sense of growth which is both productive and fulfilling. Self Compassion can best be explained as directing the compassion inwards and relating to ourselves as the object of care and concern when faced with the experience of suffering (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion consists of three key components (Neff, 2003a, 2003b, 2009). These components combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind: (1) self-kindness (this includes offering oneself warmth and a nonjudgmental understanding), (2) common humanity (which involves recognizing that being imperfect and encountering life’s difficulties are part of the shared human experience), and (3) mindfulness (This includes taking a balanced approach so that painful feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated).

Self Compassion has inherent motivating forces (Breines & Chen, 2012; Magnus, Kowalaki & McHugh, 2010; Neff 2003a; Neff, Hseih, & Dejithirat, 2005). Acting compassionately towards self include acknowledging areas of weakness that need changing and taking responsibility to be actively involved and pursuing a productive and fulfilling life. Neff, Rude, and Kirkpatrick (2007) in their study, proved that Self-Compassion was linked to increased levels of reflective wisdom and affective wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, optimism, happiness, and positive affect. Self-Compassion is associated with psychological health. Higher levels of Self-Compassion have clearly been associated with greater levels of life satisfaction, emotional intelligence, social connectedness, and mastery of goals, as well as less self-criticism, anxiety, depression, thought suppression, rumination, perfectionism, performance goals, and disordered eating behaviors (Adams & Leary, 2007; Neff, 2003a; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007).

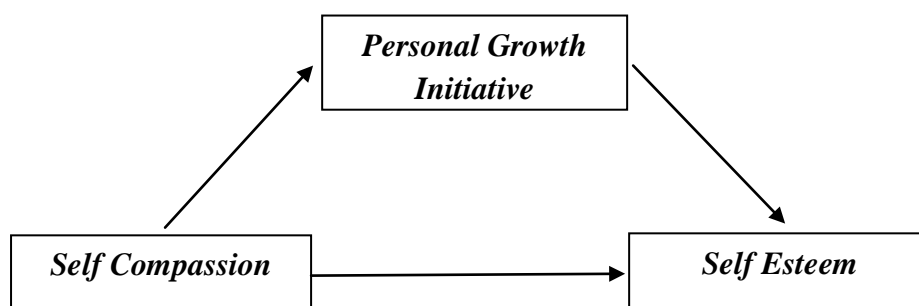
Self Compassion is positively correlated with Personal Growth Initiative (Sharma, & Davidson, 2015). This supports the view that being compassionate towards oneself induces a growth process. Personal Growth Initiative is one’s involvement in the process of changing himself or herself. It involves both cognitive as well as behavioral elements. The cognitive aspect includes believing that change is possible, valuing change, and knowing how we can change the self-function as precursors for the behavioral elements. Behavioral elements, on the other hand, include engaging in the behaviors that cause a change in the self. Research has suggested that Personal Growth Initiative is a predictor of optimal well-being. This is associated with lower levels of psychological distress, and has proposed that it captures the

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core tenets of human agency – those beliefs and abilities that relate to an individual’s sense of control over their life (Weigold, Porfeli, & Weigold, 2013). Personal Growth Initiative is seen on a continuum from high to low and it is positively related to subjective happiness and life satisfaction among adolescent students (Sood & Gupta, 2014). Personal Growth Initiatives have been defined with conscious improvement and development of talent and abilities in the long run (Robitschek, 1998).

It is recognized by research that individuals with higher levels of well-being (social, emotional and psychological) possesses higher levels of Personal Growth Initiative and negligible level of distress (psychological and emotional) (Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999; Robitschek & Keyes, 2009). Recent research conducted in adolescents of Belgium, suggests that Personal Growth Initiative has a positive relationship with self-esteem (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014). Additionally, college students with higher levels of Personal Growth Initiative have stronger vocational identities, are more hopeful, and feel that they have a clearer purpose in life (Robitschek & Cook, 1999; Robitschek & Keyes, 2009). Development of Personal Growth Initiative and receiving of recognition is being mediated by life satisfaction (Stevic & Ward, 2008).

The current study presents a model (fig-1) which shows that Personal Growth Initiative plays a mediating role in the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem which thus indicates the role of Personal Growth Initiative as being inevitable.



