

## Association between Self-Compassion and Demographics of University Students Adjusted by Gratitude

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### Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative research was to assess the association between self-compassion and demographics adjusted by gratitude for university students. A convenience sample of 104 social work students at a public northeastern in the United States completed an online survey that included Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-s), Gratitude Questionnaire, and demographic information. Increased gratitude was associated with increased self-compassion in all the tested models. Individuals aged 23 or younger, from larger households, leaning independents/moderate democrats, and higher spirituality, had a higher level of self-compassion. Students from rural areas had a higher level of self-compassion than those from suburban regions, but lower self-compassion than those residing in urban areas. Participants with advanced degree had relatively low self-compassion compared with those with a two-year or a four-year degree. Implications of the findings are discussed, including the potential value of incorporating self-compassion and gratitude training in curricular and extracurricular activities in universities.

**Keywords:** Demographics, Gratitude, Gratitude Practices, Self-Compassion, Self-Compassion Practices, University Students

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The practice of self-compassion is a cornerstone of professional practice and education - it entails the ability of professionals and students in training to espouse flexible and non-judgmental stance when working with consumers (Miller et al., 2020). The practice of self-compassion helps professionals to maintain a sense of wellbeing and stave off compassion fatigue and burnout. Additionally, the relationship between compassion among university students and their subjective well-being has been examined (Booker & Dunsmore, 2018). However, the association between self-compassion and demographics adjusted by gratitude is limited, and the focus of this research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Defining Self-Compassion**

Compassion toward oneself and the ability to be sensitive, non-judgmental, and respectful toward oneself contributes to being compassionate towards others (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion is positively related to well-being under many conditions - self-compassionate individuals are more confident in admitting their mistakes, modifying unproductive behaviors, engaging in positive health behaviors, taking on new challenges, and display fewer depressive symptoms (Beaumont et al., 2016; Neff & Pommier, 2013).

### **Self-Compassion and Well-Being of University Students**

Heightened self-compassion was linked to various factors for college students- increased academic resourcefulness and GPA (Martin et al., 2019); increased positive affective responses (Saeed & Sonnentag, 2018); gratitude and life satisfaction (Booker & Dunsmore, 2018); student well-being (Mantelou & Karakasidou, 2017); lower compassion fatigue and burnout (Beaumont et al., 2016); motivation, perceived self-regulation, and overall mental health (Dundas et al., 2017). Likewise, self-compassion was negatively correlated with anxiety, depression, homesickness, narcissism, negative affect, school burnout, and suicide risk (Terry et al., 2013).

With growing evidence of the positive effects of self-compassion on university students, self-compassion has been utilized to mediate varying negative social conditions. Ying (2009) observed that the incorporation of mindfulness-based self-care strategies better supported social work students. Self-compassion interventions among university students have also been proven to have a positive effect on overall student well-being. Mantelou and Karakasidou (2017) noted a significant increase in self-compassion and well-being after the completion of a brief self-compassion training program. Dundas et al. (2017) explored how a short self-compassion intervention increases healthy self-regulation habits using the Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) intervention - MSC intervention increased healthy self-regulation and decreased unhealthy self-regulation. Finlay-Jones et al. (2017) assessed the effect of a self-guided, six-week online self-compassion intervention for psychology trainees, and the participants reported significant improvements in self-compassion.

### **Defining Gratitude**

Gratitude can be viewed as a positive emotion that contrasts negative reactions i.e., anger, anxiety, and jealousy; and gratitude practice can help people develop a positive mindset that fosters congenial relationships (Voci et al., 2019). Cultivation of gratitude has been documented to result in beneficial outcomes in professional practice and increased satisfaction in university students (Booker & Dunsmore, 2018). Positive relationships between gratitude, happiness, forgiveness, compassion, and higher subjective well-being have also been chronicled (McCullough et al., 2002). Satici et al. (2014) further reported that increased gratitude practice helps reduce anger and aggression and increase forgiveness in college students.

Even with an increased focus on the power of self-compassion in supporting university students, it's interconnection to cultivating gratitude, and the relationship of self-compassion with gratitude and various demographic variables is limited. The purpose of this research was to assess the association between self-compassion and demographics adjusted by gratitude. Self-compassion of undergraduate and graduate social work students enrolled in a northeastern public university was examined in Spring 2020.

