International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 2014, 6(1), 103-111

iojes
www.iojes.net

International Online Journal of Educational Sciences

ISSN: 1309-2707

Self-Compassion as a Predictor of Proactivity

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 17.02.2014
Received in revised form 06.03.2014
Accepted 09.03.2014
Available online 21.04.2014

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the predictive role of self-compassion on proactivity. Participants were 285 university students (153 women, 132 men; M age= 20.9 yr.). In this study, the Self-compassion Scale and the revised Proactivity Scale were used. The relationships between self-compassion and proactivity were examined using correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. In correlation analysis, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness factors of self-compassion were found positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification factors of self-compassion were found negatively related to proactivity. According to regression results, proactivity was predicted negatively by over-identification and isolation. Further self-kindness and mindfulness predicted proactivity in a positive way. Self-compassion has explained 30% of the variance in proactivity. The results were discussed in the light of the related literature and dependent recommendations to the area were given.

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Keywords:
Self-compassion, proactivity, multiple regression analysis

Introduction

Self-compassion refers to being affectionate and gentle towards oneself in the face of failure, pain, or perceived inadequacy and requires acknowledging that these experiences are part of the human condition and that all people, oneself included, are worthy of compassion (Neff, 2003b; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Neff (2003a, b), who put forward this construct firstly, considered self-compassion as a three-dimensional concept: (a) Self-kindness vs. self-judgment, (b) Awareness of common humanity vs. isolation, and (c) Mindfulness vs. over-identification. Self-kindness, involves to being kind and understanding toward oneself in difficult times rather than being harshly self-critical. When people with self-kindness notice some unfavorable feature of their personality, the emotional tone of language which used towards them must be soft and supportive (Neff, 2009). Awareness of common humanity is seeing one's both happy and painful experiences as not personal, but as all human beings' and involves recognizing that all humans are imperfect and that they fail (Neff, 2009). Having this kind of awareness, individuals perceive these experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than feeling isolated from the society and harshly criticizing oneself for failure and suffering experiences (Neff, 2003a). Mindfulness is a pre-conceptual awareness that helps individual to accept most distressful and painful emotions without being carried away by them (Gunaratana, 1993; Martin, 1997; Neff, 2003a; Nisker, 1998; Rosenberg, 1999). These three dimensions of self-compassion are experienced differently at the phenomenological level, while they interact so as to mutually enhance and engender one another (Neff, 2003a). For instance, when individuals recognize and accept their distressful experiences, when they are kind toward themselves, they may avoid suppressing these

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2014.01.011

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experiences. Therefore, when they are aware that all humans experience negative emotions, they are not trapped by over-identification (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Research generally demonstrated that self-compassion is a strong and significant indicator of psychological health in a variety of domains such as affect, cognitive patterns, achievement, and social connections. In these research it was found that self-compassion is related positively to life satisfaction, social relatedness (Neff, 2003b), social relationship, emotional intelligence, self-determination (Neff, 2003a), social support (Akın, Kayış, & Satıcı, 2011), learning-approach goals (Akın, 2008b), psychological well-being (Akın, 2008a), reflective and affective wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, optimism, positive affect, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007), and relational-interdependent self construal (Akın & Eroglu, 2013). Conversely, the other studies have showed that self-compassion is negatively related to interpersonal cognitive distortions (Akın, 2010a), submissive behavior (Akın, 2009), loneliness (Akın, 2010b), automatic thoughts (Akın, 2012), depression, anxiety, rumination, thought suppression (Neff, 2003b), internet addiction (Iskender & Akın, 2011), performance-approach/avoidance goals (Akın, 2008b), social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation (Werner et al., 2012), and neuroticism (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Because self-compassion is related to how a person perceives him/herself and to cope with negative life events effectively it is also an important key factor for individual's development which has crucial effects on daily life. Proactivity therefore may be influenced by self-compassion deeply since it plays worthy role in social and psychological life. Recent rapid improvements in technology, increasing ambiguity, confusions, and dynamism lead many organizations to prefer a person with having long and permanent goals (Crant, 2000; Friedman, 2005; Grant & Ashford, 2008) and these changes cause for many employers and researchers to focus on proactivity (Campbell, 2000; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). The concept of proactivity was defined in 1960's by Bonner (1967) as the interactions with the environment that an individual uses his/her potentials and creativity, gives importance on future orientation, makes choices and takes his/her responsibilities

