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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION ON SUBJECTIVE HAPPINESS IN TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the predictive role of self-compassion on subjective happiness. Participants were 302 (160 women, 142 men; M age= 20.9 yr.). In this study, the Self-compassion Scale and the Subjective Happiness Scale were used. The relationships between self-compassion and subjective happiness were examined using correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. In correlation analysis, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness factors of self-compassion were found positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification factors of self-compassion were found negatively related to subjective happiness. According to regression results, subjective happiness was predicted negatively by self-judgment and isolation. Further self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness predicted subjective happiness in a positive way. Self-compassion has explained 29% of the variance in subjective happiness. The results were discussed in the light of the related literature and dependent recommendations to the area were given.

Keywords: Self-compassion, subjective happiness, multiple regression analysis

Self-compassion refers to being kind and gentle towards oneself in the face of negative experiences and perceived inadequacy and requires accepting that failure, distressful, and inadequacies are part of the human condition (Neff, 2003b; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). According to Neff (2003a, b), who put forward this construct firstly, self-compassion has three principal components: (a) Self-kindness vs. self-judgment, (b) Awareness of common humanity vs. isolation, and (c) Mindfulness vs. over-identification. The first dimension, self-kindness, involves being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of difficult times rather than being harshly self-critical. When noticing some unfavorable feature of one's personality, the emotional tone of language used towards the self is soft and supportive (Neff, 2009). Common humanity, the second dimension of self-compassion, is seeing one's both joyful and painful experiences as not personal, but as all human beings'. It is principal to self-compassion involves accepting that all humans are imperfect and that they fail (Neff, 2009). Having this kind of awareness, one perceives his/her negative experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than feeling isolated from the society (Neff, 2003a). Mindfulness, the last component of self-compassion, is a pre-conceptual awareness that helps people to accept most stressful and painful emotions without being carried away by them (Gunaratana, 1993; Martin, 1997; Neff, 2003a; Nisker, 1998; Rosenberg, 1999). The three dimensions of self-compassion are experienced differently at the phenomenological level but they interact so as to mutually enhance and engender one

another (Neff, 2003a). For example if individuals accept and tolerate their negative experiences and if they are gentle toward themselves, they may avoid denying or suppressing these experiences. And thus, when they are aware that these negative experiences are something that all humans experience, they are not trapped by over-identification (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Research on self-compassion has begun with the development of a valid and a reliable scale by Neff (2003b) and numerous studies have demonstrated that self-compassion is a powerful predictor of mental health. In these studies it was proved that self-compassion is related positively to life satisfaction, social relatedness (Neff, 2003b), psychological well-being (Akın, 2008a), self-determination (Neff, 2003a), self-deception (Akın, 2011), learning-approach goals (Akın, 2008b), social relationship, emotional intelligence, social support (Akın, Kayış, & Satıcı, 2011), reflective and affective wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, optimism, positive affect, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007), and relational-interdependent self construal (Akın & Eroglu, 2013). In contrary, the other studies found that self-compassion is negatively associated with performance-approach/avoidance goals (Akın, 2008b), depression, anxiety, rumination, thought suppression (Neff, 2003b), loneliness (Akın, 2010b), internet addiction (Iskender & Akın, 2011), submissive behavior (Akın, 2009), interpersonal cognitive distortions (Akın, 2010a), automatic thoughts (Akın, 2012a), and neuroticism (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Subjective happiness

Subjective happiness, evolved from the positive psychology movement which tries to understand factors that increase the level of well-being or happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and is defined as the balance of positive-negative affect, overall life satisfaction (Diener, 2000) and psychological state of well-being, joy, and contentment (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Subjective happiness is based on the question of why some people are happier than others or why some seem to have the capacity to be happy in the face of negative circumstances (Lyubomirsky, 2001). It is relatively consistent over time and across situations, and it has a crucial influence on how people perceive, interpret, recall, and actually experience life events in a positive or negative way (Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998).

Subjective happiness contains both an emotional and a cognitive aspect, while the former is usually further, divided into presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect, the latter is mentioned to as life satisfaction. The people with higher subjective happiness level have more positive thoughts about themselves (Campbell, 1981; Lee & Im, 2007), feel more personal control (Larson, 1989), evaluate recent experiences in their lives as more pleasant (Matlin & Gawron, 1979), and give more intense emotional reactions to positive events, but less long lasting to negative events (Seidlitz, Wyer, & Diener, 1997). Thus subjective happiness is generally assumed as a component of the good life (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003). Related with this issue, Veenhoven stated that "happiness is the degree to which a person evaluates the overall quality of his present life-as-a-whole positively and denotes an overall evaluation of life" (1997, p. 3-4). Similarly, Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) emphasized that 'one may conceivably appraise oneself as a very happy person, despite having only a somewhat happy life; also 'one may identify oneself as a generally unhappy person, despite having [experienced a number of positive emotions pleased, proud and particularly excited] in the previous month.' (p. 140).

