

Self-Compassion as a Mediator of the Attachment and Resilience Relationship

Jessica A. Gordon

BA, PGDip (Psych), Assoc MAPS

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Declarations

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library**, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the conditions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Acknowledgement of Collaboration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers from the University of Newcastle (UoN). The larger project design, ethics application, and data collection were conducted collaboratively by Associate Professor Ross Wilkinson, postgraduate clinical psychology students Callie Buller, Marissa Black, and Alexander Arentz, and myself. I identified a research question that had not previously been explored in the data set, independently completed a literature review, and designed and conducted data analysis procedures collaboratively with Associate Professor Ross Wilkinson.

Acknowledgement of Authorship

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a scholarly work of which I am a joint author. This is a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, and attesting to my contribution to the joint scholarly work.

Statement on Human Rights

All procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and standards, laid down in the 1964 Helsinki Declaration. Ethical approval of the study was granted by the UoN's Human Research Ethics Committee (H-2014-0210). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Statement on Welfare of Animals

No studies with animals were performed by any of the authors.

Signed:

Jessica A. Gordon

Date

Signed:

Associate Professor Ross Wilkinson

Date

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Structured Abstract

Scope

Self-compassion research has recently grown significantly, due to studies that have suggested it is associated with numerous psychological health benefits (Macbeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff, 2003a). Research has suggested that an individual's self-compassion can be explained by their attachment (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Wei, Liao, Ku, & Shaffer, 2011). Attachment security has also been associated with psychological well-being (Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), including resilience (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012). Therefore, it has been proposed that attachment is important for the development of resilience (Atkinson, Martin, & Rankin, 2009; Bowlby, 1969). Although self-compassion has also been associated with resilience (Neff, 2003b; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007), no research has investigated the joint relationship between attachment, self-compassion, and resilience.

Purpose

The current study aimed to examine the joint relationship between attachment, self-compassion, and resilience, with a particular focus on the possible mediating role of self-compassion. A partial mediation model hypothesized that insecure attachment (i.e., of both the anxious and avoidant varieties) would be negatively associated with, and have a direct effect on both self-compassion and resilience. It hypothesized that self-compassion would be positively associated with, and have a direct effect on resilience, and self-compassion would partially mediate the relationship between both anxious and avoidant attachment, and resilience.

Methodology

Participation was restricted to Australian residents, at least 18 years old, with access to a computer and the internet. After data screening 506 participants remained, consisting of 397 females (78%) and 109 males (22%), aged between 18 and 82 years old ($M = 31.38$ years). Participants consisted of undergraduate psychology students ($n = 212$) and members of the general community ($n = 294$). Participants were predominantly Australian (45%) and European Australian (40%). An online questionnaire was administered using LimeSurvey software. For this study, the following measures were examined: the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b), the Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994), and the revised version of the Resilience Scale for Adults (Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, Martinussen, & Aslaksen, 2006; Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2006).

Results

All correlations were significant ($p < .001$). Both attachment anxiety and avoidance, were strongly and negatively associated with both self-compassion ($r = -.61$, $r = -.51$) and resilience ($r = -.61$, $r = -.60$). Self-compassion was strongly and positively associated with resilience ($r = .58$). Mediation analyses were conducted using structural equation modelling. All direct and indirect effects were significant ($p < .01$). Both attachment anxiety and avoidance, had a negative and direct effect on both self-compassion ($\beta = -.48$, $\beta = -.21$) and resilience ($\beta = -.26$, $\beta = -.30$). Self-compassion had a positive and direct effect on resilience ($\beta = .26$). Self-compassion had a negative and indirect effect on the relationship between both attachment anxiety ($\beta = -.13$) and avoidance ($\beta = -.06$), and resilience. The only differences to the hypothesized model were some of the effect sizes. The model explained 40% of the variance in self-compassion and 50% of the variance in resilience.

General Conclusions and Implications of the Larger Work

The hypothesized model was generally supported. As hypothesized, higher attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted lower self-compassion and resilience, and lower self-compassion predicted lower resilience. These findings provide further support for existing research and theory, suggesting that attachment expectancies are important to self-compassion (Neff & McGehee, 2010), and that attachment expectancies and self-compassion are important to resilience (Atkinson et al., 2009; Neff et al., 2007). Unexpectedly, the indirect effects were too weak for self-compassion to be considered a meaningful mediator of the relationship between either attachment anxiety or avoidance, and resilience. This finding contributes to the literature by suggesting that attachment expectancies and self-compassion are independently important to resilience. As such, this suggests that both attachment relationships and self-compassion are promising targets for therapeutic intervention. However, there has been limited research investigating the efficacy of interventions that aim to increase attachment security (Slade, 1999), and attachment-based interventions require further development. Given resilience has been associated with many psychological benefits (Atkinson et al., 2009), attachment- and self-compassion- based interventions should be considered in preventative and mental health settings.