Exploring the relationship between compassion, closeness, trust, and social support in same-sex friendships

Aynı cinsiyetteki arkadaşlıklarda merhamet, yakınlık, güven ve sosyal destek arasındaki ilişkilerin incelenmesi

Leslie Ramos Salazar[1]

Abstract

The aim of this exploratory study was to explore the relationship between self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support, and to determine whether there were gender differences between variables. First, it discusses the new construct of compassion for self and others. Second, it examines the potential relationship between compassion and interpersonal communication variables such as closeness, trust, and perceived social support in same-sex friendship communication. Third, it explores whether there are gender differences in self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and perceived social support. A total of 142 university students (50 males and 93 females) participated in this study. Self-Compassion Scale, Other-Compassion Scale, Trust Scale and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support were used as data collection instruments. The result of this study revealed that males and females differ in self- and other compassion. Other compassion was positively related to closeness, trust, and social support. However, self-compassion was not related to any interpersonal construct.

Keywords: Self-compassion, compassion, closeness, trust, social support, friendships

Özet

Bu çalışmada öz-merhamet, başkalarına merhamet, kişilerarası yakınlık, güven ve sosyal destek arasındaki ilişkiler incelenmiştir. İlk olarak, yeni bir kavram olan merhamet bireyin kendisi ve başkaları açısından tartışılmıştır. İkinci olarak, aynı cinsiyetteki arkadaşlıklarda merhamet ve kişilerarası iletişimle ilgili yakınlık, güven, algılanan sosyal destek arasındaki potansiyel ilişkiler incelenmiştir. Üçüncü olarak ise, öz-merhamet, başkalarına merhamet, yakınlık, güven ve algılanan sosyal destek açısından cinsiyete gore bir farklılık olup olmadığı incelenmiştir. Katılımcılar 142 üniversite öğrencisidir (50 erkek/93 Kadın). Öz-merhamet ölçeği, Başkalarına Merhamet Ölçeği, Güven Ölçeği ve Çok Boyutlu Algılanan Sosyal Destek Ölçeği veri toplama araçları olarak kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulguları, öz-merhamet ve başkalarına merhamet açısından cinsiyete gore farklılık olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Başkalarına merhamet, yakınlık, güven ve sosyal destek ile pozitif ilişki bulunmuştur. Öz-merhamet ise herhangi bir kişilerarası yapı ile ilişkili bulunmamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öz-merhamet, merhamet, yakınlık, güven, sosyal destek, arkadaşlık

---

[1] California State University Department of Communication, Fresno, USA. E-mail: lsalazar@mail.wtamu.edu

Introduction

Suffering is painful and stressful, and it can have a negative effect on everyday life. While suffering is often unwanted, it can stimulate a person to communicate with others in relationships to help alleviate another person's suffering. People, who are characterized as compassionate, embrace others' weaknesses and shortcomings without judging them (Neff & Lamb, 2009). Acting in a compassionate way has been associated with one's psychological well-being (Neff, 2004), and it is associated with well-being in relationships (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). Because criticizing the self and others promotes suffering, compassion may help people to establish healthier relationships by accepting themselves and other people in their relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffith, 1996). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore the associations between the relatively new psychological constructs of self-compassion and other-compassion, and interpersonal constructs such as closeness, trust, and social support. More specifically, the goal of this paper is to explore the implications of compassion in same-sex friendships.

Self-compassion and other-compassion are new psychological constructs that may enhance our understanding of interpersonal relationships. Neff (2004) defines self- and other-compassion as when people care about their own suffering as well as the suffering of others. For instance, other-compassion is when individuals remain open-minded without judging a person who engages in wrongful or unethical behaviors such as stealing, cheating, or harming others (Neff, 2004). Self-compassion is the process of understanding and acknowledging the feelings of one's own pain. Neff (2003a) proposes three components of self-compassion including a) being kind to self during pain or failure, b) seeing experiences as a larger human experience, c) holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness without over-identifying with them (p. 30). Several compassion researchers make a clear a distinction between compassion and self-esteem (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2004; Leary & MacDonald, 2003). Self-esteem refers to evaluating a person's worth based on their own perceptions of themselves, which sometimes can become problematic (Leary & MacDonald, 2003). High self-esteem, for instance, can lead to negative effects such as narcissistic tendencies, prejudice, and self-centeredness (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2004; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). On the other hand, compassion toward the self and others is about feeling kindness toward self and others by recognizing the humanness of all individuals, and including the self without judgments. While self-esteem is unstable because it fluctuates from high to low, compassion is relatively stable because it does not require any external validation of one's worth (Neff, 2004; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Compassion, for instance, has been shown to be a stable trait because it is not dependent on external situations (Harter, 1999). Self-esteem; however, is more fragile and variant to external factors such as other peoples' judgments, criticisms, and potential rejections (Seligman, 1995).Self-esteem is reinforced by others' compliments, achieving goals, and external success (Kernis, 2003). One of the purposes of this study is to explore on the construct of compassion of the self and of others given that we still not yet know how it relates to relationships such as friendships.