## METHODS

### Sample and Procedure

This quantitative descriptive research was approved by the university's Office of Research Compliance and the respondents were guaranteed anonymity. A convenient sampling strategy was employed, and the unit of analysis was the students enrolled in the School of Social Work in a northeastern public university. All the students were invited to participate in this web-based survey, and the data was collected online using the Qualtrics Software for five-months starting March 2020. Participation in the study was voluntary and \$5 Amazon gift cards were provided to participants. In total 104 responses from undergraduate (40%) and graduate (60%) social work students were received for the research project from the sample size of 350, resulting in a response rate of 30%. The participants' demographic profile is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participants**

Demographic Variables	Mean/Percent
Age	Mean = 29 years (SD 9.3, 18-59 years)
Years of Education	Mean = 18 years (SD 2.5)
Years of Professional Social Work Employment	Mean = 8.2 years (SD 7.8, 0-35 years)
Gender	
Male	7%
Female	90%
Transgender female	1%
Gender variant/non-conforming	1%
Agender	1%
Ethnicity	
White/European American	91%
Black/African American	5%
Latinx/Hispanic American	4%
Marital Status	
Single	50%
Married (Civil partnership)	28%
Cohabiting with a partner	18%
Divorced	2%
Widowed	2%
Geographic Location	
Urban	32%
Suburban	26%
Rural	42%
Presence of Disability	
Yes	22%
No	78%
Political Affiliation	
Republican	9%
Independent	31%
Democrats	60%
Religions Affiliation	
No religion	60%
Christian	26%
Jewish	4%
Buddhist	1%
Other	9%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	75%

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Bisexual	13%
Queer/gay/lesbian	8%
Pansexual	2%
Questioning	2%
Spiritual Affiliation	
1 (Not at all Spiritual)	36%
4	28%
7 (Very Spiritual)	36%

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### **Statistical Analysis**

Three major statistical models were utilized to extract information from the two survey instruments to define self-compassion and gratitude index and assess the association between self-compassion and demographics adjusted by gratitude. The principal component analysis (PCA) was used to define self-compassion and gratitude. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to assess whether self-compassion and gratitude are associated with individual demographic variables. The multiple linear regression models were then generated to assess the relationship between self-compassion and gratitude with various demographic variables.

## **RESULTS**

### **Data Set**

A simple imputation in which missing values are replaced by the median of the corresponding item was utilized for the few missing values in the self-compassion and gratitude instruments.

### **Demographic Variables**

The original survey includes 15 demographic variables and each variable had multiple categories. Due to the relatively small size of the data and lack of statistical significance, we decided to select the following variables: spirituality, household size, urbanity, age, political affiliation, and education. We combined some of the initial demographic categories in a meaningful way to define 6 candidate demographic variables.

### **Measuring Self-Compassion**

Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (SCS, 26 items) and Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-s, 12 items) are widely used instruments to measure self-compassion. They are divided into 6 subscales; both assess positive and negative aspects of self-compassion (self-kindness versus self-judgment; common humanity versus isolation; and mindfulness versus over-identification), and compute a composite self-compassion score (Neff, 2003; Saeed & Sonnentag, 2018). The effects of self-compassion among university students and the impact of self-compassion interventions on student well-being have been widely studied using SCS and SCS-s (Beaumont et al., 2016; Lockard et al., 2014; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Smeets et al., 2014). Hence, we employed SCS-s in this research.

### **Measuring Gratitude**

We employed the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) developed by McCullough et al. (2002) to measure the gratitude level of university students. The GQ-6 is a 6-item instrument on a 1-7 scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) and has demonstrated good internal reliability and validity (Chen et al., 2009; McCullough et al., 2002; Satici et al., 2014).

