



Evaluating the Relation of Psychological Flexibility, Self-Compassion, and Anxiety Symptoms Prior to and Following a Mindfulness Intervention

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Introduction

- Research suggests psychological flexibility (PF) is positively related to self-compassion (SC), which entails being kind to oneself, and negatively related to anxiety symptoms (Marshall & Brockman, 2016; Webb et al., 2017).
- High SC is related to low anxiety symptoms relative to individuals who report low SC (Arch et al., 2018).
- Yet, no research has evaluated SC as a mediator of the PF-anxiety symptom relation.

Hypothesis: Self-compassion will mediate the relation of psychological flexibility and anxiety symptoms pre- and post-establishment of a 2-week, 10-min daily mindfulness practice.

Method

Participants

$N = 120$ undergraduate college students and community members
 $M_{age} = 22.25$, $SD_{age} = 8.33$, Range: 18–56; 72.2% Female; 66.3% White

Procedure

Participants completed an online survey battery pre- and post-establishment of a 2-week, 10-min daily mindfulness practice.

- *Psychological Flexibility (AAQ-II)*; Bond et al., 2011)
- *Self-Compassion (SCS)*; Neff, 2003)
- *Anxiety symptoms (DASS-21)*; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

Analytic Approach

Two path-analytic mediation analyses were conducted.

Model 1

- Evaluated pre-intervention data.
- PF and anxiety symptoms were entered as the antecedent and consequent, respectively.
- SC was entered as the mediator.

Model 2

- Evaluate post-intervention data.
- PF and anxiety symptoms were entered as the antecedent and consequent, respectively.
- SC was entered as the mediator.

Results

Mediation Analysis

- PF was inversely related to self-compassion in both models ($a = -1.07$ and -1.17 , respectively).
- SC did not mediate the relation of PF and anxiety symptoms before the intervention.
- SC significantly mediated the PF-anxiety symptom relation following the intervention, $ab = 0.07$, $p < .00$.

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Self-compassion mediates the relation of psychological flexibility and anxiety symptoms following establishment of a daily 2-week mindfulness practice.



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Tables and Figures

Table 1

Descriptive and Correlational Statistics for Self-Report Measures

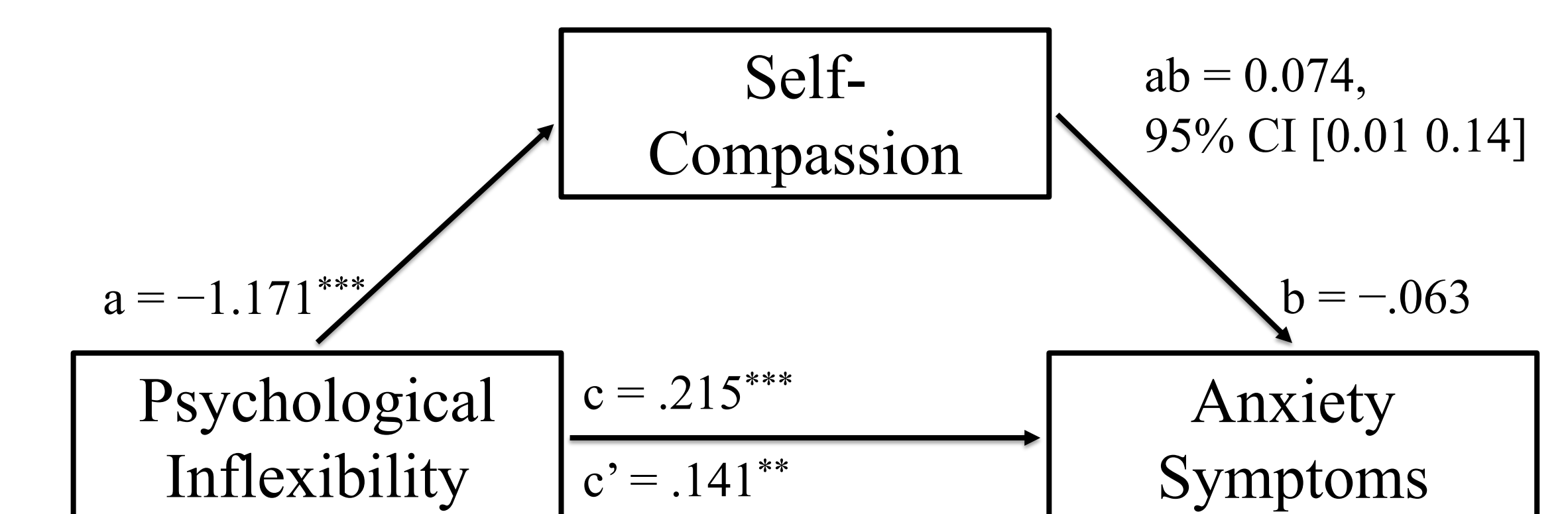
Scales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
AAQ-II	26.24	9.26	–		
DASS-21	5.91	4.26	0.46**	–	
SCS	72.33	18.40	–0.59**	–0.45**	–

Note. SCS = Self-Compassion Scale; AAQ-II = Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II; DASS-21 = Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

** $p < .01$

Figure 1

Mediation Analysis Examining the Relation of PF, SC, and Anxiety



Note. Mediation analysis of data collected following establishment of a 2-week mindfulness practice. PF = psychological flexibility; SC = self compassion.

** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .001$.

Discussion

- Results suggest SC mediates the relation of PF and anxiety symptoms following a mindfulness intervention.
- Interventions that promote SC may improve anxiety symptoms, for individuals who report low PF.
- Considerable variance in anxiety symptoms was not explained, suggesting identification of additional variables that account for the relation of PF, SC, and anxiety symptoms is warranted.

Limitations

- Data is cross-sectional so the direction of relations reported herein cannot be delineated.
- The sample did not include individuals with anxiety diagnosis.
- Analyses do not address mediation of moderation of the effect of the intervention.

Future Directions

- Long-term effects of SC among individuals with anxiety should be evaluated in longitudinal designs.
- The effect of SC and low PF should be clarified in the context of psychiatric diagnoses.
- Change in variables across time should be included in future analysis to evaluate the effect of the mindfulness intervention.

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