Positive psychology movement, which has been developed in 1980's, describes proactive person as an individual who operationally focuses on modern life opportunities and well-being of individuals rather than individuals' failure, pathologies, burnouts, and helplessness behaviors (Caprara & Cervone, 2003). Proactivity has been generally defined as one being relatively unconstrained by situational forces and changes the environment intentionally and directly (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Proactive behaviors are permanent and contain intentional decisions (Morrison & Phelps, 1999) and taking risk rather than accepting the conditions (Crant, 2000; Crant & Bateman 2000). Similarly, proactive individuals are entrepreneurs, responsible, determined, make risk analysis, and take appropriate risk (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Grant & Ashford, 2008).

Studies indicated that proactivity is associated positively with work and career related variables such as successful career performance (Crant, 1995; Fuller, Hester, & Cox, 2010; Gerhardt et al., 2003), work adjustment (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), transformational and charismatic leadership (Crant & Bateman, 2000), external and internal career success (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001), and successful job search (Brown et al., 2006). Moreover proactive personality encompasses not only an individual but also an organization achievement (Ashford & Black, 1996). With this regard, the person with proactive personality characteristic is beneficial in his/her organizations, cultures, community, and even global world (Covey, 1998). In recent research on the relationships between proactivity and psychological variables, proactivity wasfound linked positively to satisfaction with life, positive affect, optimism (Sohl & Mover, 2009), social astuteness, altruism, interpersonal influence (Shi, Chen, & Zhou, 2011), autonomy, and vitality (Tummers, Kruyen, Vijverberg, & Voesenek, 2013) and was found negatively to negative affect (Sohl & Mover, 2009).

The present study

Self-compassion is a new research area and numerous studies have conducted with the self-compassion in recent decade. To date, however, no empirical research has examined whether self-compassion predicts proactivity. Therefore the goal of the present research is to do this. Previous evidence suggests that both self-compassion and proactivity are strongly and positively related to positive affect, satisfaction with life, and optimism (Akın, 2008a; Baker & McNulty, 2011; Neff, 2003b; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007; Sohl & Mover,

2009). Also, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, adaptive dimension of self-compassion, allow people to feel cared for, connected, and emotionally calm and thus enhances well-being (Gilbert, 2005), remedy reactions to negative experiences, and buffer people against the influence of negative self-feelings and distressful experiences (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). Similarly individuals who have higher levels of proactivity seem to have more positive emotions and vitality and function positively in both private and social environments (Shi et al., 2011; Tummers et al., 2013). Therefore there may be linear positive relationship between self-compassion and proactivity. Based on the above relationships of self-compassion and proactivity, it was hypothesized that self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, adaptive dimensions of self-compassion, would be associated positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification, maladaptive dimensions of self-compassion would be associated negatively with proactivity.

Method

Participants

Participants were 285 Sakarya University Faculty of Education students (153 women, 132 men) who enrolled in various undergraduate programs. These programs were social science education (*n*=60), science education (*n*=76), pre-school education (*n*=52), primary school education (*n*=53), and mathematics education (*n*=44). Of the participants, 63 were first-year students, 80 were second-year students, 57 were third-year students, and 85 were fourth-year student. Their ages ranged from 17 to 26 years old (M = 20.92, SD = 1.05) and GPA scores ranged from 1.84 to 3.90.

Measures

Self-compassion Scale. Self-compassion was measured by using Self-compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın, Akın, and Abacı (2007). Self-compassion Scale is a 26-item self-report measurement and consists of six sub-scales; self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). Language validity findings indicated that correlations between Turkish and English forms were .94, .94, .87, .89, .92, and .94 for six subscales, respectively. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit. The goodness of fit index values of the model were RMSEA=.056, NFI=.95, CFI=.97, IFI=.97, RFI=.94, GFI=.91, and SRMR=.059. The internal consistency coefficients were .77, .72, .72, .80, .74, and .74 and the test-retest reliability coefficients were .69, .59, .66, .60 .69, and .56, for six subscales, respectively.

