

**THE ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION IN
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG
EMERGING ADULTS IN MALAYSIA**

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EMERGING ADULTS IN MALAYSIA**

by

TEOH HOOI PING

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
LIST OF APPENDICES	xi
ABSTRAK	xii
ABSTRACT	xiv
CHAPTER 1	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Introduction	1
1.3 Problem Statement	6
1.4 Research Question.....	16
1.5 Research Objectives	17
1.6 Significance of the Study	18
1.7 Scope of the Study.....	19
CHAPTER 2	21
2.1 Overview	21
2.2 Conceptualizations and Measurement of Self-Compassion.....	21
2.2.1 Self-Compassion	21
2.2.2 Self-Compassion versus Self-Esteem	31
2.2.3 Self-Compassion versus Self-Pity.....	34
2.2.4 Self-Compassion versus Narcissism	37
2.2.5 Self-Compassion versus Compassion for Others.....	40
2.2.6 Measurement of Self-Compassion	42
2.3 Conceptualizations and Measurement of Romantic Relationship.....	43

2.3.1	Social Relationship	43
2.3.2	Romantic Relationship.....	50
2.3.3	Measurement of Satisfaction Romantic Relationship.....	56
2.3.4	Trust in Romantic Relationship	57
2.3.5	Measurement of Trust	60
2.3.6	Love Expression in Romantic Relationship.....	61
2.3.7	Measurement of Love Expression.....	64
2.3.8	Commitment of Romantic Relationship	65
2.3.9	Measurement of Commitment	66
2.4	Conceptualizations and Measurement of Psychological Well-Being	67
2.4.1	Measurement of Psychological Well-Being	71
2.5	Emerging Adulthood	73
2.6	Self-Compassion, Romantic Relationship, and Psychological Well-Being...	75
2.7	Self-Compassion and Gender	83
2.8	Self-Compassion and Trust in Relationship.....	87
2.9	Self-Compassion and Love Expression.....	90
2.10	Self-Compassion and Commitment of Romantic Relationship	94
2.11	Theoretical Framework	97
2.11.1	Social Exchange Theory	97
2.11.2	Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments (PERMA) Theory.....	102
2.11.3	Self-Determination Theory	106
2.12	Conceptual Framework/Model.....	111
2.13	Hypotheses	116
	CHAPTER 3	117
3.1	Overview	117
3.2	Research Design	117
3.3	Population and Sampling	118

3.4	Participants	119
3.4.1	Inclusion Criteria.....	120
3.4.2	Exclusion Criteria	120
3.4.3	Vulnerability	121
3.5	Sample Size Estimation.....	121
3.6	Procedures	122
3.7	Instruments	125
3.7.1	Self- Compassion Scales (SCS) (Neff, 2003)	125
3.7.2	Trust in Close Relationships Scale (TCRS) (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985)	128
3.7.3	Adaptive Version of Affection Communication Index (ACI) (Floyd & Morman, 1998)	129
3.7.4	The Commitment Scale (TCS) (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001)	131
3.7.5	Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998)	131
3.7.6	Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS) (Ryff, 1989)	132
3.8	Operational Definitions	134
3.9	Pilot Study	135
3.9.1	Pilot Test Result	136
3.10	Data Analysis	141
3.11	Ethical Considerations.....	143
	CHAPTER 4	146
4.1	Overview	146
4.2	Description of Participants	146
4.3	Description of Variables.....	147
4.3.1	The Mean Score for All Variables	150
4.4	The Correlation between Variables.....	151
4.4.1	The Correlation between Self-Compassion and Romantic Relationship Duration	152

4.4.2	The Correlation between Romantic Relationship Satisfaction and Romantic Relationship Duration.....	152
4.4.3	Gender Differences in Self-Compassion and Its Subscales	152
4.4.4	Ethnic Differences in All Variables and Its Subscales	153
4.4.5	The Correlation between Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-Being	157
4.4.6	The Correlation between Self-Compassion and Satisfaction of Romantic Relationship.....	157
4.5	Moderation Analysis	160
4.6	Mediating Analysis	162
4.6.1	Trust	162
4.6.2	Love Expression.....	163
4.6.3	Commitment.....	165
4.7	Result Summarization	166
4.7.1	Summary of Supported/Unsupported Hypotheses.....	166
4.7.2	Summary Result in the form of Conceptual Framework/Mode...	168
CHAPTER 5		169
5.1	Overview	169
5.2	Summary of Findings	169
5.3	Discussion of Findings	174
5.3.1	Research Objective 1	174
5.3.2	Research Objective 2	181
5.3.3	Research Objective 3	184
5.3.4	Research Objective 4	187
5.3.5	Research Objective 5	191
5.3.6	Research Objective 6	195
5.3.7	Research Objective 7	197
5.4	Implication of Findings	200