There are several reasons for the importance of study of young adult same-sex friendships. First, quality same-sex friendships provide both mental and physical health benefits. For instance, friendships offer needed affection and support, and it can enhance a persons' emotional well-being (Cohen, 2004). Second, same-sex friendships also allow young individuals (i.e., college students) to express themselves by the means of self-disclosure and to feel a sense of connectedness (Buhrmester, 1990). Third, same-sex friendships help young adults feel accepted and valued by their peers, which help them with effective problem-solving (Berndt, 1992). Fourth, same-sex friendships have been shown to help young individuals become more adaptable to stressful conditions such as relocation, or

death of a close relative (Vernberg & Randall, 1997). These are some of the reasoning behind this study's purpose of choosing to study same-sex friendships. Fifth, same-sex friendships are often the context, to which one provides, or elicits emotional comfort or social support in distressful situations in young adults, in comparison, to other relationship types such as dating, romantic, or family relationships (Walen & Lachman, 2000). Sixth, friendships may stimulate positive emotional experiences in one's lifetime and is correlated to reports of overall happiness due to the intimacy, companionship, and emotional security one may feel in these relationship types over other relationship types (i.e., dating, romantic) (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Demir & Özdemir, 2010).

Compassion and Relationships

Research suggests that having compassion in one's relationship to the self is beneficial. Compassion has been related to individual well-being and mental health (Neff, 2003b). Research has demonstrated that there are mental health benefits of engaging in self-compassion and other-compassionate communication (Neff, 2004). Furthermore, research has shown that those who engage in compassionate behaviors report a higher satisfaction in life and feel more socially connected to others (Neff, 2004). Self-compassion is related to increased self-reports of happiness, optimism, initiative, and connectedness in relationships (Neff, 2009; Neff, Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). Other research suggests that compassion is correlated with higher emotional intelligence, which may strengthen interpersonal relationships (Neff, 2003; 2004). Those who do not use compassionate communication are often ridden with anxiety, depression, and instability, which can affect their communication in their close relationships (Neff, 2003b). Similarly, other studies suggest that compassionate communication toward self and others promotes healthy adaptive coping strategies when dealing denial and social rejection (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Dejitthirat, 2004).

Accordingly, compassion may be beneficial to one's reactions in interpersonal relationships. For instance, a recent study found that the practice of compassion is shown to be positively associated to how well individuals resolve their reoccurring conflicts in close relationships (Zhang, 2014). Individuals who elicit anger instead of compassion, on the other hand, were shown to not cooperate well with conflict in their relationships (Zhang, 2014). Also, the perception of conflict resolution, in turn, mediated the effects of compassion on how confident both partners feel about managing serial arguments in their relationship, which may promote relational wellbeing (Zhang, 2014). On the same note, another study found that the use of compassion and constructive conflict styles in relationships is mediated through interpersonal processes due to the reactivity level of the emotions and the interaction goal (Zhang, Andreychik, Sapp, & Arendt, 2014). Zhan and Andreychik (2013) also found that relational closeness has effects on interactional goals, emotions such as compassion, and integrating and obliging conflict styles. Similarly, previous studies have shown that nurturing positive emotions in young adults such as love and compassion is connected to enacting prosocial behavior, which may be beneficial to friendship relationships (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberth, 2005; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010).

Self-compassion has also been attributed to being able to be compassionate to others in relationships (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Dejitthirat, 2004). For instance, some research suggests that compassion increases individuals' self-esteem and positive emotions such as happiness, which may help individuals, treat their own partners with compassion in their relationships (Rosenberg, 1965). Similarly, Murray, Derrick, Leder and Holmes (2008) found that people with self-compassion and other-compassion were better able to trust their partners in their relationships. Another study found support that high self-esteem has also been associated with individuals reporting closeness with their partners (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Other research has found that compassion may also be beneficial

to maintain relationships by promoting positive feelings in relationships (Murray et al., 1996). More specifically, self-compassion is crucial to friendships because it may induce positive feeling states, which provides inner self-worth in individuals, which make them more cooperative toward their friends (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion becomes crucial to study when negative experiences occur in young adult friendships, which may serve to preserve the kindness process of the self, with can deter negative self-harm (Bennett-Goleman, 2001). When difficult moments arise, individuals can become disconnected to others who may be potential avenues of social support, which could continue an individual's experience of suffering (Bennett-Goleman, 2001).

The effects of gender on compassion have also been examined. Neff (2003) found that females had less self-compassion than males (Neff et al., 2005; Neff et al., 2008; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Raes, 2010). On the other hand, Neff, Kirkpatrick, and Rude (2007) did not find any gender differences in self-compassion and other-compassion. Similarly, Neff et al. (2008) and Iskender (2009) did not find sex differences among undergraduate students in other countries such as Taiwan and Turkey. Also, there is evidence that males emphasize emotional restrictiveness, which reduce their motivation to practice compassion because they are uncomfortable being vulnerable toward others despite facing psychological distress (Levant, 2011). These previous studies suggest that there are mixed gender findings.

