



## CAN A COMPASSIONATE-SELF PROMOTE REAL SELF? THE ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION IN AUTHENTICITY

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### **Abstract:**

Research has shown that authenticity contributes to positive psychological functioning. Theory and research also have shown that self-compassion (being kind towards oneself in the face of adversity) promotes coping with stress and emotion. However, there is less research exploring the relationship between authenticity and self-compassion. The current research examined the relationship between self-compassion and authenticity among college students. 50 college students were given 'Self-Compassion Scale' (Neff, 2003) and 'Authenticity Inventory' (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). The statistical analysis revealed that there was a positive, moderate and statistically significant relationship between self-compassion and authenticity ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). The role of self-compassion in promoting authenticity is explored.

**Keywords:** Self-compassion and Authenticity

### **Introduction**

'I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.'

-Frederick Douglass

Research has shown varied benefits of authenticity on psychological health. People really value and aim for achieving authenticity. However, little attention has been paid to what can contribute to cultivating authenticity. In the present research, the role of self-compassion in achieving authenticity is explored.

### **Conceptualizing Authenticity:**

As per Self-determination theory, authenticity is reflected when people's actions manifest their real or core self (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Authentic individuals demonstrate self-determination and function autonomously. They are open towards encountering any experience without defences or being scared about exploring it.

Another conceptualization of authenticity draws heavily from the concept of Rogers'(1961) fully functioning or self-actualized person. This approach believes that like a fully functioning person, authentic people are open to any experience without censoring or distorting it from awareness. They live fully in the moment. They trust their inner feelings and experiences to

direct their own behaviours in the real world. They believe in freedom i.e. doing the things required to be done in the moment even if the environment is uncooperative. These people are also creative in their ways of responding to the demands of the world rather than falling back on traditional modes of behaviour (Cloninger, 1993).

Most perspectives on authenticity focus on the extent to which the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions reflect their real, true or core self. In this paper, a multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity by Kernis and Goldman (2006) was used to define authenticity. This approach states that authenticity can be divided into four, separate but interrelated, components: Awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour, relational orientation.

**Awareness:** This component involves being aware of what feelings, and qualities one possess under which circumstances and having the motivation to increase one's knowledge and awareness about one's own motives, feelings, desires, self-relevant thoughts, values, strengths and weaknesses. For example: what type of food I like or dislike? When am I more or less talkative? Being aware of one's feelings leads to complete self-acceptance, that is., integration of opposing aspects of one's self into an integrated, coherent whole instead of rigidly acknowledging only those aspects that are congruent with one's self-image (for example: being aware that one is polite at times and rude as well some other times)

**Unbiased Processing:** This component requires one to non-judgmentally processing self-related information, i.e. being objective with one's positive and negative aspects, emotions, and self-knowledge. This also requires not denying, not distorting or exaggerating the information about oneself obtained through external sources. This develops accurate view of self. Biased self-processing will lead to making inaccurate choices in one's life owing to lack of accurate self-knowledge. Individuals with high unbiased processing will also exhibit high self-compassion as they will be able hold their painful thoughts and feelings with mindful awareness instead of over identifying with them. (Goldman, Lakey, and Kernis, 2005)

**Authentic Behaviour:** This component requires one to behave in accordance with one's values, feelings or motives without being pressurized by socially sanctioned behaviours. It doesn't mean one is compulsive to be authentic, rather it is a free and natural expressions of one's core self. Sometimes, needs and values of one self and societal expectation may not match, in such circumstances; behaviour authenticity may not be possible. However, in these cases, authenticity may get reflected in at least being aware of one's needs and motives with unbiased processing of environmental information regarding self.

**Relational orientation:** This component involves being one's true self in relationships with peers or other fellow colleagues. This requires openness, sincerity, genuineness and truthfulness in close relationships. Relationships may get distorted when individuals are inauthentic, that is, when they are uncertain of who they really are or they may resist accurate self-evaluation. Thus, authentic relationships require people to be having secured attachments that develop genuine expression of true self aspects without fear of punishment or criticism.

Thus, authenticity involves four components of awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour and relational authenticity. (Kernis & Goldman, 2006)

**Self-compassion:**

According to Neff (2003), Self-compassion is an alternative conceptualization for developing a healthy attitude for self. If Compassion involves being open and non-judgemental about other's pain instead of distorting or denying or disconnecting from it. Similarly, self-compassion involves being touched by one's own suffering; being warm, and open towards one's own pain. This also includes non-judgmentally seeing one's failures and inadequacies so that one can experience it as a part of universal human experience. Though we may believe that human beings are self-centred and selfish, however, in reality, research has shown that humans are sometimes extremely harsh and critical of one's self than they ever would be. Being self-compassionate would involve seeing one's weaknesses as part of human condition and one would perceive oneself as interconnected to society. Self-compassion does not mean too much of self-centeredness or self-pity. Self-compassion requires one to be mindful of one's painful thoughts and feelings instead of non-acceptance.