5.5	Limitations and Future Direction	205
5.6	Conclusion.....	206

REFERENCES

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 3.1	Rating Scales for Measurement Reliability.....	137
Table 3.2	The Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbrach’s Alphas for Instruments.....	139
Table 3.3	The Summarizing Data Analysis for Each Research Questions.....	142
Table 4.1	Demographic Characteristics.....	147
Table 4.2	The Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis, and Cronbrach’s Alphas for Instruments.....	149
Table 4.3	Summary of Intercorrelations for Scores on Self-Compassion, Trust, Love Expression, Commitment, Satisfaction of Romantic Relationship, and Psychological Well-Being.....	151
Table 4.4	All Mediators Analysis	151
Table 4.5	Correlation Analysis for Self-Compassion and Romantic Relationship Duration.....	152
Table 4.6	Gender Differences in Self-Compassion and Its Subscales...	153
Table 4.7	Test of Homogeneity of Variances.....	154
Table 4.8	Ethnic Differences in All Variables and Its Subscales.....	154
Table 4.9	Summary of Intercorrelations for Scores on Self-Compassion, Trust, Love Expression, Commitment, Satisfaction of Romantic Relationship, and Psychological Well-Being.....	159
Table 4.10	All Mediators Analysis.....	166

LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 4.1	Moderation Analysis Path Model.....	161
Figure 4.2	Moderation Slope Chart.....	162
Figure 4.3	Trust Mediator Analysis Path Model.....	163
Figure 4.4	Love Expression Mediator Analysis Path Model.....	164
Figure 4.5	Commitment Mediator Analysis Path Model.....	166

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

et al.	(<i>et alia</i>): and others
etc.	(<i>et cetera</i>): and so forth
n.d.	No date
<i>N</i>	Number in a subsample
<i>P</i>	Probability
R	Pearson product-moment correlation
SCS	Self-Compassion Scales
BAS-2	Body Appreciation Scales- 2
PWBS	Psychological Well-Being Scales
SA	Self-Acceptance
PL	Purpose in Life
PG	Personal Growth
PR	Positive Relation with Others
EM	Environmental Mastery
N	Population
Z	Confidence Level
E	Margin of Error
P	Percentage Value
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
SD	Standard Deviation
M	Mean
T	t-values
<i>df</i>	Degree of Freedom
P	Sig. (2-tailed)
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH
SURVEY

APPENDIX B SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

**PERANAN BELAS KASIHAN KENDIRI DALAM HUBUNGAN ROMANTIS
DAN KESEJAHTERAAN PSIKOLOGI DALAM KALANGAN GOLONGAN
MENCECAH DEWASA DI MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Belas kasihan pada diri bukan sahaja meningkatkan kesihatan dan kebahagiaan seseorang, tetapi ia juga memupuk perkembangan hubungan romantis yang sihat. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara rasa belas kasihan pada diri, kepuasan hubungan romantis dan kesejahteraan psikologi, serta perbezaan gender dan etnik yang untuk rasa belas kasihan pada diri, di kalangan mencecah dewasa Malaysia. Kajian ini secara khusus mengkaji pengaruh penyederhanaan kepercayaan, ekspresi kasih, dan komitmen dalam hubungan antara kepuasan diri dan kepuasan hubungan romantis. Peserta adalah 400 rakyat Malaysia berumur 18 hingga 25 tahun, yang mempunyai hubungan romantis sekurang-kurangnya enam bulan dan belum berkahwin. Mereka menjawab survei atas talian yang terdiri daripada *Self-Compassion Scales*, *Trust in Close Relationships Scales*, *Adaptive Version of Affection Communication Scales*, *The Commitment Scales*, *Relationship Assessment Scales*, dan *Psychological Well-Being Scales*. Para peserta dalam kajian melaporkan tahap belas kasihan pada diri, kepuasan hubungan romantis, dan tahap kesejahteraan psikologi yang sederhana. Dapatan kajian adalah konsisten dengan hipotesis. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan dan positif antara belas kasihan pada diri, kepuasan hubungan romantis, dan kesejahteraan psikologi. Analisis lanjut menunjukkan bahawa terdapat kepuasan hubungan romantis mempunyai pengaruh penyerdahana kepada hubungan di antara rasa belas kasihan pada diri dan kesejahteraan psikologi. Kajian ini memaparkan

peranan rasa belas kasihan pada diri berkaitan dengan kepercayaan, ekspresi kasih, dan komitmen dalam hubungan romantis. Di samping itu, kajian ini mendasari mekanisme bagaimana kepuasan hubungan romantis akan meningkatkan tahap kesejahteraan psikologi.

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MALAYSIA**

ABSTRACT

Self-compassion not only improves one's health and happiness, but it also fosters the development of healthy romantic relationships. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-compassion, romantic relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being, as well as gender and ethnic differences in relation to self-compassion, among Malaysian emerging adults. This study specifically examined the mediating effect of trust (Trust in Close Relationship Scale), love expression (Adaptive Version of Affection Communication Scale), and commitment (The Commitment Scale) in the relationship between self-compassion (Self-Compassion Scale) and romantic relationship satisfaction (Relationship Assessment Scale). Participants were 400 Malaysians aged from 18 to 25 years old, who were in a relationship for at least six months and not married. They completed an online survey comprised of the Self-Compassion Scale, Trust in Close Relationships Scale, Adaptive Version of Affection Communication Scale, Commitment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale, and Psychological Well-Being Scale. Participants in the study reported a moderate level of self-compassion, romantic relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being. The results were consistent with the hypotheses. The results showed that there were significant positive relationships between self-compassion, romantic relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Participants reported having a high level of trust, and commitment, but a low level of love expression in a romantic relationship. A further analysis reported that romantic relationship

satisfaction has a moderating effect on the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being. This study highlights the role of self-compassion with trust, love expression, and commitment in a romantic relationship. In addition, this study also underlying the mechanism of how romantic relationship satisfaction could improve the level of psychological well-being.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Chapter 1 has been divided into six broad sections to provide an overview of this research topic. The first section provides the introduction of key concepts for this study. The second section focuses on the problems and issues that covers the background for this research. The third section discusses the questions that need to be answered in this study while the fourth section presents the objectives of carrying out this study. The research objectives clearly state the goals of this study by relating to each of the research questions. The fifth section addresses the significance of the study. The final section of this chapter includes the scope of this study.

