

Full Length Research Paper

The influence of self-compassion on academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes

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In the present study, aims were (1) to determine gender differences in self-compassion, academic procrastination, and dysfunctional attitudes and (2) to examine the relationships between self-compassion, academic procrastination, and dysfunctional attitudes. Participants were 251 university students who completed a questionnaire package that included the Self-Compassion Scale, the Academic Procrastination Scale, and the Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale. Results showed that there were no significant gender differences in self-compassion, academic procrastination, and dysfunctional attitudes. In correlation analysis, self-compassion correlated positively with academic procrastination and negatively with dysfunctional attitudes. Similarly there were no significant relationships between academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes.

Key words: self-compassion, academic procrastination, dysfunctional attitudes, university students.

INTRODUCTION

The construct of self-compassion, recently defined and operationalized by Neff, offers an alternative approach to thinking about psychological well-being. Neff (2003b) conceptualized self-compassion as involving self-kindness, mindfulness and awareness of common humanity. Self-kindness is related to reacting with kindness and understanding towards oneself when experiencing negative events, mindfulness is related to holding emotions in nonjudgmental awareness and common humanity related to viewing one's life as part of the larger human experience and realizing that everyone goes through difficult times (Adams and Leary, 2007). Self-compassion involves being touched by and open to one's own suffering, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness, it also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience (Neff, 2003b). Self-compassion predicted emotional and cognitive reactions to negative events in everyday life, buffered people against negative self-feelings when imagining distressing social events, moderated negative emotions after receiving ambivalent feedback (particularly for participants who were low in self-esteem).

Finally, self-compassion leads people to acknowledge their role in negative events without feeling overwhelmed with negative emotions (Leary et al., 2005). It helps buffer

against anxiety when faced with an ego-threat in a laboratory setting and increases in self-compassion occurring were associated with increased psychological well-being (Neff et al., 2007). As measured using Neff's Self-Compassion Scale, it demonstrates positive associations with current markers of psychological well-being, such as self-acceptance, life satisfaction, social connectedness, self-esteem, mindfulness, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, reflective and affective wisdom, curiosity and exploration in life, happiness, and optimism (Kirkpatrick, 2006). Research indicates that self-compassion is significantly associated with positive mental health benefits and adaptive functioning (Neff, 2004), life satisfaction and social connectedness (Neff, 2003a), well-being (Neff et al., 2008), mastery goals and emotion-focused coping strategies (Neff et al., 2005), social identity strength (Williams, 2005), social supports, academic success (Conway, 2007), happiness, optimism, positive affects, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness (Neff et al., 2007).

Self-compassion was also found to be a stronger predictor of psychological health than mindfulness (Rendon, 2007). Self-compassion is negatively associated with self-criticism, depression, anxiety, rumination, thought suppression, and neurotic perfectionism (Neff, 2003a;

Kirkpatrick, 2006), negative affect and neuroticism (Neff et al., 2007), performance goals, avoidance-oriented strategies (Neff et al., 2005), anxiety and cognitive interference and in addition the magnitude of these correlations was greater under threatening conditions than under non-threatening test conditions and self-compassion was unrelated to race-based rejection sensitivity (Williams, 2005). Procrastination has been defined as the tendency to delay initiation or completion of important tasks (Lay, 1986), a self-regulation style that involves delay in the start and/or completion of a task (Ferrari and Tice, 2000), or to delay tasks to the point of discomfort (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984). Generally, procrastination is explained as a lower-order personality trait in the literature, related to a lack of conscientiousness (Van, 2003). Five different kinds of procrastination have been investigated, the first two referring to task avoidance, and the others to decision avoidance: Academic procrastination, general or life routine procrastination, decisional procrastination, neurotic procrastination and compulsive or dysfunctional procrastination defined as decisional and behavioral procrastination in the same person (Milgram et al., 1998).

Academic procrastination includes failing to perform an activity within the desired time frame or postponing until the last minute activities one ultimately intends to complete (Wolters, 2003). According to Ferrari (1994), behavioral procrastination was related to failing task completion, rejecting well-minded others, feeling guilty after a positive event, and choosing handicapping situations, while decisional procrastination was related to failing to complete crucial tasks, inciting anger in others.

