

Impact of Relationship Status on Self-Compassion and Meaning in Life among Females

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed at discerning the impact of relationship status on self-compassion and meaning in life. For the purpose, a sample of 70 females belonging to the age group of 18-25 years was taken. The participants were divided into two groups: (single or in a relationship) on the basis of their relationship status. Each group was assessed for their self-compassion and meaning in life, quantitatively with the help of self-compassion scale by Neff (2003) and meaning in life questionnaire by Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler (2006). The results of the study indicated that there was a significant difference in the levels of self-compassion and meaning in life, among single females and females in a relationship. And it was observed that, females in a relationship elicited higher levels of self-compassion and meaning in life with a mean of 3.53 and 4.44, as compared to single females with a mean of 2.96 and 3.90.

Keywords: *Relationship status, Females, Self-compassion, and Meaning in Life.*

It has been believed since ages that a positive attitude and our meaning in life mustn't change with anybody's existence or absence; however, females generally tend to base their value judgment about themselves on the basis of relationship that they share with their significant others.

It has been found out that one of the fundamental human motivations is the desire for enduring intimate relationships (Spielman et al., 2013) which finds its basis in the need for relatedness present in all humans (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1991). A special meaning is ascribed to a close, intimate bond with a romantic partner/spouse, especially in young adulthood (Erikson, 1980; Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, & Dodge, 2013). Hence, during this period in life individuals typically form enduring romantic relationships (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005). Achieving successfully the developmental tasks specific to young adulthood, such as establishment of marriage or other long term intimate relationships is, in turn, recognized to be a crucial determinant of self compassion and meaning in life (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Neff & Beretvas, 2012).

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Self-compassion

According to Germer (2009) “compassion originated from the Latin roots *com* (with) and *pati* (suffer)”. Neff (2003a, b) stated that self-compassion comprises being kind, warm and understanding yourself when you suffer, fail or feel inadequate, rather than criticizing and blaming yourself or suppressing or denying the pain and negative feelings. Thus, compassion, whether addressed to others or to the self, includes three elements: link with pain, awareness of the pain, and intense desire for reduction or elimination of discomfort instead of a desire for avoidance. According to Neff (2003a, 2003b) self-compassion is a construct comprising three inter-related dimensions: self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over identification. Self-kindness refers to a tendency to respond to perceived personal inadequacy or difficult situations by giving oneself, understanding and comfort, whereas self-judgment involves responding with harsh self-criticism. Common humanity entails viewing discomfort or failure as part of the shared human condition, so that one feels connected to others during painful life experiences, whereas isolation occurs when a person believes their failings or struggles represent human aberrations. Finally, mindfulness involves viewing responses to difficult experiences from an open and accepting perspective, which allows a clear and balanced recognition of one’s distress, whereas over identification involves fixating on one’s suffering and negative self-related cognitions (Neff, 2003b).

Correlates of self-compassion

People with higher levels of self-compassion report lower levels of depression, anxiety, neurotic perfectionism, rumination, and thought suppression than those lacking the trait (Neff, 2003a; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007; Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008; Van Dam, Sheppard, Forsyth, & Earleywine, 2011). Self-compassionate people also report more happiness, optimism, life satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation, as well as greater levels of emotional intelligence, coping skills, wisdom, and resilience than those who have lower levels of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejithirath, 2005; Neff et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2007). Self-compassion is associated with less anxiety and self-consciousness when considering personal weaknesses (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007; Neff et al., 2007), and is linked with more stable and less dynamic feelings of self-worth (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion is associated with less social comparison, public self-consciousness, anger, self-righteousness, and ego-defensiveness when receiving unflattering personal feedback, as well as taking more personal responsibility for past misdeeds (Leary et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009).

Meaning in life

As a psychological construct, the initial theory and dissemination about the meaning in life came from Logo therapy (Frankl, 2004). Frankl, throughout his work (1978, 2003, 2004) has stated that human beings' main motivation is the search for meaning.