Self-compassion and other-compassion is relevant to connecting with other people. Interpersonal connection can be enhanced when individuals perceive a common humanity among themselves and others (Collins, 1997). This suggests that perceived closeness among friends may encourage individuals to express and feel compassion toward them, which can enhance the quality of their friendships. Closeness is defined as the social connection, exchange of affection, and perceived intimacy between people (Burnett & Demnar, 1996). Closeness has also been found to be a critical component of same-sex friendships (Parks & Floyd, 1996). Studies show that compassion has been associated with feeling connected to other people including friends (Neff, 2003). Similarly, Neff and colleagues (2007) found that self-compassion was positively correlated with social connection with others. Closeness is an important selected concept in the context of friendships because research has shown that a lack of closeness or too much independence tends to promote isolation and depressive symptoms (Yamaguchi, Kim, & Akutsu, 2014).

Another important relationship construct to examine is trust, which is defined as "the extent to which one is willing to ascribe good intentions to and have confidence in the words and actions of other people" (Cook and Wall, 1980, p. 39). Trust has been shown to be associated with closeness in the development of friendship relationships (Gummerum & Keller, 2008). Other studies have found that self-compassion has been associated with agreeableness (Neff et al., 2007), which has elements of trust in relationships such as friendships and romantic relationships (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Liu and Wang (2010) found that compassion has influence on how individuals' interactional goals (i.e., cooperation), and this is mediated by the extent to which an individual trusts another person in the interaction process. Unfortunately, no studies have examined whether self-compassion and other-compassion are related to closeness and trust in same-sex friendships.

Self-compassion may also be related to the extent to which individuals perceive social support from others. When difficult situations occur in life, friends act as a buffer to aid individuals in coping with stressful events (Neff, 2003). Social support is defined as the belief of being "cared for and loved" and "esteemed and valued" as a contributor of "a network of communication and mutual obligation" (Cobb, 1976, p. 303). Previous research has found associations between self-worth, self-esteem, and social support in relationships (Brown, Andrews, Harris, Adler, & Bridge, 1986). Few researchers have also associated the degree of closeness in relationships with whether individuals reported

receiving social support in their relationships (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990; Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983). Social support in friendships is shown to be related to high quality ratings in friendships (Steptoe, Shankar, Demakakos, & Wardle, 2013; Rodebaugh et al., 2014). Social support that is perceived to be adequate is more likely to enhance their satisfaction in friendships relationships (Afifi, Afifi, Merrill, Denes, & Davis, 2013). However, individuals with social anxiety disorder often tend to report low quality friendships when they do not receive adequate social support (Rodebaugh et al., 2014). Further, rumination in combination with poor support often lead to perceived dissatisfaction and enhanced anxiety in the context of friendships (Affifi et al., 2013). Thus far, no previous research has examined the potential relationship between self-compassion, other-compassion, and obtaining social support from friends, and this study strives to explore how these variables are correlated.

Studies have confirmed that same-sex friendships are often more likely to be characterized by greater closeness, intimacy, and social support (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995; Wright, 1998; Winstead & Griffin, 2001). Closeness is also expressed in a gendered manner, such that women tend to exhibit more intimate disclosure than men do, and this disclosure tends to enhance the closeness of female same-sex friendships (Bowman, 2008). However, men's same-sex friendships can increase in closeness if the self-disclosure increases when support is needed, which can enhance friendship relationships (Bowman, 2008). More specifically, female same-sex friendships are known to be more intimate and more socially supportive than male same-sex friendships (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Female same-sex friendships are also characterized by intimate conversations and more self-disclosure (i.e., sharing of personal information) than male friendships. Male friendships, on the other hand, are known to be characterized with greater activities such as playing video games, or playing a sport (Winstead & Griffin, 2001).

The Present Study

There is a current need for more research on a relatively new construct of compassion and interpersonal communication constructs. Thus far, researchers have not explored the potential relationship between compassion and interpersonal related constructs such as closeness, trust, and social support. Thus, the present study seeks to explore the interrelationships between self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support in same-sex friendships. Because no research has explored the potential relationship among these constructs in same-sex friendships, this study will explore to determine whether compassion is linked to how individuals communicate with others in their same-sex friendships. Therefore, the following research questions will be investigated.

RQ1: What are the interrelationships between self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support?
RQ2: Is there a difference between males and females and their reported use of compassionate communication for self and others?
RQ3: Is there a difference between males and females and their reported experience of closeness, trust, and social support?

Method

Participants

A total of 142 students were recruited from a large southwestern university in the United States of America after obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, which included 50 males and 93 females

aged between 18 and 42 years of age (*M* = 20.74, *SD* = 3.13). Participants were recruited in lower-division communication courses and participants were invited to complete a survey for extra credit about compassion and same-sex friendship communication. The ethnicities of the participants included 65.5% Caucasian/Non-Hispanic, 17.6% Hispanic/Latino(a), 0.7% African-American/Black, 9.9% Asian-American/Asian, 0.7% Native-American/American Indian, and 5.6% Mixed/Other.

Procedures

Participants were instructed to complete and return a survey questionnaire using the SurveyMonkey software about same-sex friendship communication in exchange for extra credit. Participants were provided with a web link of the online questionnaire through their course website (i.e., Blackboard) and had two weeks to complete this 10-15 minute study. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants printed and submitted the last page of the survey as evidence of completion of this survey so that their responses remained anonymous. Participants were asked demographic questions and were asked to think about a same-sex friend and to respond to questions on the questionnaire using this same same-sex friend in mind.