### **Internal Reliability of the Instruments**

The short form of the Self-Compassion instrument has 12 items that can be further broken down into 6 sub-scales. Among them, mindfulness (Q2\_3, Q2\_7), self-kindness (Q2\_2, Q2\_6), and the

sense of common humanity (Q2\_5, Q2\_10) are positively scored and measure self-compassion while over-identification (Q2\_1, Q2\_9), isolation (Q2\_4, Q2\_4), and self-judgment (Q2\_11, Q2\_12) were negatively scored and measure coldness. The empirical relationship described above was verified in the heatmap in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The pairwise correlation plot reveals the potential relevance of PCA. The shape of an ellipse represents the correlation. The skinnier the ellipse, the higher the correlation. The direction reflects whether a correlation is positive or negative. The off-diagonal direction implies a positive correlation while the main diagonal direction implies a negative association.**

Similar to López et al. (2018), we utilized the six positively scored items that are associated with sub-scales mindfulness, self-kindness, and the sense of common humanity to define the self-compassion index. The Gratitude Questionnaire 6-item survey data has two negatively scored items that we reversed so they are consistent with the rest of the four items. The internal reliability measures are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2 Point Estimates of Cronbach’s Alpha for Both Instruments and the Associated 95% Confidence Intervals**

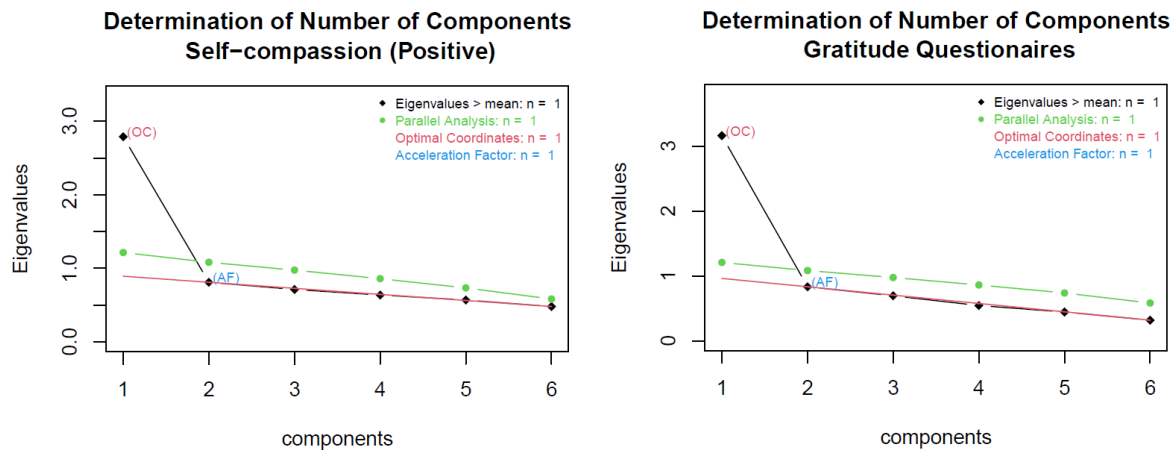
Survey Instrument	Cronbach’s Alpha	Confidence Interval (95%)
Self-compassion	0.767	(0.690, 0.830)
Gratitude	0.796	(0.728, 0.851)

The internal reliability coefficients are above 75% in both self-compassion and gratitude instruments suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

### Definitions of Indexes of Self-Compassion and Gratitude

There are different approaches to aggregate information in the survey instruments. Taking the sum or average of the item scores is most widely used in literature but is sound if all pairwise correlation coefficients are approximately equal. Otherwise, a statistical modeling approach to aggregate the information is recommended. The principal component analysis (PCA) or exploratory

factor analysis (EFA) are commonly used to capture more information. The pairwise correlation coefficients in the top-left corner of Figure 2 indicate a significant variation. Therefore, we used the PCA scores to define self-compassion and gratitude indexes that carry as much information as possible. Different methods for finding the number of components/factors to retain in PCA are employed, and the classical ones are the Kaiser rule, the parallel analysis, and the Cattell subjective Scree test (Raiche et al., 2013) which we availed in this research.



**Figure 2. The classical Kaiser rule, simulation-based parallel analysis, and non-graphical solutions to the Scree test.**

All three methods indicate that it is sufficient that the first component of the PCA for both self-compassion and gratitude questionnaires be used for subsequent analysis. The factor loadings of the two first PCAs of the self-compassion and gratitude instruments are given in Table 3.

