

The Mutual Influence of Self-Esteem and Self-Compassion and the Advantages of Self-Compassion

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Abstract. With mental issues becoming increasingly common and drawing widespread public attention, for example, some typical mental issues like depression with some common symptoms like constantly feeling down, losing interests, and having difficulty in concentrating; anxiety disorder and its symptoms are characterized by prolonged tension, worry, and fear; and other issues like PTSD, bipolar disorder. These situations have attracted the attention of some researchers. They have done a lot of studies to find ways to promote mental health. Nowadays, self-compassion and self-esteem have become two popular concepts, which many people have done a lot of research into. In this study, it concludes the prior studies and focuses on the relationship between self-esteem and self-compassion. Using both correlation and experimental research, and some scales related to this topic, such as The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). As for the results, it found that self-esteem can enhance self-compassion, self-compassion can also promote self-esteem and avoid the drawbacks of self-esteem. As for the significance of this study, it can be of some help to psychological intervention and education, decrease individuals' level of depression and improve resilience.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Self-compassion, Mental health

1. Introduction

Nowadays, so many individuals are suffering from mental illnesses, and the situation has drawn the attention of some academics and researchers. As a significant part of human theory, self-esteem and self-compassion have always been the most popular concepts among other theories. There are a large number of studies and researches focusing on how to distinguish the two concepts and whether they have a correlation. According to prior research, it has already been found that self-esteem can improve self-compassion and serve as a role of foundation, and self-compassion can also improve the level of self-esteem by holding a kind and positive attitude towards the individuals themselves. However, the prior research also has some limitations, like the participants are limited to a certain age group and the dimensions of comparison are too narrow. In addition, the prior findings also evinced that self-esteem and self-compassion are positively correlated with well-being [1]. So, it would be beneficial to apply the two concepts into each individuals' lives. Understanding the relationship between self-esteem and self-compassion can significantly aid in promoting mental health and developing a positive self-attitude. This article focuses on the promoting impact of self-

esteem on self-compassion and how self-compassion enhances self-esteem, self-compassion avoids the drawbacks of self-esteem. Four prior studies are used to prove the two conclusions, and they contain correlation studies which use scales like The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), and analyze the data at the end. As for the experimental studies, which through some more practical ways like holding a meeting with the topic of self-compassion and finding how the variables changed. As for the meaning of this study, it can help individuals find a suitable way to improve mental health, and develop self-compassion to shift individuals' attitudes into more positive and kind ones.

2. The concepts of self-compassion and self-esteem

2.1. Self-compassion

Self-compassion is not only just about the attitude individuals hold towards themselves, but an internal coping mechanism that promotes adaptive emotional regulation. According to Peter Muris, self-compassion can be divided into 3 parts: (1) self-kindness, which means being gentle, supportive, and kind with oneself. (2) common humanity, which refers to understanding that there are so many people out there who are suffering the same as oneself. (3) mindfulness, which is related to keeping conscious and aware, and involves maintaining awareness of the present moment and adopting a balanced rather than overly reactive mindset. In general, self-compassion means holding a healthy and positive attitude towards life and not running away from setbacks [2].

2.2. Self-esteem

Self-esteem can generally be described in two factors, which are both cognitive and emotional assessments, referring to how individuals evaluate their self-worth. To be more specific, self-esteem is defined by people's feelings towards some common domains in daily life, such as academic performance, the position in the career, physical appearance, and social skills. In addition, an important point that needs to be emphasized is that self-esteem does not reflect the true abilities of the domains mentioned above, but displays a subjective feeling towards them. What is more, from prior research, self-esteem is defined as a construct that is shaped by long-term socialization and internalized beliefs about the self. So, it is confirmed that self-esteem is a continuous and stable variable that rarely changes over time. Although self-esteem generally refers to feeling good about oneself, excessively positive self-evaluations may lead to narcissism because they reinforce exaggerated beliefs about one's superiority. To distinguish the two concepts, according to Ulrich Orth, self-esteem focuses on self-acceptance and respect, while narcissism refers to a sense of superiority, grandiosity, entitlement, and self-centeredness [3].