1.2 Introduction

The research on self-compassion is extensively studied by Western psychologists recently. However, this concept is not a new phenomenon (Neff, 2003). The concept of self-compassion is heavily derived from Buddhism (Brach, 2003; Neff, 2003). Self-compassion can be defined as providing compassion inwardly. There are three components found in the concept of self-compassion, which are: (a) self-kindness versus self-judgment, (b) a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and (c) mindfulness versus over-identification (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion is different from self-esteem, which requires the individual to be better than average. Crocker and Park (2004) stated that the desire of getting high self-esteem would cause certain potential risks to the individual. Compare to self-esteem, self-compassion is more stable as it does not require the individual to judge or evaluate oneself at all. It is important to understand more aspects about self-compassion and this study is part of this attempt.

From the literature review, many past studies show that self-compassion could help an individual to promote psychological well-being (Ferguson et al., 2014; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Robitschek & Keyes, 2009; Magnus, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2010; Neff, Hiseh & Dejitterat, 2005; Homan, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2014; Barnard & Curry, 2011). In addition, there have been a lot of studies that specifically claimed that self-compassion is not only beneficial for the general population, but also for patients with depression, body dissatisfaction, and other illness (Alizadeh et al., 2018; Korner et al., 2015; Germer & Neff, 2015; Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011; Grossbard et al., 2009; Ganem et al, 2009; Szymanski & Henning, 2007). Self-compassion strongly encourages the individual to offer love and care to oneself before anyone does (Neff, 2003). Ryff and Keyes (1995) also stated that when an individual can accept oneself, he/she will not easily be affected by environmental factors. Therefore, the individual would probably experience holistic psychological well-being. This study is looking at how self-compassion can play a role in promoting one's well-being.

The concept of self-compassion encourages an individual to show love and care towards oneself, but it does not necessitate the individual to be narcissistic or isolated from others. Gerber, Tolmacz, and Doron (2015) found that people with higher self-compassion would less likely avoid socializing with others. Ying and Hashim (2016) also stated that self-compassion and social connectedness both emphasized interconnectedness. Among all types of social relationships, the romantic relationship can be considered the only social relationship that shares the combination of relational connectedness, intimate connectedness, and collective connectedness (Hawkley, Browne, & Cacioppo, 2005). A romantic relationship usually begins with people that are familiar but not close together and slowly moves on to friendship.

Singer (1987) also stated that most romantic relationship is developed from a close friendship. According to Neff and Beretvas (2012), self-compassion can be considered the key element in developing a healthy romantic relationship. It is important to understand how romantic relationships can be enhanced across a wider variety of contexts.

Collins, Welsh, and Furman (2009) claimed that a romantic relationship is a close relationship that involves emotional closeness and certain degrees of sexual behavior. On the other hand, Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985) stated that trust is considered an important element in building a healthy and successful close relationship. When an individual has enough faith and belief in their romantic partner, the individual would be more willing to trust their romantic partner and experience love and joy in the relationship (Rempel et al., 1985). In comparison with the concept of self-compassion, individuals with high self-esteem tend to be narcissistic and more selfish in their relationships (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Narcissistic partners might feel that they are better than others and they deserve excessive admiration and attention from others. They are most likely to become self-centered all the time and refuse to understand others. When there is no mutual understanding in the relationship, trust in the relationship will decrease. This study aims to examine how trust can help in mediating the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in romantic relationship.

Besides that, love expression could be another element that contributes to improving satisfaction in a romantic relationship (Floyd, 2006; Schutz, 1958; Gareis & Wilkins, 2011; Seki, Matsumoto, & Imahori, 2002; Kline, Horton, & Zhang, 2008; Wilkins & Gareis, 2006). Floyd and Riforgiate (2008) claimed that a couple who constantly expresses their love towards each other would have a higher level of

romantic relationship satisfaction. In the concept of self-compassion, the individual is encouraged to express one's feelings and thoughts either by verbalization or actions without involving any self-judging and self-criticizing (Neff, 2003). Therefore, individuals with self-compassion are likely to be better at self-expressing and love expression. Individuals with self-centered behavior hardly shows compassion toward their lovers (Leary, 2002). In another word, love expression has a strong impact on the satisfaction in romantic relationship. The more often the individual expresses their love with their partner, the higher the chances they build a healthy and successful romantic relationship.

Sternberg (1986) also stated that the presence of passion and commitment makes romantic relationship different from the other close interpersonal relationship. Commitment helps in improving the stability of a romantic relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). When a couple often avoid conversation and contact while facing relationship conflicts, it would affect the quality and length of the relationship. Neff and Beretvas (2012) found that self-compassion is positively associated with the length of a romantic relationship. Mindfulness in self-compassion encourages the individual to view all negative emotions as a dark cloud without overreacting to it, while common humanity involves tolerance and forgiveness. Therefore, the individual with self-compassion would have higher emotional intelligence and this helps the individual to strengthen and maintain the relationship (Neff, 2004). This study precisely focuses on examining the mediating effect of commitment in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction of romantic relationships.