**Table 3 PCA Loadings of the First Component Corresponding to the Instruments of Self-Compassion and Gratitude**

Self-Compassion			Gratitude	
Item	Loading	Item	Loading	
Q2_3	0.418	Q3_1	0.444	
Q2_7	0.327	Q3_2	0.462	
Q2_10	0.384	Q3_3	0.383	
Q2_5	0.400	Q3_4	0.409	
Q2_2	0.422	Q3_5	0.386	
Q2_6	0.465	Q3_6	0.356	

All PCA loadings are positive and have magnitudes greater than 0.3 in both PCA models for self-compassion and gratitude. This pattern also confirms the appropriate choice of the PCA approach to defining the index of self-compassion and gratitude respectively.

### Descriptive Analysis of Self-Compassion and Gratitude

We studied the relationships within and amongst the independent (self-compassion) and dependent variables (gratitude, spirituality, household size, urbanity, age, political affiliation, and education). Reported in Table 4 are the results of the analysis of variance analysis (ANOVA) which explores whether the mean index values across the categories of any given candidate demographic variable are equal. Also reported in Table 4 are the p-values produced from the ANOVA model and the number of subjects in each category of each demographic variable.

**Table 4 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Table for Each Demographic Variable**

Demographic Variable	Variable Values	Size	Self-Compassion Index		Gratitude Index	
			Mean (SD)	P-value	Mean (SD)	P-value
Spirituality	Low	39	-0.434 (1.63)	0.0394*	-0.531 (1.80)	0.0176*
	High	65	0.261 (1.65)		0.319 (1.70)	
Household Size	Less than 3	50	-0.348 (1.65)	0.0403*	0.156 (1.30)	0.3923
	3 or more	54	0.322 (1.63)		-0.144 (2.13)	
Urbanity	Rural	27	0.182 (1.50)	0.3440	0.293(1.68)	0.5666
	Suburb	44	-0.280 (1.77)		-0.174 (2.02)	
	Urban	33	0.225 (1.66)		-0.008 (1.51)	
Group Age	< 24 years old	32	0.206 (1.49)	0.0761 <sup>+</sup>	0.276 (1.26)	0.5651
	24-30 years old	38	-0.483 (1.71)		-0.164 (1.92)	
	30+ years old	34	-0.346 (1.66)		-0.077 (2.04)	
Political Affiliation	Independent	31	0.374 (1.39)	0.3750	0.308(1.50)	0.1984
	Moderate D.	31	-0.366 (1.53)		-0.184 (1.50)	
	Republican	12	-0.136 (2.05)		0.686 (0.93)	
	Strong D.	30	0.046 (1.89)		-0.406 (2.40)	
Education	Associate Deg	26	-0.011 (1.68)	0.5990	0.485 (1.20)	0.1225
	Baccalaureate Deg	66	0.086 (1.64)		-0.052 (1.78)	
	Advanced Deg	12	-0.448 (1.90)		-0.762 (2.52)	

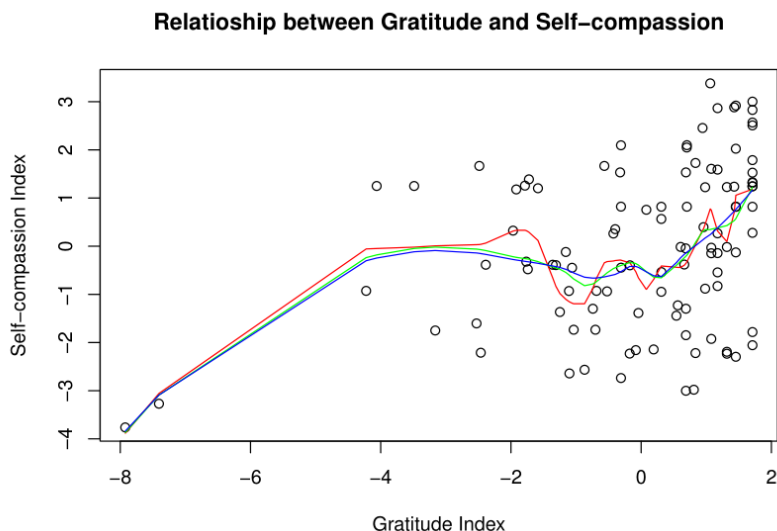
\* significant at 0.05, <sup>+</sup> significant at level 0.10.

