

Self-Compassion and Resiliency in Late Adolescence after a Negative Life Event

Randi L. Polizzotto, M.S.Ed.

Pace University

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PSY.D PROJECT FINAL APPROVAL FORM

NAME: Randi L. Polizzotto

TITLE OF PROJECT: Self-Compassion and Resiliency in Late Adolescence after a Negative Life Event

DOCTORAL PROJECT COMMITTEE:

PROJECT ADVISOR: Anastasia Yasik, Ph.D.
Name

Professor Pace University
Title Affiliation

PROJECT CONSULTANT: Guler Boyraz, Ph.D.
Name

Associate Professor Pace University
Title Affiliation

FINAL APPROVAL OF COMPLETED PROJECT:

I have read the final version of the doctoral project and certify that it meets the relevant requirements for the Psy.D. degree in School-Clinical Child Psychology.

Anastasia E Yasik, PhD 04/19/2021
Project Advisor's Signature Date

G. Boyraz 04/16/2021
Project Consultant's Signature Date

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

ABSTRACT

Previous studies have demonstrated self-compassion's protective effect in adolescents in relationship to negative life events and well-being levels. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the relationships among negative life events, self-compassion, and resilience among college students who recently experienced a negative life event(s). It was hypothesized that (a) greater exposure to negative life events would be associated with reduced resilience, (b) after controlling for negative life events, self-compassion would be positively related to resiliency, and (c) self-compassion would moderate the effect of negative life events on resiliency. Participants included 228 college students aged between 18 and 21 and were recruited from a small private University in the northeastern United States. Participants completed an online survey about their demographic information, negative life events, resiliency, and self-compassion tendencies. Results of the regression analyses indicated that greater exposure to negative life events was not associated with reduced resilience. Self-compassion was significantly positively related to resiliency, after controlling for negative life events. Further, self-compassion was not found to be a significant moderator of the relationship between negative life events on resiliency. Study findings build on previous literature and contribute to our understanding of self-compassion and its relationship to resiliency among college students who have recently experienced a stressful life event. The findings in this study can help to inform professionals of a therapeutic concept that may help foster resiliency abilities in older adolescents.

Keywords: self-compassion, resiliency, negative life events, adolescence, mindfulness, self-kindness, common humanity

CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Adolescence is a stage of life that can be met with frustration and confusion by important figures such as caregivers, teachers, guidance counselors, and the adolescents themselves. There are many stressors in this stage to navigate, including identity formation (Camara, Bacigalupe, & Padilla, 2014; Neff & McGeehee, 2010). Adolescents are posed with the challenge of coping with many stressors while they begin to establish their sense of self. While some adolescents may identify coping strategies successfully, others may struggle in bouncing back after a negative life event and consequently become increasingly self-critical (Bannink et al., 2013; Cheney et al., 2018; Grotevant, 1987; Marsh et al., 2018; Moksnes, Lohre, Lillefjell, Byrne, & Haugan, 2014; Wright, Creed, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010). These adolescents face the risk of future mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, or suicidal behaviors (Bannink, Broeren, van de Looij-Jansen & Raat, 2013; deWilde, Kienhorst, Diekstra & Wolters, 1992; Kelly, Soloff, Lynch, Haas & Mann, 2000). The risk that these vulnerable adolescents face poses the demand for researchers to discover and develop interventions that will promote resiliency in adolescents during this judgmental and stressful time.

Previous research has focused on the moderating relationship of self-compassion to both resiliency and well-being levels in adult (Ehret, Joormann, & Berking, 2015; Hayter & Dorstyn, 2014; Izadinia et al., 2010; López, Sanderman, Ranchor & Schroevers, 2018; Scoglio et al., 2015) and adolescent populations (Barry, Loflin, & Doucette, 2015; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017; Bluth et al., 2016; Marsh et al., 2018; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Smeets, Neff, Alberts, & Peters, 2014). Several studies have demonstrated self-compassion's protective effect in

adolescents (Bluth, Lathren, & Mullarkey, 2018; Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen & Hancock, 2007; Marshall et al., 2015; Muris, Otgaar, Meesters & Heutz, 2019; Zeller, Yuval, Nitzan-Assyag & Bernstein, 2015). These results demonstrate that self-compassion is a modifiable trait and researchers advocate for interventions that will strengthen self-compassion. By further exploring what factors can strengthen an adolescent's ability to cope, interventions can be more specifically developed in a way that can maximize adolescent's potential to persevere despite the negative stressful events that are more than likely to occur.

Although the protective and moderating role of self-compassion in the relationship between negative life events and psychological outcomes has been previously studied, there is a lack of research connecting this idea to resiliency in late adolescence (Barry, Loflin, & Doucette, 2015; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017; Bluth et al., 2016; Hayter & Dorstyn, 2014; López, Sanderman, Ranchor & Schroevers, 2018; Marsh et al., 2018; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Smeets, Neff, Alberts, & Peters, 2014). The past research does not consider the moderating role that self-compassion may play in achieving resiliency during a time (i.e., adolescence) that is characterized by self-criticism and harshness and is complicated by negative life events. Therefore, the intent of this study was to examine self-compassion's moderating effect in the relationship between negative life events in late adolescence and resiliency. By exploring this relationship, researchers, psychologists, clinicians, and other mental health professionals can better understand how to best support these adolescents as they navigate this challenging stage of life and continue to transition into adulthood.