Meaning in life can be defined as the perception of order and coherence in one's own existence, along with the pursuit and achievement of goals, resulting in a feeling of existential accomplishment (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000; Steger, Snyder & Lopez, 2009). Frankl (1978) argued that a firm sense of meaning is essential for optimal human growth. Bruner (1990) put it more bluntly, stating that in the absence of meaning systems “we would be lost in murk of chaotic experience and probably would not have survived as a species in any case”.

Meaning in life has been identified as a potential mediator of the link between religiousness and psychological health (Steger & Frazier, 2005). Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006)

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describes the concept of meaning in life as encompassing of two components: Presence and Search. The presence component tells us how full respondents feel their lives are of meaning. The search component tells us how engaged and motivated respondents are in efforts to find meaning or deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives.

Correlates of meaning in life

Both search and presence implies ways in which meaning in life could help people foster well-being, resolve and formulate future resilience to psychological distress, and build a sense of spiritual connection with something beyond their momentary experiences. Heightened indecisiveness and a lack of interest is similarly a part of the symptom profile of some psychopathological disorders, such as depression. Such factors may decrease people's abilities to form and pursue goals (Steger, 2012).

A number of studies have tried to investigate the impact of relationship status on self-compassion and meaning in life

Crocker and Canevello (2008), in a study, found that self-compassionate individuals are more likely to have more compassionate goals in their friendships, and they tend to attach more meaning in providing social support and in ensuring interpersonal trust among friends.

Similarly, a study by Yarnell and Neff (1993) found that highly self-compassionate people were more likely to resolve relationship conflicts with their romantic partners compromising and balancing the needs of self and other. People high on self-compassion are also less likely to experience turmoil and are more likely to be authentic when resolving conflicts, suggesting that the self-compassionate people are more likely to yield personal as well as interpersonal benefits.

Research has demonstrated that self-compassionate individuals tend to have trusting and supportive relationships with others, whether in friendships or romantic relationships (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Neff & Beretvas, 2012). Neff and Beretvas (2012) found that individuals who scored high on self-compassion scales were more likely than those who scored lower to report healthy behavior in their romantic relationships, such as acting supportively, and were less likely to be controlling or aggressive towards their partners.

There are several reasons why individuals with high levels of self-compassion might have healthier romantic relationships than those with lower levels of self-compassion. Individuals with high levels of self-compassion tend to be able to meet their own needs in terms of kindness and self-comfort (Neff & Beretvas, 2012). Because of this, these individuals are likely to be able to balance independence with connectedness, which has been shown to be important for healthy relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, in difficult times, self-compassion promotes feelings of connectedness with other individuals (Neff et al., 2007). Similarly, individuals with high levels of self-compassion are more likely to have good conflict resolution skills, probably because they are able to see their partners' outlook during disagreements and to see their own current difficulties, and not considering those as personal hardships, but instead as part of the human condition (i.e., common humanity). Tirsch (2010) asserts that self-compassionate individuals have a mindful, balanced response to suffering, without ruminating on difficult emotions or suppressing them. Because of their nonjudgmental awareness of negative thoughts and emotions, individuals with high levels of self-compassion may be more likely to bring that same sense of mindfulness to resolving disagreements within their relationships.

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Baumeister and Leary (2013), stated that feeling more connected to others improved both happiness and meaning in life.

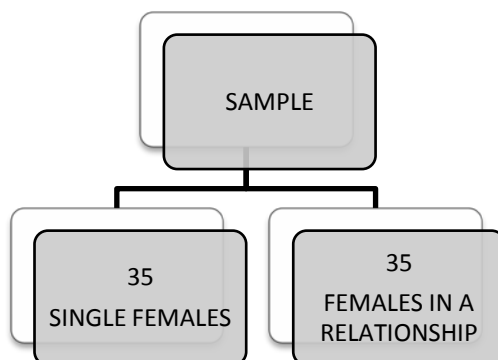
Since, a number of research studies have focused on the effect that self compassion entails on one's relationship and there have been few researches conducted to find out the relationship between meaning in life and relationship status. The present study focuses to encompass the impact of relationship status on self-compassion and meaning in life. For the purpose, data are collected from females belonging to the age group of 18-25, in order to understand whether or not their relationship status have an impact on their levels of self-compassion and meaning in life. The identified relationship could further be studied in order to know whether a strong relationship exists between one's relationship status and self-compassion and meaning in life. Also, based on the thrusts of the present study, certain intervention programs can also be formulated in order to enhance the happiness and well-being of people.