Measures

Self-compassion Scale: Self-compassion was measured using Neff's (2003) 26-item Self-Compassion Scale, which consists of six subscales: self-kindness, self-judgment, awareness of common humanity, mindfulness, isolation, and over-identification. Sample items include "I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain," "When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself," and "When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need." Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never* to 5 = *almost always*), with higher scores representing greater self-compassion. The alpha reliability was α = .94 (Neff, Hsieth, & Dejitterat, 2005) in a previous study and α = .81 in this study.

 Other-compassion Scale: Other-compassion was measured using Pommier's (2011) Other-Compassion Scale, which is a 24-item Likert-type scale. Sample items include "I don't feel emotionally connected to people in pain," "I feel detached from others when they tell me their tales of woe," and "If I see someone going through a difficult time, I try to be caring toward that person." The scale ranges from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*), with higher scores representing greater other-compassion. The alpha reliability was α = .87 (Pommier, 2011) in a previous study and α = .86 in this study.

 Closeness. Closeness was measured by using Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. This scale is a Likert-type one-item scale which asks individuals to select the perceived closeness using a series of six Venn-diagrams that overlap each other, and one circle represents the Self and the other circle represents the Other. For example, the first diagram displays a visual of two separate circles with no overlap, while the sixth diagram displays a visual of two circles that overlap the most out of all of the diagrams. The alpha reliability was previously α = .97 (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) and α = .96 in this study.

 Trust Scale: Trust was measured the 7-point Likert-type Trust Scale by Rempel and Holmes (1986). Sample items include, "I have found that my friend is a thoroughly dependable person especially when it comes to things that are important," "I feel completely secure in facing unknown, new situations because I know my friend will never let me down," and "My friend has not always proven to be trustworthy in the past and there are times when I am hesitant to let my friend engage in

activities that make me feel vulnerable." The scale ranges from 1 (*SD*) strongly disagree to 7 (*SA*) strongly agree. The alpha reliability was α = .89 (Rempel & Holmes, 1986) and α = .81 in this study.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: Social Support was measured by using the Social Support subsection of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), a 7-point Likert-type scale. Sample items included "My friends really try to help me," "I can count on my friends when things go wrong," and "I can talk about my problems with friends. The scale indicates a continuum from 1 (*SD*) strongly disagree to 7 (*SA*) strongly agree. The alpha reliability was α = .85 (Zimet et al., 1986) and α = .84 in this present study.

Results

To address the first research question several Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to assess the correlation between self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support (see Table 1). There was a positive correlation between closeness and other-compassion, $r = .27$, $p < .001$, trust and other-compassion, $r = .35$, $p < .001$, social support and other-compassion, $r = .28$, $p < .001$, trust and closeness, $r = .52$, $p < .001$, social support and closeness, $r = .41$, $p < .001$, and finally, social support and trust, $r = .63$, $p < .001$. There was no significant correlation between other-compassion and self-compassion, closeness and self-compassion, trust and self-compassion, and social support and self-compassion.

Table 1. *Reporting descriptive statistics, and inter-correlations of the variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.Self-compassion	1				
2.Other-compassion	0.05	1			
3. Closeness	0.12	.27**	1		
4. Trust	0.14	.35**	.52**	1	
5.Social support	0.13	.28**	.41**	.63**	1
Mean	78.45	99.8	4.13	92.44	23.84
Standard deviation	15.49	11.94	1.36	13.29	4.37

** p < 0.01.

To analyze research question two, two independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare males' and females' scores of self-compassion and other-compassion. There was a significant difference in the scores for males (*M* = 84.36, *SD* = 15.59) and females (*M* = 75.04, *SD*= 14.49) in their reports for self-compassion, $t (127) = 3.42$, $p = .001$. These results suggest that gender has an effect on self-compassion. Specifically, the results suggest that males reported to be more self-compassionate than the females did. Further, there was a significant difference in the scores for males (*M* = 95.38, *SD* = 12.62) and females (*M* = 101.83, *SD* = 11.38) in their reports for other-compassion, $t (127) = -2.98$, $p = .004$. These results suggest that sex has an effect on other-compassion. More specifically, the results suggest that females reported being more other-compassionate than the males did.

A series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare males with females on measures of closeness, trust, and social support to assess research question three (see Table 2). There were no significant differences in the scores for males and females in their reports for closeness, trust, or social support. The results suggest that females and males do not differ in their perceptions of closeness, trust, and social support derived from their same-sex friendships.

Table 2. *Reporting gender differences in self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support*

	Female (n = 82)		Male (*n* = 47)				
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Self-compassion	75.04	14.49	84.36	15.59	3.421	127	0.001
Other-compassion	101.83	11.38	95.38	12.62	-2.975	127	0.004
Closeness	4.25	1.3	3.85	1.47	-1.625	127	0.107
Trust	92.55	14.55	91.47	11.07	-0.441	127	0.66
Social Support	24.13	4.33	23	4.46	-1.416	127	0.159