The Revised Proactivity Scale. Proactivity was measured using the Revised Proactivity Scale (Bateman & Crant, 1982). Turkish adaptation of this scale was done by Akın, Abacı, Kaya, and Arıcı (2011). The Revised Proactivity Scale is a 10-item self-report inventory (e. g., I am always looking for better ways to do things) and each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*). All answers given will be totaled to indicate the level of proactivity, with a high number indicating a greater incidence of proactivity. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit to the Turkish population (x^2= 47.91, df= 29, RMSEA= .044, NFI= .99, CFI= .99, IFI= .99, RFI= .97, GFI= .97, AGFI= .95, and SRMR= .033). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient was .86.

Procedure

Participants voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the participants in groups in the classrooms. Prior to administration of measures, all participants were told about purposes of the study.

Statistical Analysis

In this research, multiple linear regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationships between self-compassion and proactivity. The variables which were entered in multiple regression analysis were measured by summing the items of each scale. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 11.5.

Results

Descriptive data and inter-correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal consistency coefficients of the variables used.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, alphas, and inter-correlations of the variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-kindness	–						
2. Self-judgment	-.385**	–					
3. Common humanity	.705**	-.220**	–				
4. Isolation	-.300**	.667**	-.176**	–			
5. Mindfulness	.723**	-.338**	.602**	-.329**	–		
6. Over-identification	-.398**	.767**	-.233**	.719**	-.405**	–	
7. Proactivity	.440**	-.369**	.347**	-.378**	.459**	-.414**	–
Mean	16,51	12,32	12,95	10,14	13,74	10,46	54,26
Standard deviation	3,97	4,52	3,24	3,40	3,06	3,86	8,39
Alpha	.72	.80	.73	.83	.75	.78	.68

**p<.01

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Self-kindness (r=.44, p<.01), common humanity (r=.35, p<.01), and mindfulness (r=.46, p<.01) were found positively and self-judgment (r=-.37, p<.01), isolation (r=-.38, p<.01), and over-identification (r=-.41, p<.01) were found negatively associated with proactivity. There were also significant correlations between dimensions of self-compassion.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Before applying regression, assumptions of multiple regression were checked. The data were examined for normality by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated normality of distributions of test scores for all tests in the current study. Outliers are cases that have data values that are very different from the data values for the majority of cases in the data set. Outliers were investigated using Mahalanobis distance. A case is outlier if the probability associated with its D^2 is .001 or less (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Based on this criterion, twenty data were labeled as outliers and they were deleted. Multi-collinearity was checked by the variance inflation factors (VIF). All the VIF values were less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), which indicated that there was no multi-collinearity.

Multiple regression analysis was performed in which the dependent variable was proactivity and the independent variables were dimensions of self-compassion (Table 2). As many of those predictor variables were dependent on each other, forward stepwise procedure, which includes one new explanatory variable at each step, specifically the most associated with the dependent variable while being, at the same time, independent of the explanatory variables already included in the model. The criteria to include the variables from the regression model were: criterion probability-of-F-to enter <=.05.

According to the results of multiple regression analysis, summarized in Table 2, mindfulness entered the equation first, accounting for 21% of the variance in predicting proactivity (R^2=.21, adjusted R^2=.21, F(1, 283)= 75,690, p<.01). Over-identification entered on the second step accounting for an additional 6% variance (R^2=.27, ΔR^2=.06, adjusted R^2=.27, F(2, 282)= 52,952, p<.01). Self-kindness entered on the third step accounting for an additional 2% variance (R^2=.29, ΔR^2=.02, adjusted R^2=.28, F(3, 281)= 37,623, p<.01). Isolation entered last, accounting for an additional 1% variance (R^2=.30, ΔR^2=.01, adjusted R^2=.29, F(4, 280)= 29,521, p<.01). Despite the initial regression design included mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness, over-identification, isolation, and self-judgment as independent variables, the last regression models involved mindfulness, over-identification, self-kindness, and isolation as predictors of proactivity and accounted for 30% of the variance. The standardized beta coefficients indicated the relative influence of the variables in last model with self-kindness (β= .17, p<.01), over-identification (β= -.15, p<.01), mindfulness (β= .23, p<.01), and isolation (β= -.15, p<.01) all significantly influencing proactivity and mindfulness was strongest predictor.

