Self-Compassion, Self-Concept, and Mindfulness in Emerging Adolescents

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Focus of Study

Exploring the interconnectedness of **Self-Compassion**, **Self-Concept**, and **Mindfulness** and how they are related among emerging adolescents.

Impact of Gender?
Theory of Mind

- Theory of Mind (ToM) is the ability to understand thoughts and emotions in ourselves and others.
- ToM answers the questions of how people understand themselves and the minds of others (Wellman, 2017) and how the understanding of such states can guide behaviours (Peterson et al., 2005)
- ToM encompasses many aspects of development across the lifespan including:
  - + prosocial behaviour
  - + self-compassion
  - + self-concept
  - + mindfulness
  - + spirituality
  - + self-reflection
  - + gender identification
  - + empathy
Why is ToM important?

- The study of how adolescents think, feel, and act will provide a better understanding of their mental and social world, particularly in a school setting.

- Psychological reasoning and social behaviour can impact academic abilities, self-esteem, and gender differences during the complex transitions between childhood and adolescence – particularly in the school environment.
Processes

Self-Compassion

Self-Concept

Mindfulness

To feel compassion for others start with yourself!

What matters most is how you see yourself.

What matters most is how you see yourself.

Mindfulness

Awareness

Acceptance

Present Moment
Processes

**Self-Compassion**
- The act of caring, feeling warm, and understanding towards oneself (Peterson, 2017; Van der Gucht et al., 2017).
- Involves a healthy self-attitude and non-judgemental understanding of one’s self (including pain and failures).
- Lower negative self-judgement is related to less judgement of others, improved social behaviour, and a positive emotional state towards oneself (Neff, 2003).

**Self-Concept**

**Mindfulness**
Processes

Self-Compassion

Self-Concept

- Cognitive perception of one’s feelings and beliefs directed towards oneself (Damon & Hart, 1988).
- The ability to describe and justify one’s perceived self-worth (Bosacki, 2000) which may impact prosocial behaviour and self-esteem.
- Elements of self-concept include: self-perception of physical appearance, moral or behavioural conduct, and global sense of self or personal happiness (Harter, 1985).

Mindfulness
Processes

Self-Compassion

Self-Concept

Mindfulness

- An enhanced state of, and attention to, current reality (Brown & Ryan, 2003).
- As a balanced state of awareness, it results in the acceptance of mental and emotional states (Neff, 2003).
- The ability to develop and sustain mindful awareness is related to more positive health and well-being (Peer & McAuslan, 2016).
Empirical Evidence

- Previous research explores self-compassion, self-concept, and mindfulness but there is limited research on the interconnectedness of these three processes and how they are related.

- ToM and self-concept are a core tenet for adolescents’ educational experiences, however, the nature of these experiences remains unexplored (Bosacki et al., 2016).

- We explore:
  - how mindfulness, as an equilibrated mental perspective, is a component of self-compassion (Neff, 2003).
  - how both mindfulness and self-compassion influence positive mental health outcomes (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017).
  - how self-concept impacts the level of compassion towards oneself.
Neff’s research outlines that Self-Compassion has three principal components: kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity (Strauss et al., 2016).

Research in Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) finds that self-compassion may impact change in symptoms of depression and reduce stress in adolescents (Kuyken et al., 2010; Galla, 2016).
Empirical Evidence

- Research shows negative correlations between self-compassion and depression/anxiety or aggression and positive correlations between self-compassion and self-esteem (Bluth et al., 2006).

- Self-compassion is lowest during adolescence when compared to the rest of the lifespan (Neff, 2003) and decreases due to age which is linked to negative self-worth perceptions in 13-14 year olds (Bengtsson et al., 2016).
Empirical Evidence

- Research connects mindfulness and fear of negative evaluation which may intensify self-judgement and negative self-perception (Roemer et al., 2009).

- Research shows gender differences within the area of self-concept (Harter, 1999; Bosacki, 2016).

- Adolescent females' self-concept focuses on physical and social attributes (Bosacki, 2016) and their social self-concept influences their self-worth (Harter, 1999).
Research Questions

How are adolescents’ perceptions of self-compassion, self-concept, and mindfulness related?

