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The Relationship between Grace and Self-Compassion

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Introduction

Self-compassion and grace are two essential concepts that allow us to honor and accept our humanness in a way that promotes greater psychological flexibility (Neff & Bluth, 2018).

Self-compassion is defined as the ability to extend compassion towards ourselves when faced with feelings of inadequacy, failure, and suffering (Neff, 2003).

- As evidenced by recent literature, self-compassion is quickly replacing the concept of self-esteem (Hwang, et. al., 2016).
- The concept of self-compassion is influential and important to research due to how it relates to one's higher well-being (Baer, 2012; Holzel et al., 2011).
- Self-compassion involves three main parts:
 - (1) Self-kindness,
 - (2) Noticing that an individual is human and is imperfect,
 - (3) Facing difficult thoughts and feelings without blaming one's self.

Self-compassion has been found to play an important role with our mental health and numerous studies have shown that self-compassion has an inverse relationship with some mental disorders, like depression and anxiety (Greenberg, et. al., 2018, Forkus, et. al, 2019).

Although self-compassion has been studied in the context of mental disorders, few studies have examined how the concepts of self-compassion and positive qualities such as grace are related and how they play a role in an individual's overall psychological wellbeing. This study analyzed the relationship among self-compassion and the dimensions of grace.

Methods

Since mental health problems are on the rise, specifically among adolescents and young adults, we thought researching these concepts with a young adult undergraduate population could provide insight into how they are able to respond to frustrations, limitations, losses, or mistakes.

Participants: Our survey was administered online to 135 undergraduate students at a private religiously-affiliated university in the Pacific Northwest. 73.3% of student participants were European American with a mean age 18.9. Students received academic credit for completing the survey, which included personality traits, grace, self-compassion, and cultural humility. Grace and Self Compassion results were used in this specific study.



Measures

The Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) measures six different subscales: one's Self-Kindness, Self-Judgement, Common Humanity beliefs, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Overidentified thoughts or feelings. The Self-Compassion scale contains 26-items and uses a five-point response continuum from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Alpha = 0.71, 0.77, 0.67, 0.77, 0.83, and 0.80 for Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, Self-Judgment, and Self-Kindness respectively.

The Dimensions of Grace scale includes 36 items that measure one's experience of God's Grace, Costly Grace (someone always pays for grace), Grace to Self, Grace from Others, and Grace to Others (Bufford, et al., 2017). Alphas were 0.98, 0.94, 0.76, 0.84, and 0.71 respectively. Responses were given on a seven-point continuum from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

We hypothesized that Self Compassion and the five dimensions of grace would predict a significant amount of variance in each of the six aspects of Self-Compassion.

Table 1

Multiple regression analysis results for the degree to which the Dimensions of Grace variables predicted the Self-Compassion variables

Dimensions of Grace Variable(s)	Self- Compassion Variable	R	R ²	Δ R ²	SEE	σ ²
Grace to Self & God's Grace	Self- Kindness	.640	.410	.066	2.953	41%
Grace to Self & God's Grace	Self-Judgement	.696	.484	.070	3.004	48%
God's Grace	Common Humanity	.259	.067	.067	2.936	7%
Grace to Self & Grace to Others	Isolation	.595	.354	.057	2.897	35%
Grace to Self & God's Grace	Mindfulness	.524	.275	.094	2.330	28%
Grace to Self, Grace to Others, & God's Grace	Overidentified thoughts or feelings	.594	.352	.023	2.891	35%

Notes. Sig. = .000, SEE= Standard Error of the Estimate

Results

Multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the degree to which the Dimensions of Grace predicted each of the measures of Self-Compassion.

- Grace to Self and God's Grace predicted 41% of the variance for Self-Kindness.
- Grace to Self and God's Grace predicted 48% of the variance for Self-Judgement.
- God's Grace predicted 7% of the variance for Common Humanity beliefs.
- Grace to Self and Grace to Others predicted 35% of the variance for Isolation.
- God's Grace and Grace to Self predicted 28% of the variance for Mindfulness.
- Grace to Self, Grace to Others, and God's Grace predicted 35% of the variance for Overidentified thoughts or feelings.

Discussion

Each of the dimensions of grace was related to self-compassion. Our effect sizes were generally large, and a significant relationship was demonstrated between both God's Grace and Grace to Self with the six measures of Self-Compassion except Common Humanity beliefs. A weaker relationship was demonstrated between Costly Grace, Grace from Others, and Grace to Others with the six measures of Self-Compassion.

Overall, our analyses indicate that the experience of grace and self-compassion are strongly related. Clinical efforts to nurture either grace or self-compassion will likely promote the other as well. Given their links with healthy psychological functioning, nurturing either grace or self-compassion could foster improved psychological wellbeing.

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Mindfulness

Being aware of the physical, emotional, or mental pain of the moment.



Self-kindness

Treating ourselves with kindness, considering our own needs.



Common Humanity

Recognizing that these experiences are a normal part of being human.