Table 2. Summary of forward stepwise multiple regression analysis for variable predicting proactivity

Variables	B	Standart Error of B	β	t
Step 1				
Mindfulness	1.259	.145	.459	8.700*
Step 2				
Mindfulness	.956	.152	.349	6.282*
Over-identification	-.592	.121	-.272	-4.904*
Step 3				
Mindfulness	.642	.203	.234	3.154*
Over-identification	-.546	.122	-.251	-4.491*
Self-kindness	.361	.156	.171	2.310*
Step 4				
Mindfulness	.618	.203	.225	3.048*
Over-identification	-.325	.164	-.149	-1.984*
Self-kindness	.368	.155	.174	2.367*
Isolation	-.356	.178	-.145	-2.002*

Discussion

The aim of the current research was to examine the predictive role of self-compassion on proactivity and findings showed that there are significant relationships between these two variables. To my knowledge, this is the first study investigating the relationships between self-compassion and proactivity. As expected self-kindness and mindfulness -adaptive dimensions of self-compassion- predicted proactivity positively. However, awareness of common humanity did not emerge as significant predictor in the regression model. These results are in line with the previous studies which have shown that proactivity is closely associated with the indices of psychological adjustment such as satisfaction with life, positive affect, optimism, social astuteness, altruism, interpersonal influence, autonomy and vitality (Sohl & Mover, 2009; Shi et al., 2011; Tummers et al., 2013). Findings are also consistent with the literature which demonstrated that self-kindness and mindfulness are related the psychological strengths such as optimism, positive affect, life satisfaction, extraversion, agreeableness (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007), and psychological well-being (Akın, 2008a).

Moreover self-kindness and mindfulness have been found associated with the higher levels of brain activation in the left prefrontal cortex, a region associated with joy and optimism (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004) and with the feelings of autonomy and competence (Neff, 2003a), and they help people to maintain optimistic expectations about their future (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Thus, people who high in self-kindness and mindfulness can behave more proactively. In addition individuals with self-kindness and mindfulness can handle with numerous difficult life events effectively, can have more positive and less negative emotions, by behaving themselves affectionately and not allowing themselves to be swept up by negative emotions (Neff, 2003a). Self-kindness and mindfulness get rid people of the necessity to rely on defensiveness and provide a clear perception of one's characteristics, both good and bad. And provide

individuals to have more accurate self-perceptions and self-appraisals (i.e., without self-enhancement or self-deprecation) than those lacking (Leary et al., 2007). Also a proactive people focus on well-being rather than failure, pathologies, burnouts, and helplessness behaviors (Caprara & Cervone, 2003), they beneficial in their organizations, community, and even global world (Covey, 1998), have more wellness, generativity, and resilience that people experience when they are self-compassionate (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Therefore self-kindness and mindfulness dimensions of self-compassion and proactivity may share the same properties in nature and the positive associations between self-kindness, mindfulness, and proactivity are not surprising.

On the other hand results showed that as hypothesized isolation and over-identification (except self-judgment) -maladaptive dimension of self-compassion- predicted proactivity in a negative way. People with isolation and over-identification, become identified with and carried away by negative feelings and thoughts towards themselves (Neff & Vonk, 2009), feel ashamed from their failures (Neff, 2003a), and often are exposed to psychological problems (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Therefore, these dimensions of self-compassion are maladaptive and these individuals may have less level of proactivity.

Nonetheless there are several limitations of this study that should be noted when evaluating the findings, such as; (a) participants were university students and replication of this research on other student populations should be conducted to generate more solid relationships among the variables examined in this study, because generalization of the results is somewhat limited, (b) as correlational statistics were utilized, no definitive suggestions can be done about causality, and (c) the data reported here for self-compassion and proactivity are limited to self-reported data.

In sum, the present research provides important information about the predictors of proactivity. An increment in mindfulness and self-kindness will increase proactivity while an increment in over-identification and isolation will decrease it. This study also suggests that the encouragement of self-compassion could be highly beneficial for proactivity (Neff, 2003a). Clearly, however, more research needs to be done to understand how self-compassion is linked to functioning.

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