METHOD

The present study was aimed at discerning the impact of relationship status on self-compassion and meaning in life among females.

Participants

A sample of 70 females belonging to the age group of 18-25 years was taken. The sample was further divided into two groups having 35 participants each on the basis of their relationship status respectively.



Instruments

The following two quantitative tools were used:

1. **Self-compassion scale.** The 26-item self-compassion scale (Neff, 2003a) assessed Total Self-Compassion on the basis of six factors analytically derived facets of self-compassion: Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over identification. Participants indicated agreement with statements describing responses to difficult experiences (e.g., “When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself”) on a scale from (1) Almost never to (5) Almost always. A total self-compassion score was calculated by averaging all items after reverse-scoring Self-judgment, Isolation, and Overidentified items. Research (Neff, 2003a) indicates the self-compassion scale has an appropriate factor structure, and that a single factor of “self-compassion” can explain the inter-correlations among the six facets. The self-compassion scale has previously demonstrated construct validity and test-retest reliability (Neff, 2003a; Neff et al., 2007). The scale also demonstrates concurrent validity, convergent validity, discriminate validity, and test-retest reliability ($\alpha=.93$; Neff, 2003a; Neff et al., 2007).

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2. *Meaning in life questionnaire.* The Meaning in life questionnaire comprises two subscales that was developed to be relatively independent: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning (Steger et al., 2006). Responses to 10 statements are provided on a 7-point likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = *Absolutely Untrue*, 2 = *Mostly Untrue*, 3 = *Somewhat Untrue*, 4 = *Can't Say True or False*, 5 = *Somewhat True*, 6 = *Mostly True*, to 7 = *Absolutely True*. The scale exhibited structural, convergent, and discriminant validity, with the Cronbach's alpha values of the Presence subscale varying between 0.82 and 0.86 and for the Search subscale between 0.86 and 0.87, as well as good internal consistency and test-retest reliability, in the original validation study among American students (Steger et al., 2006). Good internal consistency reliability was found in South African student (Temane, Itumeleng, & Wissing, 2014), New Zealand adult (Grouden & Jose, 2014), and web-based Australian samples (Cohen & Cairns, 2012) with alpha-values of .85, .90, and .88, respectively, for the Presence of meaning scale, and .94, .91, and .92, respectively, for the Search for meaning in life.

Analysis

Data collected was scored and descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores and standard deviation scores, along with t-test on the basis of relationship status of females on the Self-compassion scale and the Meaning in life questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing mean and standard deviation scores, along with t-test for both the groups with respect to relationship status on Self-compassion scale and Meaning in life questionnaire:

| | Relationship status | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | Significance | Results |
|-----------------|---------------------|----|--------|----------------|-------|--------------|---------------|
| Self-compassion | single | 35 | 2.9649 | .51271 | 4.917 | .000 | Significant** |
| | in a relationship | 35 | 3.5314 | .44933 | | | |
| Meaning in life | single | 35 | 3.9000 | .57394 | 4.068 | .000 | Significant** |
| | in a relationship | 35 | 4.4400 | .53589 | | | |

Note. ** $p < .01$

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The present study was aimed at discerning the impact of relationship status on self-compassion and meaning in life.