Based on the review of past researches, social relationship helps the individual to experience holistic psychological well-being (Panahi et al., 2016; Tan & Karabulutlu, 2005; Dunn & Brien, 2009; Gulact, 2010). A romantic relationship can

be considered as one of the social relationships, which also provides support for the individual to overcome their life challenges. The individual with a healthy romantic relationship is expected to perform better in the mental and physical aspects of self-development. Diener and Seligman (2004) studied and supported the theory that individual with strong social relationship is reported to be happier than those without social relationship. This clearly shows that a romantic relationship not only makes the individual feel good but also improves one's long-term mental and physical health.

As of today, most previous studies focus on adults especially university or college students. However, Neff (2003) mentioned that self-compassion can develop and be found in everyone regardless of gender, age, and ethnicity. Compared to adults, Arnett (2004) claimed that emerging adults are more active in exploring their identity. Emerging adults can be defined as individuals between the ages of 18 to 25 years old. They are the ones who are in the stages between adolescence and adulthood. Emerging adults understand that they are no longer adolescents, but yet they have not fully reached the criteria of adulthood (Arnett, 2000). To emerging adults, starting and exploring a romantic relationship is an option. Most emerging adults rather stay focus on themselves instead of starting and maintaining a stable romantic relationship (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). As mentioned above, human needs social support to overcome life challenges, and romantic relationship can help to provide this essential social support to the individual. Schulenberg, Bryant, and O' Malley (2004) found that individual who satisfied one's goal of romantic exploration and intimacy, they are more likely to experience more holistic well-being. A supportive romantic partner would help in providing encouragement in life and make the individual feel more resilient to stress.

This study focuses on self-compassion in the context of romantic relationships among emerging adults in Malaysia. It clearly emphasized how self-compassion can contribute to satisfaction in a romantic relationship with elements of trust, love expression, and commitment. This present study centers on identifying the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being of emerging adults in Malaysia. And explore the satisfaction in a romantic relationship as a moderator in the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being. With the advantages of a multi-racial country like Malaysia, this study aims to include both genders and all major ethnic groups in Malaysia.

1.3 Problem Statement

The level of psychological well-being among emerging adults can be considered as low (Foo & Lo, 2018; Gomez-Lopez, Viejo, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019; Kessler et al., 2005; Baldwin et al., 2005; Blanco et al., 2008, Arnett, Zukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014; Akibar et al. 2019; Matud, Lopez-Curbelo, & Fortes, 2019; Arnett, 2015). Although Abdul Kadir and Mohd (2021) found that the level of well-being for Malaysian emerging adults was high, their sample of study could not represent all emerging adults in Malaysia. The study only focused on undergraduate students and failed to include emerging adults who did not attend university and work. It is expected that an individual who works will have a greater burden of financial responsibility and stress as compared to a student. The past studies specifically point out that the risk of emerging adults having a mental illness, such as anxiety disorders (Matud et al., 2019), substance use disorders (Arnett, 2015), mood disorders (Matud et al., 2019; Arnett et al., 2014), etc., is higher than other age groups (Baldwin et al., 2005; Blanco et al., 2008). It is important to understand the elements that could contribute to promoting the psychological well-being of emerging adults.

The National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2025 was developed by Malaysia's Ministry of Health (MOH) to enhance the psychological health of Malaysians. This strategic plan specifically identified eight (8) strategies, which are as following: improving the governance and regulatory framework; strengthening the mental surveillance system; guaranteeing the availability and accessibility of comprehensive and quality mental health services; strengthening mental health resources; enhancing and nurturing intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration; promoting mental health and wellbeing in all settings and target groups; and strengthening mental health preparedness. The MOH will also be enhanced through the establishment of a database system to gather and arrange data from governmental and non-governmental (NGO) organizations, such as the National Suicide and Fatal Injury Registry and the National Mental Health Registry. In order to raise awareness, MOH also works with NGOs and relevant community organizations to conduct mental health promotion campaigns. The "Let's Talk Mind Sihat" campaign in the community, the Healthy Mind Programme in the classroom, and the Stress at Work Programme are a few examples of programs and services. In terms of facilities and resources, MOH also increased the number of mental health hospitals and hired additional psychologists. Additionally, MOH planned to create an e-Mental screening app for Malaysians to strengthen mental health services and meet the goal of easy accessibility to health care services.

While the exact mechanism of how romantic relationships can contribute to a person's well-being has yet to be determined, the satisfaction in a romantic relationship can be considered to be an essential element in one's life for emerging adults. (Jacobson et al., 2018; Neff & Beretvas, 2012). Social relationships are essential for health and well-being. There are several types of social relationships, such as those

with family, friends, and romantic partners. Social connectedness is considered the foundation for creating and maintaining both physical and psychological well-being. Many scholars deduced that everyone needs a certain level of social connectedness that could help in improving overall health and well-being (Stafford et al., 2018; Saeri et al., 2017; Haslam et al., 2015; Yoon & Lee, 2010; Lee, Dean, & Jung, 2008). For example, Pettit et al. (2011) study found that social support could help in reducing the symptoms of depression and promoting holistic psychological well-being for an individual. Holmberg (2014) established that individuals are happier and healthier with the increase in social relationships. Past researches also show that social relationship is associated with positive social behavior (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). On the other hand, an individual with fewer social relationships have increased risk of having psychological distress. Walton et al. (2012) stated that individuals with low social relationships usually have low self-esteem and find it difficult in trusting others. Past research only indicated that social relationship has an impact on human lives. However, it does not clearly define which types of social relationships and which kinds of elements in the romantic relationship help in promoting well-being. Teh (2014) asserted that the marital status of Malaysians does affect their well-being significantly. She emphasized that stable relationships were found to have a similar effect to marriage in terms of enhancing overall well-being.