Previous research has found subjective happiness is positively related with life satisfaction (Garcia & Siddiqui, 2009) self-perceptions of well-being (Diener, 2000; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandi, 1998), satisfying relationships, positive emotions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), mental health (Liem, Lustig, & Dillon, 2010), positive self-evaluation in young (Cheng & Furnham, 2004), and self-

enhancing bias (Lee & Im, 2007). On the other hand subjective happiness has been found to relate negatively to the depressive symptoms (Chaplin, 2006) and internet addiction (Akın, 2012b).

The present study

Although increasing number of research conducted with the self-compassion is encouraging, yet, no empirical research has examined whether self-compassion predicts subjective happiness. The goal of this study, therefore, is to investigate the predictive role of the self-compassion on subjective happiness. Previous evidence shows that both self-compassion and subjective happiness are strongly and positively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect and negatively with internet addiction and depressive symptoms. Self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, adaptive dimension of self-compassion, helps people to feel cared for, connected, and emotionally calm and thus may enhances happiness (Gilbert, 2005). These dimensions also moderate reactions to negative feelings and buffer individuals against the influence of negative self-feelings and failure experiences (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). Similarly individuals who have higher levels of happiness seem to have more positive thoughts, see themselves in a more favorable light, feel more personal control (Larson, 1989), perceive their past life evenes as more pleasant (Matlin & Gawron, 1979), and react emotionally more strong to positive events (Seidlitz et al., 1997). Therefore there may be linear positive relationship self-compassion and subjective happiness. Based on the above relationships of self-compassion and subjective happiness with psychological constructs it was hypothesized that self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, adaptive components of self-compassion, would be associated positively with subjective happiness. It was also hypothesized that self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification, maladaptive components of self-compassion, would be related negatively to subjective happiness.

Although research conducted with the authenticity is encouraging, to date, however, no empirical research has examined whether authenticity predicts hope. This study has been conducted to examine the predictive role of authenticity on hope. Authenticity is a basic human feature which influences both cognitive and psychological processes. Since authentic people treat openly, honestly, and according to their innate feelings and intentions authenticity is accepted as a key characteristic of healthy functioning and psychological well-being (Harter, 2002; Wood et al., 2008). Also authentic living may protect individual against psychological disorders. Similarly Similarly individuals who have higher levels of hope seem to have more positive thoughts, have more energy, and see themselves in a more favorable light, (Snyder, 1995). They are also less likely to have psychological symptoms and more likely to have a healthy psychological and social life and active coping strategies. Therefore there may be a positive association between authenticity and hope. Based on the above relationships of authenticity and hope, in the current research the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 1. Accepting external influence will be negatively associated with hope.

Hypothesis 2. Self-alienation will be positively associated negatively associated with hope.

Hypothesis 3. Authentic living will be positively associated with hope.

Method

Participants

Participants were 302 university students (160 women, 142 men) enrolled in various undergraduate programs at Sakarya University Faculty of Education, Turkey. These programs were mathematics education (*n=62*), science education (*n=55*), computer and instructional technology education (*n=75*), and psychological counselling and guidance (*n=56*), and Turkish education (*n=54*). Of the participants, 71 were first-year students, 90 were second-year students, 86 were third- year students, and 55 were fourth-year student. Their ages ranged from 17 to 31 years old (*M* = 20.9, *SD* = .97) and GPA scores ranged from 1.72 to 3.87.

Measures

Self-compassion Scale. Self-compassion was measured by using Self-compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın, Akın, and Abacı (2007). Self-compassion Scale is a 26-item self-report measurement and consists of six sub-scales; self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). Language validity findings indicated that correlations between Turkish and English forms were .94, .94, .87, .89, .92, and .94 for six subscales, respectively. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit. The goodness of fit index values of the model were RMSEA=.056, NFI=.95, CFI=.97, IFI=.97, RFI=.94, GFI=.91, and SRMR=.059. The internal consistency coefficients were .77, .72, .72, .80, .74, and .74 and the test-retest reliability coefficients were .69, .59, .66, .60 .69, and .56, for six subscales, respectively.