**p < .001

Discussion

The aim of this exploratory study was to explore the relationship between self-compassion, other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support, and to determine whether there were gender differences between variables. Results showed that there were no significant relationships between self-compassion and any of the other tested variables including other-compassion, closeness, trust, and social support. One reason for this lack of significant support may be because self-compassion is negatively associated with self-criticism (Yamaguchi, Kim, & Akutsu, 2014). Some research has found that when individuals with low self-compassion criticize themselves within relationships, it helps them correct their own flaws within relationships, which motivates them to perform their best in relationships (Hewit & Flett, 1991). Other research suggest that individuals who score highly on self-compassion may already feel elements of closeness and trust within themselves, which suggests that these individuals may not need external social support in their relationships (Witcher, Alexander, Onwuebuzie, Collins, & Witcher, 2007). Further, other research suggests that those with low self-compassion are motivated to seek self-change in order to establish trust and social support in relationships (McNulty & Rusell, 2010). While a previous study has shown that self-compassion may influence how one might treat others in young adult same-sex friendships (Dunning, 2002), this study did not support this assumption. Thus, self-compassion might not be a necessary component in interpersonal relationships, but mainly a critical component in the relationship with the self. Future studies may need to continue to investigate whether self-compassion moderates any interpersonal outcomes, especially as this is a pure correlational study.

On the other hand, the findings revealed significant relationships between other-compassion and closeness, trust, and social support. There were also significant relationships between closeness and trust, social support, and between social support and trust. This may be the case because other-compassion is stemmed from how a person relates to oneself rather than toward others (Neff, 2003b).

In the context of friendships, a previous study suggests that friendship relationships tend to cultivate a norm of empathy, closeness, trust, and social support, which serves as a buffer effect to stress (Ying, 2008). Additionally, same-sex friendships tend to provide individuals with emotional and instrumental support in moments of distress (Sapadin, 1988). A university study of college same-sex friendships found that interpersonal competencies and self-disclosure were the main predictors of perceived quality in friendships (Festa, Barry, Sherma, & Grover, 2012). In addition, some studies suggest that compassion for others is associated with a person's ability to correct their own behavior to support others in their relationships (Cosley, McCoy, Saslow, & Epel, 2010). When individuals suffer from serious distress (i.e., depression), friends have been shown to show compassion and empathy, which may serve as a form of peer social support intervention (Egbert, Miraldi, & Murniadi, 2014). These findings also extend previous scholarship that show that compassion is correlated to the interconnection and interdependence among young adults, which can best cultivate quality friendships (Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008).

Further, there were no significant differences between gender and the characteristics of closeness, trust, and social support. This finding is supportive of the mixed results in the research. For instance, some researchers have found that same-sex friendships do not differ in individuals' perceptions of closeness and trust in a relationship (Helgeson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987; Maddux & Brewer, 2005). On the other hand, some researchers suggest that there are some social support differences in same-sex friendships (Johnson, Hobfoll, & Zalcberg-Linetzy, 1993). Similarly, research has found gender differences in the degree of closeness in friendships (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, & Gridley, 2003). These findings suggest that there might be no significant gender differences in perceptions of closeness, trust, and social support in same-sex friendships. The gender socialization hypothesis suggests that men and women are socialized to enact a different set of behaviors toward others in the context of friendships (Ptacek, Smith, & Zanas, 1992). For instance, women are socialized to elicit emotion-focus behavior to build trust and intimacy, while men are socialized to elicit more problem-solving behavior in relationships (Ptacek, Smith, & Zanas, 1992). Also, young women have been shown to report valuing the establishment of strong social bonds such as closeness, trust, and social support in same-sex friendships than men because they are expected to be more relationship-oriented than men (Collins & Repinski, 1994; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). According to gender socializations, women naturally give and receive more peer support than men do (Rosario, Shinn, Morch, & Huckabee, 1988), however, other studies find that men and women are not significantly different in their reports of engaging in relationship-based behaviors (i.e., peer support) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Johnson, 2004). Also, both young men and women feel loneliness and both desire to build and maintain trust, closeness, and social support in their relationships, and thus, they both may enact other-centered attitudes and behaviors in friendships (Cecen, 2008). Therefore, this finding suggests that both men and women report similar degrees of closeness, trust, and social support in their same-sex friendships.

In addition, this study found sex differences in individuals' reports of self- and other-compassion. Few studies have found that women tend to be more self-compassionate and other-compassionate in comparison to men (Levenson, 2009). A study suggested that women tend to be more other-compassionate than men to maintain their relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997). The findings of this study are consistent with another study, which showed that women are more self-critical than men, and because of this self-criticism, women report lower levels of self-compassion than do men (Baker & McNulty, 2011). One reason why women might be more critical toward themselves is that women have been shown to be judgmental toward their self-image and their body-image given the social pressures of beauty, femininity, poise, and nurturance (Sands, 1998). Women also tend to engaging in

self-scrutinizing behaviors as they evaluate their own physical appearance and their performance of the expected feminine roles (i.e., cooking, cleaning) (Moradi & Huang, 2008), which might help explain why women might report being less compassionate toward themselves than the men did.