Self-compassion and romantic relationships are still considered the fresh field yet to be explored. From the literature review, self-compassion is not a newly invented concept, although it has not been studied widely (Neff, 2003). Many scholars have begun to research self-compassion in Western cultures since the year 2003, but there were limited research examining the relationship between self-compassion and romantic relationships (Jacobson et al., 2018; Neff & Beretvas, 2012; Zhang & Chen,

2017; Santeree-Baillargeon et al., 2018; Janjani et al., 2017). Self-esteem and romantic relationships were prominently discussed in the majority of earlier studies as if self-esteem was the sole way to increase the satisfaction of romantic relationships (Erol, & Orth, 2016; Tackett, Nelson, & Busby, 2013; Whisman et al., 2006; Sciangula & Morry, 2009). Neff and Beretvas (2012) asserted that developing healthy romantic relationships is best accomplished through the practice of self-compassion. However, most people confuse self-compassion with narcissism and self-pity. They would therefore mistakenly assume that romantic relationships are not related to self-compassion. Compassion for others is crucial for the growth of a successful romantic relationship. Branden's (1994) also affirmed that developing compassion for oneself comes before developing compassion for others. Both concepts are interrelated. Gala and Kapadia (2013) concluded that being in a romantic relationship was associated with increased life satisfaction and decreased levels of melancholy and irate moods. Therefore, there is a critical need for research into self-compassion and romantic relationships.

The expression, behavior, and belief of romantic relationships are different between Western and Asian cultures (Kline, Horton, & Zhang, 2008). Most of the past research were examining the correlation between self-compassion and romantic relationships among Europeans, while the concept of self-compassion is heavily influenced by Eastern philosophical thoughts (Ferreira, Pinto-Gouveia, & Duarte, 2013; Helverson, 2013; Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2014; Jacobson et al., 2018; Neff & Beretvas, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2017; Santeree-Baillargeon et al., 2018; Janjani et al., 2017). In Chinese traditional cultures, women are expected to hold on to traditional values such as being polite, and loyal, and viewed as subordinate to men. Based on Confucian principles, women who self-sacrifice themselves for the family

were idealized (Zuo, 2003; Bond & Hwang, 1986). The sense of self for women in traditional Chinese cultures is secondary and they can barely express their true selves in interpersonal relationships. Marshall (2008) found that Chinese Canadian women have a greater commitment in their romantic relationships but lower self-disclosures and thus lower intimacy behavior in relationships. Research on the relationship cannot just focus on one culture but must include others too.

There was no specific published work that investigates self-compassion and romantic relationships in Malaysia. Most researchers in this field are done in European countries (Jacobson et al., 2018; Neff & Beretvas, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2017; Santeree-Baillargeon et al., 2018; Janjani et al., 2017). Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright (1993) stated that Western people build up the concept of romantic relationships based on freedom of choice while non-Western cultures tend to be concerned with the needs of family or group. Baptish et al (2012) described that Malaysians did engage in behavior that help in maintaining the romantic relationship. Malaysian men might contribute more to the maintenance behavior as compared to Malaysian females. For example, Malaysian men reported to be more willing in disclosing their thoughts and feelings toward their partner. This finding is a bit contradicting with many past studies that have shown that non-Western people are more conservative and hold on to more traditional values in interpersonal relationships compare to Western cultures (Sassler & Goldscheider, 2004; Moghaddam et al., 1993; Marshall, 2008; Marshall, 2010; Gallagher, 2003; Xu, Hudspeth, & Bartkowski, 2005; Sassler & Schoen, 1999). Baptish et al. (2012) study showed that the attachment style and maintenance behaviors of Malaysian couples and American couples are very much different. Malaysian participants reported having higher anxious and avoidant attachment compared to American participants. Due to socio-cultural factors, Malaysian males

and females show no significant gender difference in their attachment and maintenance behaviors. Whereas American female participants are reportedly contributing more to their romantic relationships. Research samples carried out in Malaysia are mostly by university students and counselors (Ying & Hashim, 2016; Voon, Lau, & Leong, 2017; Chang et al., 2019; Teoh & Hashim, 2020).

In Malaysia, studies on romantic relationships have focused more on married couples than on dating couples (Hoesni et al., 2016; Tam et al., 2011; Yee et al., 2020). Even while marriage has generally been the focus of Malaysian studies on romantic relationships, they essentially adhered to the same theoretical framework. These studies have all agreed to use Sternberg's Triangular theory of love to define love. Hoesni et al. (2016) suggested intimacy is a crucial component in a romantic relationship because most Malaysians would consider their romantic relationship to be satisfactory if there was a high level of intimacy. However, this study did not indicate that its love component had the same effect on dating relationships. According to Harris et al. (2008), the concept of a dating relationship and a marriage can be relatively similar, but both characteristics can differ. Polygamy among non-Muslims is forbidden by Malaysian law. However, Malaysia continues to recognize polygamous marriages among Muslims as legitimate. Consequently, different cultures may have different definitions of commitment. The Malaysia Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act of 1976 has made it such that an individual's willingness to stay in a relationship for an extended period is no longer solely based on love but is almost now regulated by law. This may affect how love is evaluated. Putte and Matthijs (2001) argued that it is essential to distinguish between a dating relationship and marriage due to the influence of cultural change. Therefore, it is imperative to study love among Malaysia's unmarried couples.