Subjective Happiness Scale. Subjective happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Turkish adaptation of this scale was done by Akın and Satici (2011). The Subjective Happiness Scale is a 4-item self-report instrument and each item was rated on a 7-point scale. This scale is a summative scale, with item 4 being reversed scored. All answers given will be totaled to indicate the level of subjective happiness, with a high number indicating a greater incidence of subjective happiness. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the uni-dimensional model was well fit to Turkish population (x^2/df=0.71, p=0.49193, RMSEA=.000, NFI=.99, CFI=1.00, IFI=1.00, RFI=.98, GFI=1.00, AGFI=.99, and SRMR=.015). The internal consistency reliability coefficient was .86 and the three-week test-retest reliability coefficient was .73.

Procedure and Statistical Analysis

Permission for participation of students was obtained from related chief departments and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of measures, all participants were told about purposes of the study. In this research, multiple linear regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationships between self-compassion and subjective happiness. The variables which were entered in multiple regression analysis were measured by summing the items of each scale. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 11.5.

Results

Descriptive Data and Correlations

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Self-kindness (*r*=.45, p<.01), common humanity (*r*=.14, p<.05), and mindfulness (*r*=.43, p<.01) were found positively and self-judgment (*r*=-.38, p<.01), isolation (*r*=-.37, p<.01), and over-identification (*r*=-.34, p<.01) were found negatively associated with subjective happiness. There were also significant correlations between dimensions of self-compassion.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Alphas, and Inter-correlations of the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-kindness	—						
2. Self-judgment	-.41**	—					
3. Common humanity	.45**	-.12*	—				
4. Isolation	-.37**	.67**	-.18*	—			
5. Mindfulness	.69**	-.34**	.46**	-.36**	—		
6. Over-identification	-.34**	.63**	-.08	.68**	-.33**	—	
7. Subjective happiness	.45**	-.38**	.14*	-.37**	.43**	-.34**	—

Mean	14.72	12.48	11.84	10.98	12.37	11.55	18.47
Standard deviation	3.92	4.39	3.20	3.69	3.13	3.82	4.66
Alpha	.73	.68	.70	.76	.84	.72	.75

*p<.05, **p<.01

Multiple Regression Analysis

Before applying regression, assumptions of multiple regression were checked. The data were examined for normality by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated normality of distributions of test scores for all tests in the current study. Outliers are cases that have data values that are very different from the data values for the majority of cases in the data set. Outliers were investigated using Mahalanobis distance. A case is outlier if the probability associated with its D^2 is .001 or less (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Based on this criterion, nine data were labeled as outliers and they were deleted. Multi-collinearity was checked by the variance inflation factors (VIF). All the VIF values were less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), which indicated that there was no multi-collinearity.

Multiple regression analysis was performed in which the dependent variable was subjective happiness and the independent variables were dimensions of self-compassion (Table 2). As many of those predictor variables were dependent on each other, forward stepwise procedure, which includes one new explanatory variable at each step, specifically the most associated with the dependent variable while being, at the same time, independent of the explanatory variables already included in the model. The criteria to include the variables from the regression model were: criterion probability-of-F-to enter <=.05.

Table 2. Summary of forward stepwise multiple regression analysis for variable predicting subjective happiness

	Variables	*B*	Standart Error of B	*β*	*t*
Model 1	Constant				
	Self-kindness	.534	.061	.449	8.695*
Model 2	Constant				
	Self-kindness	.429	.064	.361	6.676*
	Isolation	-.298	.068	-.237	-4.374*
Model 3	Constant				
	Self-kindness	.283	.083	.238	3.411*
	Isolation	-.269	.068	-.214	-3.944*
	Mindfulness	.282	.103	.190	2.727*
Model 4	Constant				
	Self-kindness	.323	.084	.272	3.825*
	Isolation	-.266	.068	-.211	-3.912*
	Mindfulness	.335	.106	.226	3.178*
	Common humanity	-.183	.083	-.126	-2.216*
Model 5	Constant				
	Self-kindness	.288	.086	.242	3.348*
	Isolation	-.163	.085	-.129	-1.915*
	Mindfulness	.333	.105	.224	3.173*
	Common humanity	-.165	.083	-.114	-1.995*
	Self-judgment	-.144	.073	-.135	-1.980*