Further, a reason for why women may report being more compassionate toward their same-sex friends might be that women are often socialized to be more emotional, self-disclosive, and supportive to others, and thus, elicit these characteristics in their relationships (Grewal & Salovey, 2006; Sunewy, 2004). Women are also found to be more emotionally expressive than men (Lafferty, 2004). Further, women are socialized to be nurturers toward others in the context of their close relationships such as friendships (Argyle, 1990). This socialization has shown that women are more skillful in demonstrating empathy toward others who may be suffering (Trobst, Collins, & Embree, 1994; Argyle, 1990). Women have also been shown to be more sensitive toward others' problems in social interactions and are motivated to avoid being rejected by others than men do (Hartke, King, Heinemann, & Semik, 2006; Quartana, Schmaus, & Zakowski, 2005). On the other hand, men have been shown to display emotional distance, lack of intimate self-disclosure, and less comfort in providing support to others given the social expectation of masculinity (Green & Addis, 2012), which might affect their performance of compassion toward other men in the context of friendships. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that there are sex differences in men and women's reports of their use of compassion in their same-sex friendships.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, conclusions cannot be drawn from this study because this study did not employ an experimental approach. Future studies should use an experimental design with a control and experimental groups to determine whether there are any casual relationships among the variables examined in this study. Second, this study targeted a college student sample. While friendships are common college samples, this sample is appropriate, sampling other populations can possibly increase generalizability. Third, the sample size is relatively small. Fourth, the age range of the participants was wide, which may result in developmental differences that may influence the results of this study.

This study offers a new avenue for future research that can link the psychological construct of compassion toward self and others and interpersonal communication. Self and other-compassion can be developed and taught (Neff & McGeehee, 2009) with programs such as Gilbert's (2009) Compassionate Mind Training (CMT), which helps individuals develop compassion skills to relate better to the self and to others. Future studies need to replicate a similar study with a different population and with a larger sample to overcome issues of generalizability and to strengthen the relationships between the variables of interest. Future studies may also compare potential differences in compassion in a variety of different relationships such as cross-sex friendships, dating relationships, married relationships, cohabiting relationships, or workplace friendships. A future study may also adopt a variety of methodological strategies such as using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, longitudinal surveys, or observational approaches. Finally, other studies may adopt a variety of theoretical frameworks to determine the predictors of compassion. For instance, does an individual's attachment style determine if secure individuals are more likely to be other-oriented in their friendships in the context of suffering than insecure attachment styles?

The study of both self-compassion and other-compassion in relationships may expand the literature of interpersonal communication in the context of same-sex friendships. This study sought to explore the relationships between compassion and interpersonal constructs, and future research should

continue to explore this construct to understand its role in interpersonal relationships. Studies should continue to explore the role of compassion in same-sex friendships and expand it to a variety of different contexts (i.e., workplace, school, church). Compassion may be useful concept to continue to both nurture and maintain quality same-sex friendships. If compassion is related to closeness, trust, and social support, then this information might help college students, or young individuals who are dealing with distress who may benefit with having their intimate, trusting friend enact compassion as needed. If a college student is dealing with problems, then it might be a worthy idea to seek peer support from a trustworthy friend. In addition, if a woman needs validation, or is being overly self-critical, she may benefit from learning more about self-compassion. Compassion is a fruitful construct and scholars may benefit from continuing their exploration of this important construct.

References

Afifi, T., Afifi, W., Merrill, A. F., Denes, A., & Davis, S. (2013). "You need to stop talking about this!" Verbal rumination and costs of social support. *Human Communication Research, 39*(4), 395-421. http://dx.doi.org/10.111/here.12012

Argyle, M. (1990). *The psychology of interpersonal behavior*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63,* 596-612.

Baker, L. R., & McNulty, J. K. (2011). Self-compassion and relationship maintenance: The moderating roles of conscientious and gender. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 10*, 1-21.

Barnard, L. K., & Curry, J. F. (2011). Self-compassion: Conceptualizations, correlates, and interventions. *Review of General Psychology, 4*, 289-303.

Baumeister, R. F., Smart, L., & Boden, J. M. (1996). Relation of threatened egotism to violence and aggression: The dark side of high self-esteem. *Psychological Review, 103*, 5-33.

Bennett-Goleman, T. (2001). *Emotional alchemy: How the mind can heal the heart*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Berndt, T. J. (1992). Friendship and friends' influence in adolescence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 1*, 156-159.

Brown, G. W., Andrews, B., Harris, T., Adler, Z., & Bridge, L. (1986). Social support, self-esteem, and depression. *Psychological Medicine,16*, 813-831.

Bowman, J. M. (2008). Gender role orientation and relational closeness: Self-disclosive behavior in same-sex male friendships. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 16*(3), 316-330.

Buhrmester, D. (1990). Intimacy of friendship, interpersonal competence, and adjustment during pre-adolescense and adolescence. *Child Development, 61*, 1101-1111.

Buhrmester, D., & Prager, K. (1995). Patterns and functions of self-disclosure during childhood and adolescence. In Rotenberg, K. J. Rotenberg (Ed.), *Disclosure process in children and adolescents* (pp. 10-56). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Burnett, P. C. , & Demnar, W. (1996). The relationship between closeness to significant others and self-esteem in early adolescence. *Journal of Family Studies, 2*(2), 121-129.

Cecen, A. R. (2008). The effects of gender and loneliness levels on ways of coping among university students. *College Student Journal, 42*(2), 510-516.

Cobb, S. (1976). Social support as moderator of life stress. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 38*, 300-314.

Cohen, S. (2004). Social relationships and health. *American Psychologist, 59*, 676-684.

Collins, W. A., & Repinski, D. J. (1994). Relationships during adolescence: Continuity and change in interpersonal perspective. In R. Montemayor, G. R. Adams, & T. P. Gullota (Eds.), *Personal relationships during adolescence* (pp. 7-36). California: Sage Publications.