Most researchers were too focused on examining the positive outcome of self-compassion among adults and adolescents instead of emerging adults. Erikson's (1959) definition of young adulthood, which includes people between the ages of 19 and 40, can be thought of as covering a wide age range. In 2000, Arnett introduced the term emerging adulthood. Emerging adults are young people between the ages of 18 and 25. (Arnett, 2000). Previous studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between self-compassion and age (Homan, 2016; Young, Furman, & Lauren, 2011; Hwang et al., 2016; Bluth et al., 2016; Bluth et al., 2017; Potter et al., 2014; Przedziecki et al., 2013; Wren et al., 2012; Neff & Vonk, 2009).

Age could be one of the crucial elements to be included in the self-compassion study. Homan (2016) found a positive relationship between age and self-compassion. Older females reported to have less self-compassion than the younger ones (Bluth et al., 2017). Although studies on the relationship between self-compassion and romantic relationships have been conducted, it is still not apparent how self-compassion influences romantic relationships with individuals of all ages (Jacobson et al., 2018; Neff & Beretvas, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2017; Santeree-Baillargeon et al., 2018; Janjani et al., 2017). According to Turner's (2016) research, both younger and older adults have significantly different perspectives on love and sex. Her claims are backed up by previous studies, which showed that older adults are better at controlling and regulating their emotions than young adults. Schryer and Ross's study (2012) found that older adults tend to be more optimistic about their past experiences with their spouses than young adults. Ardel (2010) proposed that as life experiences and age increases, the understanding of common humanity will increase. Individuals with more life experiences could easily recognize and understand that the imperfection of life is

normal. This recognition of common humanity is a type of wisdom that helps individual have a more stable and mature mentality.

Most self-compassion related researches were too focused on highly educated adults (Alizadeh et al., 2018; Lopez et al., 2018; Lee, 2013; Breines & Chen, 2012; Magnus, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2010; Robitschek & Keyes, 2009; Neff, Rude, & Krikpatrick, 2007). Due to the target sample that shares almost similar education levels and age ranges, the self-compassion topic was usually related to the academic performance and mental health of this particular sample group (Kyeong, 2013; Teleb & Al Awamleh, 2013; Breines & Chan, 2012; Adams & Leary, 2007, Neff et al., 2007). These past research subjects were usually adults who received college or university-level education. According to Lopez et al. (2017), education level could affect the level of self-compassion in an individual. Lopez et al. (2017) stated that individuals with higher education will have higher self-compassion levels compared to individuals with lower education. This finding indicated that there is a positive relationship between self-compassion and education level. However, due to the limited number of self-compassion studies about the education level, further study in this area should be explored. Self-compassion and social support are not only accessible for the individual with high education level, but also for those who are working and have dropped out of school (Neff, 2003). Therefore, when the researchers only focused on those who have high education levels, the results would create a bias and overgeneralization.

Gender roles can be considered an important issue to determine the level of self-compassion. The findings of gender difference in self-compassion remain inconsistent throughout these years, whereby some studies show that women reported to have lower self-compassion than men, while other researches show that there was

no significant gender difference found in self-compassion (Neff, 2003; Neff, Hseih, Dejithirat, 2005; Ying & Hashim, 2016; Raes, 2010; Iskender, 2009; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hseih, 2008; Neff, Kirkpatrick et al., 2007; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011). This might be attributed to the age and ethnicity of that particular gender (Kehn & Ruthig, 2013; Takahashi & Overton, 2002).

Past studies found that women tend to be more self-criticizing than men (DeVore, 2013; Raes, 2010). Raffaelli and Ontai (2004) also believe that frequent negative self-talk might be one of the reasons that causes women to be less self-compassion. Raffaelli and Ontai (2004) stated that women tend to have the feminine norms of self-sacrifice. Bluth et al. (2017) indicated that younger women would be more self-conscious than older women. Besides that, Hyde et al. (2008) also stressed that older women would have more experiences in facing developmental challenges. In order to meet the social expectation for women, older adolescent females will begin to understand and adopt feminine norms and values. Nevid and Rathus (2016) found that women who hold on to more traditional values experienced higher stress in their life compared to women who had more flexible gender roles. As mentioned, women are viewed as subordinate to men in Asian traditional culture. Each gender has their roles in interpersonal relationships. Cultural expectations and gender orientation roles might affect the self-compassion level of an individual. Moreover, Turner (2016) stated that the behavior and attitude toward romantic relationship changes with the influence of social and gender roles.

Self-compassion and compassion for others should be related. Although the concept of self-compassion encourages people to provide love and care inwardly, it does not dictate the person to be narcissistic or isolated from others (Neff, 2003).