The sample consists of 70 females belonging to the age group of 18-25 years. The participants are divided into two groups on the basis of their relationship status (single or in a relationship). The study evaluated the participants on self-compassion and meaning in life with the help of self-compassion scale by Neff (2003a) and meaning in life questionnaire by Steger et al. (2006).

According to Neff (2003a) self-compassion entails three basic interacting components: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation and mindfulness versus over-identification. A higher score on the self-compassion scale reflects a higher level of self-kindness (a tendency to respond to perceived personal inadequacy or difficult situations by giving oneself, understanding and comfort), common humanity (entails viewing discomfort or failure as part of the shared human condition, so that one feels connected to others during

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painful life experiences), and mindfulness (involves viewing responses to difficult experiences from an open and accepting perspective, which allows a clear and balanced recognition of one's distress). A lower score on the self-compassion scale reflects a higher level of self-judgement (involves responding with harsh self-criticism), isolation (occurs when a person believes their failings or struggles represent human aberrations) and over-identification (involves fixating on one's suffering and negative self-related cognitions).

Looking at Table 1, it is indicated that there is a significant difference in the levels of self-compassion of single females and females in a relationship. ($t_{(68,1)} = 4.917, p < .01$) and it is also observed that, females in a relationship elicit higher levels of self-compassion with the mean of 3.53 as compared to single females with the mean of 2.96. The effect size is calculated with the help of Cohen's *d* formula and it came out to be $d = 1.18$, since the value of the effect size of Cohen's *d* is higher than 0.7, this is indicative of a high effect size, which in turn indicates that there is high practicality value of the given data.

As Neff and Beretvas (2012) reported that individuals who scored high on self-compassion scales were more likely than those who scored lower to report healthy behavior in their romantic relationships, such as acting supportively, and were less likely to be controlling or aggressive towards their partners. Thus, the present study is parallel to the findings of Neff and Beretvas (2012)'s study, and it indicates that there is a high impact of relationship status on the levels of self-compassion, or vice-a-versa.

According to Steger (2006) the concept of Meaning in life comprises of two components: Presence and Search. The Presence component tells us how full respondents feel their lives are of meaning. The search component tells us how engaged and motivated respondents are in efforts to find meaning or deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives. A higher score on meaning in life questionnaire indicates that one feel his/her life has a valued meaning and purpose, and are not actively exploring that meaning or seeking meaning in their life. One might say that they are satisfied that they've grasped what makes their life meaningful, why they're here, and what they want to do with their life. A lower score on meaning in life indicates that they probably do not feel their life has a valued meaning and purpose, and they are actively searching for something or someone that will give their life meaning or purpose. They may feel lost in life, and this idea may cause them distress.

Looking at Table 1, the scores of meaning in life, it is indicated that there is a significant difference in the levels of meaning in life of single females and females in a relationship. ($t_{(68,1)} = 4.068, p < .01$) and it is observed that, females in a relationship elicit higher levels of meaning in life with the mean of 4.44 as compared to single females with the mean of 3.90. The effect size is calculated with the help of Cohen's *d* formula and it came out to be $d = 0.97$, since the value of the effect size of Cohen's *d* is higher than 0.7, this is indicative of a high effect size, which in turn indicates that there is high practicality value of the given data.

As Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, and Garbinsky (2013), stated that feeling more connected to others improved both happiness and meaning in life, thus, the present study is parallel to the findings of Baumeister et al. (2013) study, and it indicates that there is a high impact of relationship status on the levels of meaning in life.

CONCLUSION

Thus, from the present study it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the levels of self-compassion and meaning in life on the basis of relationship status (that is

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among single females and females in a relationship). The study also showed that females in a relationship elicited higher levels of self-compassion and meaning in life with the mean of 3.53 and 4.40, as compared to single females who elicited lower levels of self-compassion and meaning in life with the mean of 2.96 and 3.90 respectively.

But, in order for the results to be generalized to the larger population we need to take into consideration a larger sample size. Also, on the basis of the present study, certain interventions could be formulated in order to increase the levels of self-compassion and meaning on life among young females.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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