How does gender impact these three psychosocial abilities and are there differences between males and females?
Method

Participants

- 146 Grade 8 students from 13 schools in Ontario, Canada (97 females, $M=13.5$ years)
- Mainly middle-class social economic background and mainly Euro-Canadian ethnicity

Procedure

- Participants were group-administered within a school setting
- Measure included standardized self-report questionnaires (pencil and paper tasks) focusing on self-compassion, self-concept, self-perception, and mindfulness.
Measures

Self-Compassion Short-Form Scale (SCS-SF, Neff, 2003; 2016)

- 12 item Likert scale self-report questionnaire
- Item ratings begin at 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) – negative subscale items are reverse scored.
- Total scores calculated by adding the means of each subscale together – higher score referring to higher self-compassion.
Measures

Perceptions of Self-Competencies Scale (PSCS; Harter, 1985)

- 18 item self-report questionnaire *
- 3 subscales – each subscale included 6 items: physical appearance, moral or behavioural conduct, global sense of self/personal happiness.
- Participants asked to select one of two sentences that most applied to themselves. **
- Subscale scores were calculated using the mean of each of the subscales’ six items.
Measures

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale-Children (MAAS-C, Benns, 2004)

- 15 item scale self-report questionnaire
- Assesses self-compassion, self-perception, and mindfulness – focusing on day-to-day experiences.
- Each statement scored from 1 (almost never) to 6 (almost always). *
- Higher scores are reflective of higher dispositional mindfulness.
Results

A total score was calculated for each of the 3 variables: Self-Compassion, Self-Concept, and Mindfulness

Significant correlations were found between each of the 3 variables:

Self-Concept ($M = 2.72, SD = .64$) and Mindfulness ($M = 2.78, SD = .80$)

$> r = .575, p = \leq 0.01, n = 135$

Self-Concept and Self-Compassion ($M = 2.78, SD = .61$)

$> r = .575, p = \leq 0.01, n = 141$

Self-Compassion and Mindfulness

$> r = .418, p = \leq 0.01, n = 141$
Results

Self-Concept and Mindfulness

- Mindfulness was a significant predictor of Self-Concept and accounted for 21.3% of variance ($F(1,133) = 36.05$).

- Increase of 1% when gender and the interaction term of gender and Mindfulness were added.

- Neither gender nor the interaction term of gender and Mindfulness were significant predictors of Self-Concept, accounting for 22.3% of the variance for Mindfulness ($F(3,131) = 12.57, p = \leq 0.01$).
Results

Self-Concept and Self-Compassion

- Self-Concept was a significant predictor of Self-Compassion and accounted for 33.1% of variance ($F(1,137) = 67.71$)

- Increase of 58.7% when gender and the interaction term of gender and Self-Concept were added

- Gender and the interaction term of gender and Self-Concept were significant predictors of Self-Compassion, accounted for 91.8% of the variance for Self-Compassion ($F(3,135) = 502.97$, $p = \leq 0.01$)
Results

Self-Compassion and Mindfulness

- Mindfulness was a significant predictor of Self-Compassion and accounted for 17.5% of variance ($F(1,139) = 29.39$)

- Increase of 8.6% when gender and the interaction term of gender and Mindfulness were added

- Accounted for 26.1% of the variance for Self-Compassion ($F(3,137) = 16.10, p = \leq 0.01$)

- Gender was significant when added, however interaction term of gender and Mindfulness was not significant
Discussion

- Findings suggest that gender played a significant role in adolescents’ Self-Concept, Self-Compassion, and Mindfulness.
- Results support research that shows how these concepts influence positive mental health outcomes (Neff, 2003).
- The impact of gender supports research that indicates how adolescent females may have lower self-compassion due to gender-role intensification and the pressure to conform to stereotypical sex roles (Bluth et al., 2016).
- Significant positive relations were found among Self-Concept, Self-Compassion, and Mindfulness as interrelated concepts, resulting in improved emotional well-being and positive mental health.
- Results support research that adolescents with high self-compassion may react to adversity and negative self-evaluations with self-kindness and lessen the potential for negative self-concept/self-esteem (Marshall et al., 2015).
Conclusions

Theoretically

- Our research highlights the interconnectedness between these three psychosocial factors, and how they impact adolescents’ perceptions of their self-worth.

Practically

- Our research provides a framework for the development of mindfulness and educational programs for youth that foster Self-Compassion and a caring and supportive view of the self.
Future Research

- Alternate studies hypothesize that adolescents with greater self-compassion report greater well-being and mental health, as well as, less perceived stress (Bluth et al., 2016). These studies were performed in a controlled laboratory setting.

- We suggest further research is needed to explore how these concepts affect the well-being and mental health of adolescents within a psychosocial setting. Additional environmental stress factors may also impact well-being and mental health in this environment.

- Previous research between Canadian and Polish youth suggests that there may be cultural influences affecting ToM and self-concept (Bosacki et al., 2016).

- Further research in Canada with a greater ethnic diversity among adolescents may illustrate how cultural differences and self-perceptions affect well-being and mental health in school settings.
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