3. The impact of self-esteem on self-compassion

In prior research, according to Luciana Karine de Souza and other researchers, they focus on Self-Compassion in Relation to Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, the participants are Brazilian adults which contains half men and half women [4]. This study is correlation research using the measurements of some scales like The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) and The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). After the participants completed the two scales, the researchers found a positive correlation between self-esteem and self-compassion and drew the conclusion: people who have an average level of self-esteem, which means they value themselves, it is believed that they have faith in themselves that they can achieve their goals on their own, and it is easier for those type of people to keep

mindfulness when facing some challenges and difficulties. For example, those type of individuals tend to generate fewer negative emotions and engage in less self-criticism when facing difficulties, and allow the self-kindness and self-acceptance to come when faced with some sufferings. Also, in this study, some other factors such as age, gender and religious faith are being discussed too.

Other research studied different aspects like the big five personality traits. The researchers (Yang, Hagiwara) focus on the different roles that self-esteem and self-compassion play in the big five personality traits [5]. The participants are people above 18 and live in Tokyo, and this study is also a correlation research containing scales like the big five inventory and SCS, RESE, but in a Likert-type format. And through the correlation study, the findings indicate that self-esteem and self-compassion have impacts on different aspects of the big five personality traits, and different personality dimensions, such as emotional stability and interpersonal warmth. Self-esteem is more related to openness and self-compassion is uniquely associated with agreeableness. In addition, through zero-order correlation coefficients, partial correlation coefficients, and descriptive statistics, the researchers found that there was a large size of significant positive correlation between self-esteem and self-compassion. Although this study focuses less on the specific correlation between self-esteem and self-compassion, it analyzes the different roles that self-esteem and self-compassion play in the big five personality traits as contributing factors. This study gives a unique direction and inspiration on how to analyze the correlation between self-esteem and self-compassion.

There is also other research focuses on specific contributing factors, such as childhood trauma. In this study, a new variable was introduced, which is childhood trauma [6]. It is found that childhood trauma has a significant positive correlation with self-esteem, and self-esteem has a significant positive correlation with self-compassion. The participants are college students from JiangXi Province. This research offers a meaningful perspective on how specific life experiences shape self-esteem and, consequently, self-compassion.

There is also research about the mediating effect of self-esteem. This study focuses on the relationship between self-compassion and hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and analyzes the self-esteem's role as a mediating effect [7]. The participants of this study are junior high school students, and the researchers use a questionnaire to measure well-being, happiness, self-compassion and self-esteem. The study concluded that self-esteem served as a mediating effect between self-compassion and hedonic well-being, edudaimonic well-being.

To conclude the prior research, as for the similarity, most of them use the correlation approaches to measure the impact of self-esteem on self-compassion, and as for the differences, firstly, the four prior researches mentioned above concentrated on different aspects of how self-esteem influences self-compassion, and the approaches are through direct measurement, big five personality, childhood trauma and hedonic well-being, educational well-being. Secondly, the participants are different. They are of different age groups, different regions and different positions. And to conclude from the prior research, it is confirmed that self-esteem has a positive correlation with self-compassion, and self-esteem has a promoting impact on self-compassion. Also, there are some limitations to the prior researches. Firstly, people from different cultural backgrounds may react differently to some certain situations. Secondly, as for the age, young people may have a developing body and mind, while the adults are mature, and this may influence the study conclusion.

4. Self-compassion—a better choice

In this section, the reason why self-compassion is a better choice will be demonstrated in two aspects. The first one is that self-compassion can promote self-esteem, and the second one is that self-compassion can address the deficiencies of self-esteem and have more advantages.