The results in Table 4 show that the level of self-compassion is statistically dependent on spirituality ( $p = 0.0394$ ), household size ( $p = 0.0403$ ), and age ( $p = 0.0761$ ). Furthermore, people with a higher spirituality and from larger household level tend to have a higher self-compassion. In terms of age, people aged 23 or younger have a higher level of self-compassion. Due to the relatively small sample size, demographic variables urbanity, political affiliation, and education *did not* achieve statistical significance. However, the magnitude of the mean index score of self-compassion across these categories also reveals some interesting patterns. For example, people from rural and urban areas have a higher self-compassion than those from the suburban region. People who received an advanced degree have a relatively low self-compassion compared with those with a two-year or a four-year degree. For political affiliation, independent and strong democrats tend to have a higher level of self-compassion than republicans and moderate democrats. Of course, there is no clear boundary between strong and moderate democrats and the classification may introduce bias to the data, resulting in some bias in the interpretation.

For the gratitude index, spirituality has the same pattern as seen in the self-compassion ( $p = 0.0176$ ). The rest of the demographic variables did not achieve the statistical significance level largely because of the relatively small sample size that led to the bigger variation across the category.

### Relationship between Self-Compassion and Gratitude

We first plotted the two index variables by a scatter plot and a non-parametric technique to fit the scatter plot to see the relationship between self-compassion and gratitude. We chose three different smoothing coefficients in the LOESS curve (LOcally WEighted Scatter-plot Smoother) plot which is given in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. The scatter plot of gratitude and self-compassion indexes with non-parametric LOESS curves with different smoothing coefficients.**

The scatter plot in Figure 3 indicates that there is a potential curve (cubic) linear relationship between gratitude and self-compassion. The overall pattern shows that as the index of gratitude increases the self-compassion level also increases.

#### Association between Self-Compassion and Demographic Variables

Three regression models were built to address the research objective of this study. The candidate demographic variables were selected based on a comprehensive analysis using several criteria i.e., the coefficient determination ( $R^2$ ), Mellow’s p, and AIC. The sum and mean of the raw item scores were compared with the PCA scores. Using the first PCA component in the linear regression model procedures a significantly higher  $R^2$  than the sum and mean item scores were observed. The automatic variable selection criteria were based on the p-values in the joint regression model: if the p-value was less than 0.3, we included the corresponding variable. If the p-value was bigger than 0.4, the corresponding variable was excluded. One exception was education that was included in the model intentionally regardless of the p-value. The reason we used a high p-value to include in the model was based on two considerations. The sample size is relatively small and the automatic variable selection using AIC yielded variables that have similar p-values in around 0.3. The association between self-compassion and the demographic variables that are not adjusted by the gratitude index is summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5 Summary of Linear Regression Model between Self-Compassion Index and Demographics**

Demographics (Baseline)	Category	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
Intercept		0.7391	0.7956	0.9290	0.3553
Spirituality (high)	Low	-0.5783	0.3495	-1.6545	0.1014
Household Size (< 3)	Size 3+	0.4490	0.3482	1.2895	0.2005
Urbanity (Rural)	Suburban	-0.3912	0.4106	-0.9527	0.3433
	Urban	0.6003	0.4717	1.2728	0.2063
grp.age (<24 yrs old)	Age [24,30]	-0.6946	0.4400	-1.5788	0.1178
	Age [30+]	-0.1076	0.4309	-0.2496	0.8035
Political affiliations (Independent)	Moderate D.	-0.6458	0.4451	-1.4510	0.1502
	Republicans	-0.8125	0.5760	-1.4107	0.1617
	Strong D.	-0.5095	0.4545	-1.1212	0.2651
Education (Advanced Degree)	Assoc. Degree	-0.1056	0.6182	-0.1708	0.8647
	Bachelor’s degree	-0.0500	0.5497	-0.0909	0.9278