Cook, J., & Wall, T. (1980). New work attitude measures of trust, organizational commitment and personal need non-fulfillment. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 53,* 39–52.

Cosley, B. J., McCoy, S. K., Saslow, L. R., & Epel, E. S. (2010). Is compassion for others stress buffering? Consequences of compassion and social support for physiological reactivity to stress. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46*(5), 816-823.

Cross, S. E., & Madson, L. (1997). Models of the self: Self-construals and gender. *Psychological Bulletin, 1122*, 5-37.

Demir, M., & Özdemir, M. (2010). Friendship, need satisfaction and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 11*(2), 243-259.

Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2008). *Rethinking happiness: The science of psychological wealth*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Dunkel-Schetter, C., & Skokan, L. A. (1990). Determinants of social support provision in personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7*(4), 437-450.

Dunning, D. (2002). The relation of self to social perception. In M. R. Leary & J.P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 251-441). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Egbert, N., Miraldi, L. B., & Murniadi, K. (2014). Friends don't let friends suffer from depression: How threat, efficacy, knowledge, and empathy relate to college students' intentions to intervene on behalf of a depressed friend. *Journal of Health Communication, 19*(4), 460-477. doi:

Festa, C. C., Barry, C. M., Sherman, M. F., & Grover, R. L. (2012). Quality of college students' same-sex friendships as function of personality and interpersonal competence. *Psychological Reports, 110*, 283-296.

Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1980). An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 21*, 219-239.

Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind*. London: Constable.

Green, J. D., & Addis, M. E. (2012). Individual differences in masculine gender socialization as predictive of men's psychological responses to negative affect. *International Journal of Men's Health, 11*, 63-82.

Grewal, D., & Salovey, P. (2006). Emotional Intelligence. *Mente y Celebro, 16*, 10-20.

Gummerum, M., & Keller, M. (2008). Affection, virtue, pleasure, and profit: Developing an understanding of friendship closeness and intimacy in western and Asian societies. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 32*(3), 218-231.

Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Hartke, R. J., King, R. B., Heinemann, A. W., & Semik, P. (2006). Accidents in older caregivers of persons surviving stroke and their relation to caregiver stress. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 51*, 150-156.

Hegelson, V. S., Shaver, P., & Dyer, M. (1987). Prototypes of intimacy and distance in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 4*(2), 195-233.

Hendrick, S. S., Hendrick, C., & Adler, N. L. (1988). Romantic relationships:Love, satisfaction, and staying together. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54,* 980–988.

Hewitt, P.L., & Flett, G. L. (1991). Perfectionism in the self and social contexts: Conceptualization, assessment, and association with psychopathology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 456-470.

Hook, M.K., Gerstein, L. H., Detterich, L., & Gridley, B. (2003). How close are we? Measuring intimacy and examining gender differences. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 81*(4), 462-472.

Iskender, M. (2009). The relationship between self-compassion, self-efficacy, and control belief about learning in Turkish university students. *Social Behavior and Personality, 37*(5), 711-720.

Johnson, H. D. (2004). Gender, grade, and relationship differences in emotional closeness within adolescent friendships. *Adolescence, 39*(154), 243-255.

Johnson, R., Hobfoll, S. E., & Zalcberg-Linetzy, A. (1993). Social support, knowledge, and behavior and relational intimacy: A dyadic study. *Journal of Family Psychology, 6*(3), 266-277.

Kernis, M. H. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice, 10*, 144-156.

Lafferty, J. (2004). The relationships between gender, empathy, and aggressive behaviors among early adolescents. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences of Engineering, 64*(1), 6377B.

Leary, M. R., & MacDonald, G. (2003). Individual differences in self-esteem: A review and theoretical integration. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 401-418). New York: Guilford Press.

Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E.., Allen, A. B., & Hancok, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(5), 887-904.

Lempers, J. D., & Clark-Lempers, D. S. (1992). Young, middle, and late adolescents' comparison of the functional importance of five important relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 2*, 53-96.

Levant, R. F. (2011). Research in the psychology of men and masculinity using the gender role strain paradigm as a framework. *American Psychologist, 66*, 765-776.

Levenson, M. R. (2009). Gender and wisdom: The roles of compassion and moral development. *Research in Human Development, 6*(1), 45-59.

Liu, M., & Wang, C. (2010). Explaining the influence of anger and compassion on negotiators' interaction goals: An assessment of trust and distruct as two distinct mediator. *Communication Research, 37*(4), 443-472.

Maddux, W. W., & Brewer, M. B. (2005). Gender differences in the relational and collective bases of trust. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 8*(2), 159-171.

McNulty, J. K., & Russell, V. M. (2010). When "negative" behaviors are positive: A contextual analysis of the long-term effects of problem-solving behaviors on changes in relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*, 587-604.

Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., Gillath, O., & Nitzberg, R. A. (2005). Attachment, caregiving, and altruism: Boosting attachment security increases compassion and helping. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology, 89*, 817.

Neff, K. D. (2003a). Development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity, 2,* 223-250.

Neff, K. D. (2003b). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity, 2*, 85-102.