Two prior studies can argue the first reason, according to Andersen, who delivered an experimental research instead of a correlation study [8]. This study focused on a therapy named Compassion-focused therapy (CFT), and how it impacts self-esteem. The participants are 102 patients from a private clinic with different kinds of mental illnesses, and they are divided into groups, which contain 10 to 12 people. Each group will be organized to attend a meeting, and during each meeting, they will practice meditation and other types of healing in different topics, and all the methods are based on the principles of CFT. Before and after the meeting, they all asked to complete an RSE inventory, which shows their levels of self-esteem. After analyzing the two types of data, the researchers found that the levels of self-esteem of all the participants were all improved. From the study results, it could be proved that self-compassion can promote the level of self-esteem, they have a positive correlation. However, this study has some drawbacks. Firstly, the study did not set a control group, which means the researchers did not control the participants' backgrounds, and the participants are not sharing the same or similar mental situation which could be seen from the study results, it is found that patients with Personality Disorder were impacted by the treatment the most, which means the treatment is more effective on them, and it could be seen that people with different types of mental illness may have different treatment impacts. For the second point, the meetings are not voluntary ones but compulsory ones, and that characters may affect the patients willingness towards attending the meetings and ultimately affect the effects of the treatment. In addition, some personal experiences can also be a contributing factor towards the final result.

And for the second research, according to, it focuses on the relationship between self-compassion, self-esteem and cognitive emotion regulation strategies, maladaptive emotion regulation strategies [9]. The two regulation strategies were introduced as background information. First, as for the cognitive emotion regulation strategies, they contain 5 aspects. They are acceptance, which means accepting the negative events and the negative feelings caused by those events; positive refocusing, which refers to shifting individuals' views and focusing on the positive sides; positive reappraisal, which means using a positive attitude to evaluate the negative event, explaining the negative events positively; refocus on planning, which means putting individuals' attention on the solutions to the problems instead of focusing on the problems or the negative events themselves.; putting into perspective, which means decreasing the importance and level of severance in individuals 'minds, addressing the comparison with other things. The second one is maladaptive emotion regulation strategy, and it mainly consists of 4 aspects: self-blame, which mainly contributes all the failures to the individuals 'own faults; Blaming-others, which means putting all the responsibilities that caused the failures on others instead of the individuals themselves; Catastrophizing, means always focusing on the terror sides and the negative events, thinking that the most awful things will happen to the individuals; Rumination, which is a similar concept to overthinking, referring to constantly thinking about the negative, unpleasant events, and focusing on the uncomfortable feelings those events bring to the individuals, and not even trying to change the situation.

Then comes to the methods of this research. This experiment focused on 146 college students. They completed three scales, the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Self-Compassion Scale(SCS), the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire(CERQ), respectively. Analyzing the data to draw a conclusion. As a result, First, as for the similarity, self-compassion and self-esteem both have a positive correlation with cognitive emotion regulation strategies, and have a negative correlation with maladaptive emotion regulation strategies. Second, as for the difference, self-compassion can predict all the four maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, while self-esteem can only predict two of them, which are catastrophizing and rumination. So from the study, a conclusion

can be drawn that self-compassion has more advantages outweigh self-esteem. Also, it can be seen in other aspects that the proved the conclusion. First, self-compassion shows a greater stability than self-esteem during different types of situations. Self-compassion has nothing to do with the collapse of self-esteem, that could be proved by the definition of self-compassion and self-esteem. Self-compassion is based on self-importance, self-care, and nonjudgmental understanding, but self-esteem is based on positive self-evaluation. So, based on the definition, self-compassion can decrease the need for the positive evaluation from the outside through self-kindness and understanding, so that self-esteem can stay at a stable level. Second, it focuses on the soothing traits of self-compassion. Drawing from the social mentality theory, self-compassion can deactivate the threat system and replace it with the soothing system. However, self-esteem is related to positive or negative evaluation and dopamine systems. So it could be found that individuals with high levels of self-compassion hold a more positive attitude toward themselves and tend to evaluate themselves in a positive way. However, this study also has some limitations and drawbacks. First of all, the participants are lacking generality, they mainly focus on a group of college students, which are limited in the background. In addition, the comparison approach in self-compassion and self-esteem is too narrow, only by comparing the two emotion regulation strategies.