However, self-defeating tendencies of failure to complete crucial tasks and rejecting opportunities for pleasure were significant predictors of decisional, behavioral, and overall dysfunctional procrastination. Interpersonal dependency also was a significant predictor of both decisional and dysfunctional procrastination, while self-esteem predicted behavioral procrastination. While decisional procrastination concerns dilatory behavior in making important decisions (Ferrari et al., 1995), avoidant or behavioral procrastination is the tendency to delay task performance in order to avoid aversive tasks or performance failures (Ferrari and Emmons, 1994; Milgram et al., 1998).

Research results demonstrated that procrastination correlated with diffusion and moratorium (Shanahan and Pychyl, 2007), perfectionism (Walsh and Ugumba, 2002), discomfort intolerance and low self-esteem (Harrington, 2005; Ferrari, 1994), problematic internet use (Thatcher et al., 2008), present-hedonist (Ferrari and Diaz-Morales, 2007) fear of failure (Alexander and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Solomon and Rothblum, 1984), health problems (Sirois, 2007), perceived stress (Sirois et al., 2003), and the neuroticism facets-anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, vulnerability (Watson, 2001; Johnson and Bloom, 1995; Schouwenburg and Lay, 1995). On the other hand, procrastination negatively related to self-efficacy (Van, 2003; Sirois, 2004), ego identity develop-

ment and achievement (Shanahan and Pychyl, 2007; Harrington, 2005), and conscientiousness (Van, 2003; Johnson and Bloom, 1995; Lay et al., 1998; Watson, 2001; Schouwenburg and Lay, 1995).

However, the factors of extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness were not significantly correlated with procrastination (Johnson and Bloom, 1995).

Procrastination studies related to sex revealed that procrastination was positively related to test and class anxiety and interpretation anxiety for males and statistics anxiety for females (Rodarte-Luna and Sherry, 2008). On the other hand, fathers' authoritarian parenting style was significantly negatively correlated with daughters' procrastination (Ferrari and Olivetti, 1994) and also there was a significant negative relation between maternal authoritative parenting and procrastination. However, for females a significant negative relation was found between self-worth and procrastination (Pychyl et al., 2002). Procrastination may be associated with poor family relations and disrupted or dissatisfying social relationships (Ferrari et al., 1999; Ferrari and Patel, 2004).

Trait procrastination is a strong predictor of students' dilatory behaviors (Lay and Schouwenburg, 1993). Trait adjectives highly related to trait procrastination included 'undisciplined', 'lazy', and 'disorderly'. Trait procrastination was highly related to lower scores (Schouwenburg and Lay, 1995). Procrastination was related to college students' self-efficacy and work-avoidant goal orientation and, to a lesser extent, their use of metacognitive strategies (Wolters, 2003). Student researches revealed that procrastination was associated with increased anxiety, delayed writing behavior, and lower grades (Fritzsche et al., 2003), mastery-avoidance goal orientation, greater disorganization and less use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies (Howell and Watson, 2007), task aversiveness, proneness to boredom (Blunt and Pychyl, 2000), and pre-examination dejection (Lay and Silverman, 1996).

Procrastination related negatively to mastery-approach goal orientation (Howell and Watson, 2007) and test performance (Moon and Illingworth, 2005). Beck (1967, 1983) hypothesizes that depressive schemas are typically organized as sets of dysfunctional attitudes. This schema is activated following the occurrence of negative life events. Negative errors in thinking increase the probability that an individual will develop the negative cognitive triad. Beck defines the negative cognitive triad as negative views of the self, the world and the future. Providing partial support for Beck's theory, Abela and Sullivan (2003) reported that dysfunctional attitudes interacted with the occurrence of negative events to predict increases in depressive symptoms and major depressive episodes (Lewinshon et al., 2001). Dysfunctional attitudes played a moderating role in the relationship between life stress and depressive symptoms for both men and women (You et al., 2009). Recent research has also indicated that dysfunctional attitudes are related to mood-state (Miranda and Persons, 1988; Roberts and Kassel,

1996), depression (Miranda et al., 1998), maladaptive coping and negative mood (Kahler et al., 2003).