Neff, K. D. (2004). Self-compassion and psychological well-being. *Constructivism in the Human Sciences, 9*(2), 27-37.

Neff, K. D., & Lamb, L. M. (2009). Self-compassion. In S. Lopez (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of positive psychology* (pp. 561–573). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Neff, K. D., Hsieh, Y-P, & Dejitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Psychology Press, 4*, 263-287.

Neff, K. D., Kirkpatrick, K., & Dejitthirat, K. (2004). *Self-compassion: Research on promising alternative self-attitude construct.* Poster presented at the 5th Annual Convention of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Austin, Texas.

Neff, K. D., Pisitsungkagarn, K., & Hsieh, Y.-P. (2008). Self-compassion and self-construal in the United States, Thailand, and Taiwan. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 39*, 267-285.

Neff, K. D., & Vonk, R. (2009). Self-compassion versus global self-esteem: Two different ways of relating to oneself. *Journal of Personality, 77*, 23-50.

Parks, M. R., & Floyd, K. (1996). Meanings for closeness and intimacy in friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 13*, 85-107.

Piff, P. K., Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., Cheng, B. H., & Keltner, D. (2010). Having less, giving more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99*, 771-784.

Pommier, E. A. (2011). The compassion scale. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 72*, 1174.

Ptacek, J. T., Smith, R. E., & Zanas, J. (1992). Gender, appraisal and coping: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Personality, 60*, 745-770.

Quartana, P. J., Schmaus, B. J., & Zakowski, S. G. (2005). Gender, neuroticism, and emotional expressivity: Effects on spousal constraints among individuals with cancer. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*, 769-776.

Rempel, J. K. & Holmes, J. G. (1986) How do I trust thee? *Psychology Today. 20(2)*, 28-34.

Rodebaugh, T. L, Lim, M. H., Fernandez, K. C., Langer, J. K., Weisman, J. S., Tonge, N., Levinson, C. A., & Shumaker, E. A. (2014). Self and friends' differing views of social anxiety disorder's effect on friendships. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 123*(4), 715-724.

Rosario, M., Shin, M., Morch, H., & Huckabee, C. B. (1988). Gender differences in coping and social supports: Testing socialization and role constraint theories. *Journal of Community Psychology, 16*, 55-69.

Sapadin, L. A. (1988). Friendship and sex: Perspectives of professional men and women. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 5*, 387-403.

Sarason, I. G., Levine, H. M., Basham, R. B., & Sarason, B. R. (1983). Assessing social support: The social support questionnaire. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 127-139.

Seligman, M. E. (1995). *The optimistic child*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Steptoe, A., Shankar, A., Demakakos, P., & Wardles, J. (2013). Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 110*, 5797-5801.

Sunew, E. Y. (2004). Emotional intelligence in school-aged children: Relations to early maternal depression and cognitive functioning. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences of Engineering, 65*(4), 2116B.

Trobst, K. K., Collins, R. L., & Embree, J. M. (1994). The role of emotion in social support provision: gender, empathy and expression of distress. *Journal of Social and Personal Relations, 11*(1), 45-62.

Vernberg, E. M., & Randall, C. J. (1997). Homesickness after relocation during early adolescence. In M. Van Tilburg & A. Vingerhoets (Eds.), *Home is where the heart is: The psychological aspects of permanent and temporary geographical moves* (pp. 165-180). Tilburg, the Netherlands: Tilburg University Press.

Walen, H. R., & Lachman, M. E. (2000). Social support and strain from partner, family, and friends: Costs and benefits for men and women in adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17*, 5-30.

Winstead, B. A., & Griffin, J. L. (2001). Friendship styles. In J. Worrell (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of women and gender* (pp. 481-492). Boston: Academic Press.

Witcher, L. A., Alexander, E. S., Onwuebuzie, A. J., Collins, K. M., & Witcher, A. E. (2007). The relationship between psychology students' level of perfectionism and achievement in a graduate-level research methodology course. *Personality and Individual Differences, 43*, 1396-1405.

Wright, P. H. (1998). Toward an expanded orientation to the study of sex differences in friendship. In D. J. Canary, & K. Dindia (Eds.), *Sex differences and similarities in communication: Critical essays and empirical investigation of sex and gender in interaction* (pp. 41-63). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Yamaguchi, A., Kim, M., & Akutsu, S. (2014). The effects of self-construals, self-criticism, and self-compassion on depressive symptoms. *Personality and Individual Differences, 68*, 65-70.

Ying, Y. W. (2008). The buffering effect of psychological detachment against emotional exhaustion among social work. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 27*(1-2), 131-150.

Zhang, Q. (2014). Emotion matters in serial arguments: The effects of anger and compassion on perceived resolvability and relationship confidence in dating relationships. *Communication Research Reports, 31*, 102-109.

Zhang, Q., & Andreychik, M. (2013). Relational closeness in conflict: Effects on interactional goals, emotion, and conflict styles. *Journal of International Communication, 19*, 107-116.

Zhang, Q., Andreychik, M., Sapp, D. A., & Arendt, C. (2014). The dynamic interplay of interaction goals, emotion, and conflict styles: Testing a model of intrapersonal and interpersonal effects on conflict styles. *International Journal of Communication, 19328036*, 8534-8557.

Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 52*, 30-41.