According to the results of multiple regression analysis, summarized in Table 2, self-kindness entered the equation first, accounting for 20% of the variance in predicting subjective happiness (R^2=.20, adjusted R^2=.20, $F(1, 299)$= 75,597, p<.01). Isolation entered on the second step accounting for an additional 5% variance (R^2=.25, ΔR^2=.05, adjusted R^2=.25, $F(2, 298)$= 49,658, p<.01). Mindfulness entered on the third step accounting for an additional 2% variance (R^2=.27, ΔR^2=.02, adjusted R^2=.26, $F(3, 297)$= 36,299, p<.01). Common humanity entered on the fourth step accounting for an additional 2% variance (R^2=.28, ΔR^2=.02, adjusted R^2=.27, $F(4, 295)$= 28,811, p<.01). Self-judgment entered last, accounting for an additional 1% variance (R^2=.29, ΔR^2=.01, adjusted R^2=.28, $F(5, 295)$= 24,059, p<.01). Despite the initial regression design included mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness, over-identification, isolation, and self-judgment as independent variables, the last regression models involved mindfulness, self-kindness, isolation, mindfulness, common humanity, and self-judgment as predictors of subjective happiness and accounted for 29% of the variance. The standardized beta coefficients indicated the relative influence of the variables in last model with self-kindness (β= .24, p<.01), isolation (β= -.13, p<.01), mindfulness (β= .22, p<.01), common humanity (β= -.11, p<.01), and self-judgment (β= -.14, p<.01) all significantly influencing subjective happiness and self-kindness was strongest predictor.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate the predictive role of self-compassion and subjective happiness and significant relationships were found. To our knowledge, this is the first study investigating the relationships between these two variables. As expected, self-kindness and mindfulness -adaptive dimensions of self-compassion- predicted subjective happiness positively. In interpreting the results of the present findings, several plausible explanations exist. First of all these findings are in line with the research that has shown that subjective happiness is closely associated with the indices of psychological adjustment such as self-perceptions of well-being (Diener, 2000; Suh et al., 1998), mental health (Liem et al., 2010), life satisfaction (Garcia & Siddiqui, 2009) satisfying relationships, positive emotions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), positive self-evaluation in young (Cheng & Furnham, 2004), and self-enhancing bias (Lee & Im, 2007). Results of the current research are also consistent with the literature which demonstrated that self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness are linked to the psychological strengths such as psychological well-being (Akın, 2008a), optimism, positive affect, life satisfaction, extraversion, and agreeableness (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007).

Second, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness have been found associated with sense of autonomy and competence (Neff, 2003a), higher levels of brain activation in the left prefrontal cortex, a region associated with joy and optimism (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004), and they help to maintain optimistic expectations about the future (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Thus, people who high in self-kindness and mindfulness can feel themselves as subjectively happiness. Third individuals with self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness can cope with numerous challenging life experiences effectively and can experience more positive and less negative emotions, by treating themselves with care and kindness and not allowing themselves to be swept up by negative emotions (Neff, 2003a). Fourth, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness remove the necessity to rely on illusions or defensiveness and provide a clear perception of one's characteristics, both good and bad and thus people who have higher levels of self-kindness common humanity, and mindfulness have more accurate self-perceptions and self-appraisals (i.e., without self-enhancement or self-deprecation) than those lacking (Leary et al., 2007). Also subjective happiness related to (and also facilitate) feelings of warmth, positive thoughts, and equilibrium that people experience when they are self-compassionate (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Thus the positive

associations between self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, and subjective happiness are not surprising.

Also as hypothesized, findings of the present research demonstrated that self-judgment and isolation -maladaptive dimension of self-compassion- predicted subjective happiness in a negative way. However, over-identification did not emerge as significant predictor in the regression model. Individuals with self-judgment and isolation ruminate their own limitations (Barnard & Curry, 2011; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007), reject their own feelings and thoughts, feel ashamed from their failures (Neff, 2003a), become identified with and carried away by negative feelings and thoughts towards themselves (Neff & Vonk, 2009), and often are exposed to psychological problems (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Therefore these dimensions of self-compassion are maladaptive and so these individuals may feel less happiness. This may clarify the positive associations between subjective happiness and self-judgment and isolation.

There are several limitations of this study that should be taken into account when evaluating the findings. First (a) participants were university students and replication of this study for targeting other student populations should be made in order to generate a more solid relationship among the constructs examined in this study, because generalization of the results is somewhat limited, (b) as correlational statistics were utilized, no definitive statements can be made about causality, and (c) the data reported here for self-compassion and subjective happiness are limited to self-reported data.

Consequently, the present research provides important information about the predictors of subjective happiness. An increment in mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity will increase subjective happiness. In contrary an increment in self-judgment, over-identification, and isolation will decrease subjective happiness. This research also suggests that the encouragement of self-compassion could be highly beneficial for subjective happiness. Additionally, encouraging the development of self-compassion should be useful individuals by helping them to counter destructive self-critical tendencies and deal with their negative emotions with greater clarity and equanimity (Neff, 2003a). Clearly, however, more research needs to be done to understand how self-compassion is linked to functioning.

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