There are also two prior researches that can prove the second reason. According to one prior study, this research mainly focuses on the mediating effect of self-compassion in the relationship between self-esteem and level of body appreciation [10]. First, as for the participants, which are junior high school students, they are chosen because they are in a period of significant physical and psychological changes, and are more easily affected by the contemporary esthetic culture. For those adolescents who have unstable psychological states, underdeveloped cognitive structures, and experience asynchrony between physiological and psychological maturity, they are more easily to view themselves, especially their bodies, in a more critical and skeptical way, and easily get unsatisfied with their bodies. For example, in the modern internet, the ideal of pale, thin beauty is widely favored among women, and the ideal of a strong, athletic physique is widely favored among men. Adolescents are easily affected by those trends, even though they already meet the standards of a healthy body, they may still develop negative views about their bodies, believe that they have physical imperfections, and constantly experience appearance anxiety, body image anxiety, and a sense of shame related to these concerns. Second, as for the measurements, this study first uses RSES, SCS and Body Appreciation Scale(BAS) to examine the participants, and analyzes the data, to find out the mediating role of self-compassion. Based on the study results, the participants are divided into two groups, a control group and an experiment group, through testing the experimental group by carrying out a supporting course with the topic of self-compassion, to find out how self-compassion impacts on self-esteem and level of body appreciation. As a result, carrying out the courses with the topic of self-compassion can promote the level of self-esteem and body appreciation effectively. As for the limitations of this study, since the participants selected are junior high school students, the study conducted at such an immature stage of mental development may not be generalizable.

The second research can prove that self-compassion has more advantages than self-esteem, and can address the deficiencies of self-esteem. According to one prior study, this study can prove the conclusion in two aspects, which are the intervention effect of self-compassion and the drawbacks of self-esteem [1]. In the aspect of intervention, the participants were divided into two groups to participate in self-writing based on negative events that happened to the participants. The first group were guided to write in the self-compassion way, which means they were guided to treat themselves with kindness, keep mindfulness, and realize that the pain that an individual experiences is a part of

the shared human experience. And the second group was guided to write in a positive way with the aim of improving self-esteem. The results turned out to be that the intervention based on self-compassion improved the level of self-acceptance greatly and decreased the negative feelings. In addition, as for the level of difficulty of the intervention, the study shows that self-esteem depends more on external evaluation, whereas self-compassion focuses on how individuals treat themselves and manage their relationship with themselves in the face of adversity. Therefore, self-compassion is a more easily changeable personal trait. In the aspects of the drawbacks of self-esteem, excessive self-esteem can easily lead to narcissistic tendencies, as individuals become overly concerned with self-evaluation and develop a self-centered mindset. Therefore, simply boosting self-esteem to have better feelings and thoughts about oneself can be a two-edged sword. However, self-compassion can effectively avoid these drawbacks.

Concluded from the four prior studies, they showed that self-compassion can enhance self-esteem, and has greater advantages compared to self-esteem, and addresses its limitations.

5. Discussion

In this article, it mainly focuses on the relationship between self-compassion and self-esteem. Two conclusions could be drawn according to the 4 prior studies mentioned above: (1) self-esteem can promote self-compassion.(2) self-compassion can enhance the level of self-esteem and self-compassion has greater advantages. In future studies, according to the limitations, as for the participants, they could be selected from diverse backgrounds, and ages to make the results more generalizable. As for the aspects of measurement, apart from the intervention effects and other therapies, some different study plan could be designed for different age groups to make the results of the study cover more people.

6. Conclusion

This study focuses on the relationship between self compassion and self-esteem. From the prior researches, it is found that self-esteem can promote the level of self-compassion, and self-compassion can enhance the level of self-esteem, which means they both have a positive correlation with each other Self-compassion can avoid the drawbacks of self-esteem and have more advantages. From this article, it can be learned that it is of great importance to manage the relationship between self-compassion and self-esteem, and to apply those theories in practice. This research could set a direction for future studies to focus on the diversity of the participants and to find out whether self-esteem has some advantages that self-compassion does not have.

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