According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) study, a healthy relationship is supposed to have private space and connectedness, and both components must be balanced. With self-kindness mainly focusing on oneself, the individual could satisfy their own psychological needs without help from others. However, common humanity in self-compassion encourages the individual to understand and include everyone in the circle of compassion. In this process, the individual will also develop empathy and consideration for others. Feher (2016) stated that self-compassion is not only beneficial for oneself but also improves interpersonal relationship with others. Davidson (2007) found that individuals with high self-compassion reported to have a higher level of empathy for others.

In past research, the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample is considered as one of the limitations. Jacobson et al. (2018) found that there is a positive correlation between self-compassion and the quality of the romantic relationship. However, most of the samples for this study were young Caucasian females. Thus, the finding does not represent the general population. Past research stated that ethnic minorities tend to hold on to more traditional values. Helms et al. (2006) commented that traditional couples are better at showing their moral commitments to each other (Castillo et al., 2010; Goldberg et al., 2012; Pierre, Mahalik, & Woodland, 2001; Villanueva Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). These traditional values involve tolerance and loyalty in a relationship, which contributes to prolonging the length of the relationship. However, Helms et al. (2006) also found that traditional couples tend to experience lower satisfaction in their relationship. Research have been carried out to explore the relationship between self-compassion and romantic relationship in the context of the behavior and satisfaction of the relationship (Jacobson et al., 2018; Neff & Beretvas, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2017; Santeree-Baillargeon et al., 2018; Janjani et al., 2017).

Ethnicity might play an important role when it comes to examining the length of the relationship.

In conclusion, the level of psychological well-being among emerging adults is low and satisfaction in a romantic relationship can act as a predictor of psychological well-being. Besides that, self-compassion and love relationships are still thought to be well researched. Most of the self-compassion and romantic relationship-related research was done in European countries. The findings cannot be generalized and applied to Asian countries as the expression, behavior, and belief of romantic relationships in Western cultures are different from that of Asian cultures. Therefore, there is a need to explore further as there has been no specific published work related to self-compassion and romantic relationships studied in Malaysia. The social relationship is essential for health and well-being for everyone, but most researchers were too focused on examining the positive outcome of self-compassion among young adults especially adults with high education levels. Gender roles can be considered important issues to determine the level of self-compassion. Self-compassion and compassion for others should be related. The lack of ethnic diversity in the sample is considered one of the limitations of the past research.

1.4 Research Question

- What is the level of self-compassion, romantic relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being among emerging adults in Malaysia?
- What is the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among emerging adults in Malaysia?
- What is the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in romantic relationships among emerging adults in Malaysia?

- How does a romantic relationship moderate the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among emerging adults in Malaysia?
- How trust plays a role as a mediator in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia?
- How does love expression plays a role as a mediator in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction of romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia?
- How commitment plays a role as a mediator in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia?

1.5 Research Objectives

- To examine the level of self-compassion, romantic relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being among emerging adults in Malaysia.
- To examine the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among emerging adults in Malaysia.
- To explore the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia.
- To identify the moderation effect of romantic relationships in the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among emerging adults in Malaysia.
- To identify the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia.

- To explore whether love expression mediates the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia.
- To examine the mediating effect of commitment in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship among emerging adults in Malaysia.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Earlier in the problem statement, the issues of mental health and well-being has been discussed. This study provided information as to what variables can contribute to promoting the psychological well-being of emerging adults. It examines the roles of self-compassion and romantic relationships respectively.

The other issue discussed in the problem statement is the role of romantic relationships in well-being. This study is important because it helps to identify the underlying mechanism of how romantic relationship helps individuals to experience holistic psychological well-being. It precisely pointed out the importance of trust, love expression, and commitment in romantic relationships.

Self-compassion and romantic relationships is still considered a new field of study, even though more and more academics are starting to explore it. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it explores a novel field, which is self-compassion and romantic relationships.

As mentioned in the problem statement, there were no specific published works that investigated self-compassion and romantic relationships in Malaysia. Although some Western researchers found that there is a positive correlation between self-compassion and romantic relationships. What set this study apart from previous studies

is its focus on examining the roles of self-compassion in a more holistic aspect of a healthy romantic relationship. In addition, this study also specifically examines trust, love expression, and commitment as the mediators in the relationship between self-compassion and satisfaction in the romantic relationship.

This study is significant because it identified that self-compassion and compassion for others should be related.

Another concern noted in the problem statement is that the majority of researchers concentrated too much on looking at the benefits of self-compassion in adults and adolescents rather than in emerging adults. This study is significant because it looks into whether a social relationship is essential for the health and well-being of everyone and the positive outcome of self-compassion among emerging adults.

Having said that, it was worth noting that the expression, behavior, and belief in love are different in Western and Asian cultures, and there have not been specific published journals on the study of self-compassion and romantic relationships in Malaysia. This study can be used in a target sample representative of Asians, especially Malaysians.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between self-compassion and romantic relationships among emerging adults in Malaysia. The population of interest for this study are emerging adults between the ages of 18 to 25 years in Malaysia. This study includes both genders and all major ethnic groups. The

marital status of the participant in this study must be in a relationship for at least six months and not married.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter explains all the variables and concepts that are related to the topic. The review of previous studies and research that are related to this current study are included in this chapter and it is categorized into four main sections, which are a discussion of concepts, the relationship between concepts-evidence from the previous studies, conceptual and theoretical framework, and hypotheses. The major focus of this study is self-compassion. The first part of the discussion is to present the construct of self-compassion by comparing self-compassion with other related elements. The second part of the discussion provides an overview of social relationships and the rationalization for choosing a romantic relationship as one of the variables. The next section highlights potential elements that contribute to building a healthy romantic relationship. The fourth part of the discussion is to give background information on psychological well-being. All the variables/concepts that are related to this present study explain in the first section, while the second section mainly focused on discussing the relationship between each variable/concept. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks include in the third section. Lastly, the fourth section provides the hypotheses of the present study.