Need for the study

As there is a knowledge gap with regard to the role of Personal Growth Initiative in the relationship between these variables, this study aims to explore the role of Personal Growth Initiative in the relationship between Self-Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students i.e. Through Personal Growth Initiative, Self Compassion Influences Self Esteem as a result of which one flourishes.

Research Problem

The study will examine the role of Personal Growth Initiative in the relationship between Self-Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students.

Research Question

What is the role of Personal Growth Initiative in the relationship between Self-Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students?

Objectives

1. To assess the Personal Growth Initiative, Self Compassion and Self Esteem of College Students.

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2. To find out whether Personal Growth Initiative mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students.

Hypothesis

H1: Personal Growth Initiative mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students.

METHODOLOGY

Correlational research design was opted for the present study. The sample was selected using Convenient Sampling method. The participants of the study included 120 College Students (54 males and 66 females) who are enrolled for the title of Undergraduate and Postgraduate (Bachelors and Masters Degree) in any recognized universities or colleges in Mangaluru city, Karnataka. The data was collected by sending a secure link to an online web based survey that contained the questionnaire package, including informed consent of the participants. The participants were reached both by word of mouth and electronic media. Once the desired number of responses were obtained, further analysis of the data was carried out.

Instruments

For the purpose of collecting relevant information for the study, the following scales have been used:

1. **Personal Growth Initiative** Participants were given the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS) developed by Robitschek in 1998. The current scale consists of nine-items with a 6-point scale having the following options 1 (*definitely disagree*), 2 (*mostly disagree*), 3 (*somewhat disagree*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*mostly agree*), and 6 (*definitely agree*), that measures intentional involvement in changing and developing as a person. Responses to the items of the scale are summed up, with higher scores being indicative of higher levels of initiative. Lower scores mean lesser initiative by the subject. The internal consistency of this scale estimates to a range from .78 to .90 (Robitschek, 1998, 1999; Robitschek & Keyes, 2009). There is evidence that Personal Growth Initiative Scale is strongly and positively related to Psychological wellbeing and negatively related to Psychological distress.
2. **Self-Compassion** Participants were given the Self-Compassion Scale- Short Form developed by Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht in 2011. The scale consists of 12 (short version of 26 items scale) items both positive and negative items with a rating scale from 1 – 5; almost never to almost always. The scale has six dimensions: Self-Kindness Items (2 and 6), Self-Judgment Items (11 and 12), Common Humanity Items (5 and 10), Isolation Items (4 and 8), Mindfulness Items (3 and 7), Over-identified Items (1 and 9). Subscale scores are computed by calculating the mean of the subscale item responses. The Self Compassion Scale - Short Form, demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha 0.86) and a near-perfect correlation with the long form Self Compassion Scale ($r \geq 0.97$). Confirmatory factor analysis on the Self Compassion Scale – Short Form, supported the same six-factor structure as found in the long form, and also as a single higher-order factor of Self-Compassion.
3. **Self Esteem** Rosenberg Self Esteem scale has been used to assess Self Esteem. Participants were asked to fill in the scale consisting of 10-items that measure global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni- dimensional. Items are to be answered using a 4-point Likert scale format with the options being strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly

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disagree. The alpha reliability of the Rosenberg Self Esteem scale ranges from 0.85 to 0.88 across assessments.

As the psychometric properties of the above mentioned scales are satisfactory, the investigators have successfully adopted the same for the current study.

Data Analysis

Before beginning with the analyses of the obtained data, the data has been groomed and the statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all analyses. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to study the data and examine the relationship between the variables Personal Growth Initiative, Self Compassion and Self Esteem. All three variables were found to be related. Mediation analysis was used to test the hypothesized mechanism between Self Esteem, Self Compassion and Personal Growth Initiative.

RESULTS

Pearson Product Moment correlation obtained between Self Esteem, Self Compassion and Personal Growth Initiative is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between Self Esteem, Self Compassion and Personal Growth Initiative.

| | | Self Esteem | Self Compassion |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Self Compassion | Pearson Correlation | .332 ^{**} | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 120 | |
| Personal Growth Initiative | Pearson Correlation | .288 ^{**} | .379 ^{**} |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | .000 |
| | N | 120 | 120 |

** . Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that the obtained r value .332 relating the variables Self Compassion and Self Esteem is significant at 5 % level. The obtained r value .288 relating the variables Personal Growth Initiative and Self Esteem is significant at 5 % level. The obtained r value .379 relating the variables Personal Growth Initiative and Self Compassion is significant at 5 % level.