**Self-compassion includes three aspects:**

- a. **Self-kindness versus Self-judgement:** Extending kindness and understanding towards self rather than harshly criticizing self.
- b. **Common Humanity versus Isolation:** Seeing one's suffering as part of common human experience rather than perceiving it as happening to oneself solely in isolation.
- c. **Mindfulness versus Over-identification:** Mindfully being aware of one's painful thoughts and suffered feelings with objective and stable awareness rather than overly identifying with one's negative thoughts.

If one is able to be self-compassionate in the face of suffering, one will stop unnecessarily criticising oneself and accept oneself fully. The harmful effect of negative emotional experience would be reduced due to mindful and stable awareness. Self-compassion will allow people to remember that suffering and personal failure happen to all and suffering is part of universal human experience. (Neff, 2003)

**Can a compassionate-self promote real self?**

Research has shown that authentic functioning contributes to developing emotional well-being and also promotes healthy self-esteem. Self-compassion, too, research has shown that, is an alternative conceptualization of a healthy sense of self. Can Self-compassion promote authentic Self? A research by Zhang et al. (2019), explored the association between self-compassion and subjective authenticity. Their study revealed a positive relationship between self-compassion and dispositional authenticity. Further studies indicated that self-compassion can enhance even state authenticity and help cultivate subjective authenticity by reducing fear of negative evaluations.

**Method:**

Participants and procedure:

50 college students between the ages of 18 to 22years participated in the survey in the month of February 2020. Participants were given questionnaires in classroom and informed consent was obtained. They completed Multicomponent Authenticity Inventory version 3 and Self Compassion scale for youth. After participants completed the survey forms, they were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

**Measures:**

Authenticity: Participants completed the 46 items Multicomponent Authenticity Inventory Version 3 (Kernis& Goldman, 2006) on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree) that assessed the four components of authenticity -awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour, relational orientation. (M =154.46, SD= 16.04).

Self-compassion: Participants completed the 26 items Self-compassion scale for youth (Neff, 2003) on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = almost never; 5 = almost always) that assessed three positive components (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and three negative components (self-judgement, isolation, and over-identification). (M =79.14, SD = 17.06)

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation values between Self-compassion & authenticity and its components**

N=50	Authenticity	Awareness	Unbiased processing	Behaviour	Relational
Self-Compassion	r=0.45, p<0.0001	r=0.46, p<0.0001	r=0.42, p<0.002	r=0.24, ns	r=0.17, ns

**Results and Discussion:**

Theory and Research both suggest that Authenticity promotes positive psychological health outcomes. Little research has been done to explore whether Self-compassion can promote Authenticity. The current study revealed that there was a positive, moderate and statistically significant relationship between Self-compassion and Authenticity (r=0.45, p<0.0001). Further analysis revealed that there was a positive, moderate and statistically significant relationship between Self-compassion and Awareness component of Authenticity (r=0.46, p<0.001). There was also a positive, moderate and statistically significant association between Self-compassion and Unbiased Processing component of Authenticity (r=0.42, p<0.002). There was a positive, low and statistically non-significant association between Self-compassion and Behavioural component of Authenticity (r=0.24,ns). A positive, low and statistically non-significant relationship between Self-compassion and relational component of Authenticity was found out (r=0.17,ns).Thus, self-compassion can promote awareness and unbiased processing of self. However, Self-compassion may not contribute in developing behavioural and relational authenticity.

A study by Tondock, B. (2017) also supported the findings of this study. The researchers found out a positive association between self-compassion and authentic leadership. The study revealed that self-compassion can promote authenticity in a leader.

As there was a positive and significant association found between Self-compassion and Authenticity, we can imply that Self-compassion can help people become more authentic and genuine selves devoid of defences and facades which can promote a healthy psychological functioning.

This implies that cultivating Self-compassion can contribute to cultivating authenticity. Out of the four components of Authenticity, Awareness of one’s feelings and motives and Unbiased Processing of self-related information from external sources may get enhanced through developing a self-compassionate healthy attitude towards self.

## **Implications and Future Direction:**

The essential contribution of this paper would be that it establishes a link between Self-compassion and Authenticity. This paper additionally also adds the information about which components of Authenticity are developed due to Self-compassion. That is, awareness and unbiased processing of self can be enhanced through Self-compassion. There may be a little role of self-compassion in developing behavioural and relational authenticity. Further research can be conducted in exploring causal links between the two variables in a nationally representative population.

## **Limitations:**

The study used questionnaires to examine the relationship between the two variables. The actual authentic and self-compassionate behaviours were not examined. Participants might have faked good or faked bad which might have biased the results. The sample was limited in size and not nationally representative. The care should be taken in future research to minimize these limitations.

## **Conclusion:**

There was a positive, moderate and statistically significant relationship between Self-compassion and Authenticity. Self-compassion can be a simple tool to develop a true, authentic and genuine self.

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