Most studies in the literature are concerned with self-compassion, dysfunctional attitudes and procrastination of students, related to studying and behaviour in school or university. The performance measures included grades, missing deadlines, the time spent on preparing a task, and completing tasks, such as assignments. However, there wasn't any study about related to relation between self-compassion, dysfunctional attitudes and academic procrastination. Summarizing, the aim of this study is reveal inbetween relations of self-compassion, dysfunctional attitudes and procrastination.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants were 251 educational faculty students at a 4-year undergraduate college in Turkey, of which 129 (53%) were females and 122 (47%) were males. Ages ranged from 17 to 26 years ($M = 21.72$). Questionnaires were completed by students at the beginning of a workshop conducted by the author.

Measures

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)

Self-compassion was measured by the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akin et al. (2007). The SCS is a 26-item self-report inventory and consists of six subscales; self-kindness, self-judgment, awareness of common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Academic procrastination

Academic procrastination was measured by the Aitken procrastination inventory (API) (Aitken, 1982). The API is a self-report inventory measuring trait procrastination among students. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Balkis (2006) and it contains 16 items (for example, "I delay starting things so long I don't get them done by the deadline") that use a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (False) to 5 (True). The scale was scored such that high scores identified students who were chronic procrastinators.

Dysfunctional attitudes

The dysfunctional attitudes scale (DAS) (Weissman and Beck, 1978) is a 40-item measure that assesses attitudes and beliefs that are thought to predispose individuals to depression. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Sahin and Sahin (1992). Items such as 'If others dislike you, you cannot be happy', and 'If I fail partly, it is as bad as being a complete failure' were rated on a seven-point scale, ranging from totally agree (1) to totally disagree (7). Total scores can range from 40 to 280, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of maladaptive beliefs. Coefficient α was 0.85 in the present sample.

RESULTS

Descriptive data and inter-correlation

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there is a correlation between self compassion, academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes. Self compassion related positively to academic procrastination ($r = 0.32$). But there were no significant correlations between self compassion and dysfunctional attitudes and between academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes.

Gender differencies

When Table 2 is examined, there were no significant gender differences in selfcompassion, academic procrastination, and dysfunctional attitudes.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to determine whether there were gender differences inbetween variables and to investigate the relationships between self-compassion, academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes. Results showed that there were no significant gender differences in self-compassion, academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes. Similarly, there were no significant relationships between self-compassion with dysfunctional attitudes and between academic procrastination with dysfunctional attitudes. On the other hand, findings have demonstrated that there is significant relationships between self-compassion and academic procrastination. Firstly, results of this study demonstrated that self-compassion was related positively to academic procrastination. As self-compassion is regarded as positive and academic procrastination is negative feature, it could be presumed that there is no relation between self-compassion and academic procrastination. But contrary to expectation, in this study a significant relationship was found between self-compassion and academic procrastination.

Researches supported these results. Researches indicates that self-compassion leads people to acknowledge their role in negative events without feeling overwhelmed with negative emotions (Leary et al., 2005), helps buffer against anxiety when faced with an ego-threat setting (Neff et al., 2007). Self-compassion is significantly associated with adaptive functioning (Neff, 2004), emotion-focused coping strategies (Neff et al., 2005). Self-compassionate people have been shown to possess many psychological strengths, such as greater happiness, optimism, positive affect (Neff et al., 2007). This study makes several contributions. Firstly, it demonstrates that selfcompassion is associated with academic procrastination. Secondly, this study was the first to examine the relationships between self-compassion,

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

Variable	1	2	3
1. Self compassion	1		
2. Academic procrastination	.32**	1	
3. Dysfunctional attitudes	0.12	0.03	1
Mean	77.59	51.50	164.81
Standard deviation	9.31	5.82	21.55
Range	26-130	16-80	40-280

** p <0.01.

Table 2. Gender differences in self-compassion, academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes.

Variable	Female (n=129)		Male (n=122)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Self compassion	78.34	9.31	76.79	9.27	-1.31	0.189
Academic procrastination	51.07	6.42	51.95	5.08	1.20	0.231
Dysfunctional attitudes	165.91	22.54	163.65	20.46	-0.83	0.408

academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes. However, participants were university students only; so generalizability is limited.

Replication of this study could target other populations in order to generate more solid relationships among constructs examined in this study.

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