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Self-compassion and gratitude as mediators of the attachment – psychological health relationship

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master of Clinical Psychology program

School of Psychology

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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 at the University Library**, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Nastassja Maher

04.03.2015
Declarations

Acknowledgement of Collaboration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers. I have included as part of the thesis a statement clearly outlining the extent of collaboration, with whom and under what auspices.

The data collection was a shared process. I worked collaboratively with fellow students Vanessa Bailey and Callie Buller on: the Ethics application, the creation of the joint survey, monitoring online data collection, reimbursement of participants, and data screening. The survey included measures of relevance to their research and to mine.

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“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them” ~ John F. Kennedy

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Abstract

Scope

The current study examined the relationship between self-compassion, attachment insecurity, gratitude and psychological health. Over the past ten years, the concept of human behaviour has broadened to include positive psychology constructs such as empathy, generosity and other prosocial virtues. Of these constructs, self-compassion and gratitude have both been explored independently. However to date, no known research examines the relationship between the two constructs. Attachment styles have been suggested to provide an explanation for individual differences in both self-compassion and gratitude. Thus, the impact of attachment insecurity on these variables was examined in this study, specifically in relation to psychological health.

Purpose

The aim of the study was to test a hypothesised partial mediation model. The model proposed that attachment insecurity would have a direct relationship with psychological health and that both gratitude and self-compassion would partially mediate this relationship. This study aimed to explore the relationship between the two constructs. It was predicted that self-compassion would be significantly and positively correlated with gratitude and that self-compassion would predict gratitude in the hypothesised model.

Methodology

Participants consisted of 206 members of the general public (162 women and 44 men). Ages ranged from 18 to 82 years (M = 39, SD = 15.3). At the time of the study, 75.2% of participants reported being in a committed romantic relationship and 24.8% participants reported that they were not. Participants completed an online survey. Measures in the study consisted of the Self-Compassion Scale, The Gratitude...
Questionnaire Six-Item Form, The Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales, and Attachment Styles Questionnaire. The survey was part of a larger study that included other measures.

**Results**

Zero-order correlations between all variables investigated were significant ($p \leq .01$). The hypothesized model was supported with some modifications based on whether psychological health was indicated by either anxiety or depression. Direct and indirect paths were found for the outcome variable of depression. Overall, the results supported an indirect effects model for self-compassion and the relationship between anxious attachment and depression. Self-compassion was found to mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and anxiety as well as the relationship between avoidant attachment and anxiety. There was a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and gratitude and self-compassion was found to predict gratitude in both models.

**General Conclusions and Implications**

The results demonstrate that an insecure attachment style is predictive of lower levels of both self-compassion and gratitude. Overall, the results indicate that a self-compassionate attitude is more important for psychological health than dispositional gratitude both directly and as a mediator of attachment insecurity. The study found that higher self-compassion scores were predictive of lower depression and anxiety scores. Similarly, higher scores on the gratitude scale were predictive of lower depression scores, however gratitude was not significantly related to anxiety. In terms of the relationship between self-compassion and gratitude, highly self-compassionate individuals are likely be more grateful those who have lower levels of self-compassion. Implications for clinical practice are discussed. In the treatment of
depression, psychologists may wish to employ interventions that focus on increasing self-compassion and to a lesser extent, gratitude. In the treatment of anxiety, psychologists may find interventions that increase self-compassion beneficial to reduce anxiety. Future research should focus on further exploration of the relationship between self-compassion and gratitude and attempt to replicate the results of this preliminary study.