2.2 Conceptualizations and Measurement of Self-Compassion

2.2.1 Self-Compassion

To better understand “self-compassion”, the words compassion should be explored first. The term “compassion” was adopted from the Latin word *compati*, which means “suffer with”. According to Singer and Klimecki (2014), compassion

should involve the feeling of wanting to help someone who is in trouble. Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama believes that an individual with compassion can feel the feeling and emotional state of other individuals with a strong urge to soothe their pain. Goetz et al. (2010) concurred with this definition but suggested two important steps: 1) the awareness and sensitivity to acknowledge the presence of pain, and 2) the urge to relieve the suffering should be included. Therefore, compassion is not only the ability to understand the sufferings of self and others but also involves the appropriate behavior in relieving the pain (Pauley & McPherson, 2010).

In this regard, compassion is very different from empathy. Although both compassion and empathy involve the acknowledgment of pain, empathy does not involve the motivation of removing the pain (McDonald & Messinger, 2010; Goetz et al., 2010; Beverly Engel, 2008). For example, when an individual sees another human being in distress, the person can connect with and comprehend the suffering of that troubled individual. This process entails pausing, zoning out from the conventional situation, and visualizing the current scenario from another perspective. This process is known as compassion, or “suffering with” since the individual feels they had moved by the circumstance and take further action.

Recognizing human flaws necessitates the development of compassion. Compassionate individuals often treat others with kindness and empathy. When conflicts arise, they frequently choose forgiveness. To the individual with compassion, the terms “suffering, failure, and imperfection” can be seen as part of shared human experiences. Compassion has the capacity to connect people closer together because it recognizes that every human being has flaws and defects, and so every individual requires compassion.

In the Dalai Lama's teaching, compassion is not confined to individuals who are familiar or close. Gilbert (2005) also claimed to be able to feel compassion for strangers, such as malnourished African children. According to Higgins (2016), the most crucial part of compassion is acknowledging that every living thing on this planet is interconnected. When the individual grasps this concept, stereotypes, racism, or discrimination are less prone to come since every individual can envision themselves in another's shoes. There is a distinction between compassion for close others and strangers. According to Sprecher and Fehr (2005), close others are defined as the person who is significant to one's life such as friends and family. Sprecher and Fehr (2005) also designed a scale to measure compassionate love towards close others. Although this measurement is not devised to evaluate romantic love, it does provide a clear description of compassion towards close others and strangers.

Compassion had been emphasized as a core element of many religious traditions' belief systems (Strauss et al., 2016). According to Weng et al. (2013), compassion is a skill that humans can learn and master rather than just an instinctual tendency. Neff (2003) argued that self-compassion is not a new notion. Thousands of years had passed since compassion was referenced in Buddhist teachings. Self-compassion is derived from Buddhist teaching. In Buddhist thoughts, every living thing on this earth is equal (Baas & Jacob, 2004). Both Buddhist thoughts and self-compassion concepts agreed that compassion should be extended to everyone and not limited to others only (Neff, 2003; Baas & Jacob, 2004). Salzberg (1997) proposed that failing to include oneself in the circle of compassion will only develop a false sense of separate self. All individuals deserve love and respect. Mindfulness is associated with most religions, including Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and it is based on the principle of self-compassion (Trousselard et al., 2014). The

mindfulness elements have been intertwined in Hinduism, the oldest extant religion for a few thousand years. In comparison to other religions, Neff (2003) drew self-compassion from Buddhist teaching since it is more well-defined and evolved to the mindfulness concept.

Self-compassion can be defined as providing love and care toward oneself. As Buddhist teaching, everyone should be given compassion including oneself. It is easy for people to show kindness towards other people but not themselves. Salzberg (1997) indicated that a false sense of a separate self would be constructed when the self is not included in the circle of compassion. Neff (2003) stated that compassion should not be limited to others only. The sense of self should be included in the circle of compassion. Three elements can be found in the concept of self-compassion, which are: (a) self-kindness versus self-judgment, (b) common humanity versus isolation, and (c) mindfulness versus over-identification (Neff, 2003). Each of these elements seems to be distinct from one another, and yet these elements are considered as overlapping and engendering one another at the same time (Neff, 2003).

The first component of self-compassion is self-kindness. Self-kindness entails treating oneself with respect. Self-kindness can be defined as being kind towards oneself and accepting that certain situations are out of one's control. When a crisis strikes, many people tend to have self-blaming and self-judgment (Neff, 2003). Neff (2003) indicated that self-kindness is regarded as a counter-normative idea. When dealing with setbacks and difficult encounters, it encourages the individual to understand and forgive oneself. Regardless whether it is a happy or sad occurrence, each of the incidents that the individual has encountered should be viewed as a learning opportunity. When others are undergoing obstacles in life, it is natural for most individuals to console them with good words. However, when a similar situation arises