The obtained correlation values promise to relate the variable as expected. Figure 1 shows the results obtained from the mediation analysis.

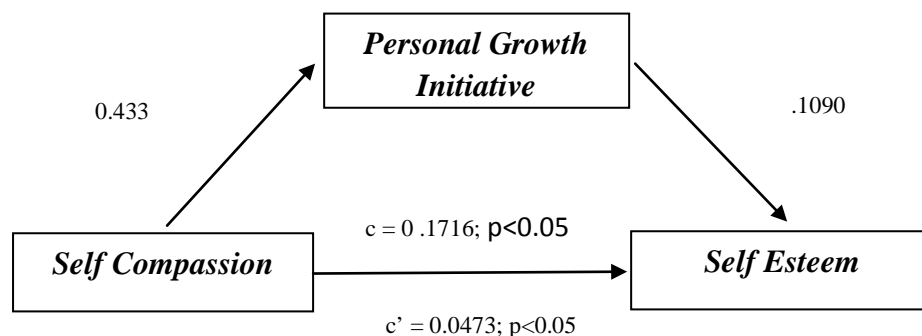


Figure 1: shows the Standardized regression coefficients of the relationship between Self Esteem and Self Compassion as mediated by Personal Growth Initiative

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The obtained regression coefficient of 0.1716 shows the direct effect of Self Compassion on Self Esteem is significant at 5% level. The obtained indirect effect of 0.0473 of Self Compassion on Self Esteem via Personal Growth Initiative is also significant at 5 % level. Hence the hypothesis H1 (Personal Growth Initiative mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students.) is rejected. Based on Baron & Kenny's Approach (1986) as the regression coefficient showing the effect of Self Compassion on Self Esteem has been reduced from 0.1716 to 0.0473 in the indirect effect, it can be concluded that Personal Initiative Growth is partially mediating the relationship between Self Compassion with Self Esteem.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to find out the role of Personal Growth Initiative in the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students. After the analysis was done, it was found that Personal Growth Initiative partially mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem which means Self Compassion influences Self Esteem through Personal Growth Initiative. This can be explained by the fact that apart from being aware and acknowledging oneself, being acceptant and compassionate towards one's shortcomings and abilities will trigger the initiation for self improvement strategies to grow and develop as a person, per se. This in turn causes a rise in the way one values himself or herself or in other words it leads to an increase in one's Self Esteem. The more aware we are of ourselves, our flaws and imperfections, the more we consciously select areas of our lives that are in need of upliftment and working on the same will lead to a sense of worth and increased value for self. This theory finds usage in Counseling and Psychotherapy practice which helps in facilitating a healthy adjustment to the fast transforming world of today and counterattacking the vulnerability of the current population to fall a prey to vices. Instead, a focus on being compassionate to oneself will trigger and create momentum to better the self and ultimately value the self.

Self Esteem has a strong influence on other functionalities; hence, it can be strengthened through the introduction of beneficial programs such as assertiveness training, social skills training, and self worth assessment. Self-Compassion may be an effective intervention target for teens suffering from negative self-views (Neff, K., & McGehee, P. 2009). Conflict resolutions, time management, negotiation techniques, are some programs that can be implemented for self improvement.

Limitations

1. The study being conducted through an online survey has hindered personal contact with participants.
2. Honesty of responses could not be cross checked.
3. Identity of participants in terms of relevance to target population could not be controlled.

Suggestions

Since Personal Growth Initiative partially mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem, it calls for further studies which focus on other mediating factors.

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CONCLUSIONS

Findings of the study show that Personal Growth Initiative mediates the relationship between Self Compassion and Self Esteem. i.e. Self-Compassion Influences Self Esteem via Personal Growth Initiative.

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Acknowledgements

The authors profoundly appreciate all the people who have successfully contributed in ensuring this paper is in place. Their contributions are acknowledged however their names cannot be able to be mentioned.

Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

How to cite this article: Athena Maria Aranha, Leeba Raj. E.B, V. Premanand (2019). The Role of Personal Growth Initiative in the Relationship between Self-Compassion and Self Esteem among College Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(1), 196-203
DIP:18.01.021/20190701, DOI:10.25215/0701.021