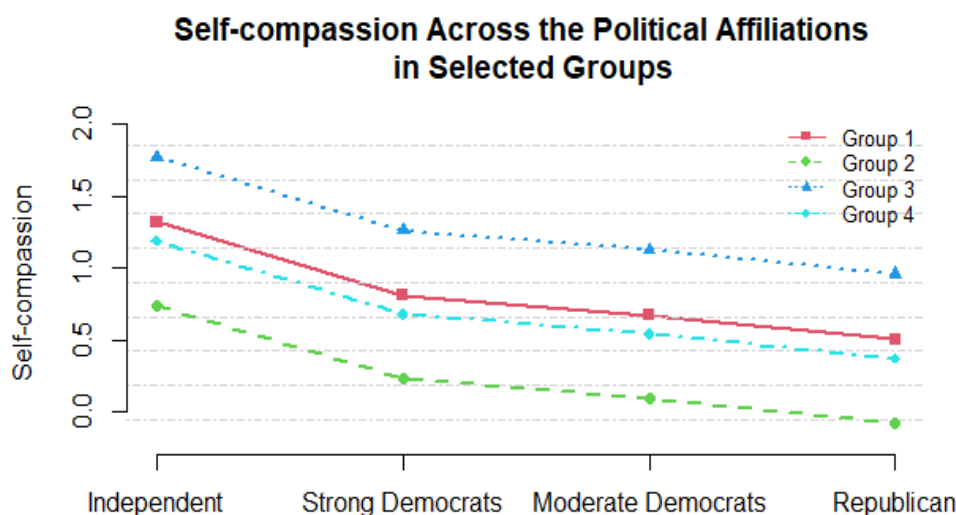
This unadjusted regression model gives similar information to what was reported in the ANOVA model (Table 4). Urbanity was retained based on the variable selection criteria. The regression coefficients indicated that the self-compassion level of students from the rural area was higher than that of students from suburban regions but lower than that of students from urban regions. We chose three baseline demographic groups - urban, aged younger than 24 and with a bachelor's degree - from less statistically significant variables urbanity, age, and the insignificant variable education. The pattern of political affiliations is slightly different from the ANOVA analysis that is based on the marginal analysis. We looked at the self-compassion across the various political affiliations based on the following four subgroups:

Group #1: Spirituality = high; Household size: < 3;

Group #2: Spirituality = low; Household size < 3;

Group #3: Spirituality = high; Household size: 3+;

Group #4: Spirituality = low; Household size: 3+;



**Figure 4. Self-compassion across political affiliation in the four specified demographic groups.**

We can see two pieces of information from Figure 4. For each demographic group, the self-compassion level is decreasing according to the political affiliations: independent, strong democrats, moderate democrats, and republicans. On the other hand, for each political affiliation, the self-compassion levels in specified demographic groups are also different. This information is not available from the *marginal* ANOVA analysis in Table 4. Within each political affiliation, students with higher spirituality have a higher self-compassion level. Furthermore, within each political affiliation and each spirituality level, students living in a household with more than 2 members tend to have a higher level of self-compassion. As noted earlier, independent and strong democrats seemed to be more self-compassionate, across all the four demographic groups defined above.

#### **Self-Compassion versus Demographics Adjusted by Gratitude**

The relationship between self-compassion and gratitude has been depicted in Figure 3. The non-parametric smooth curve indicates a cubic polynomial relationship between self-compassion and gratitude. Here we fit a linear regression model to assess the linear relationship between self-

compassion and gratitude adjusted by the demographic variables listed in Tables 4 and 5. The results are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6 Summary of Linear Regression Model between Self-Compassion Index and Gratitude Adjusted by Demographics**

Demographics (Baseline)	Category	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
Intercept		0.6181	0.7496	0.8246	0.4118
Spirituality (high)	Low	-0.2470	0.3418	-0.7228	0.4717
Household Size (< 3)	Size 3+	0.6504	0.3325	1.9559	0.0535
Urbanity (Rural)	Suburban	-0.3555	0.3867	-0.9193	0.3603
	Urban	0.5135	0.4446	1.1548	0.2512
Group Age (<24 yrs old)	Age [24,30]	-0.6156	0.4147	-1.4843	0.1412
	Age [30+]	-0.0044	0.4066	-0.0108	0.9914
Political affiliations (Independent)	Moderate D Democrats	-0.4811	0.4214	-1.1415	0.2567
	Republicans	-0.9626	0.5438	-1.7702	0.0800
	Strong Democrats	-0.2643	0.4332	-0.6102	0.5433
Education (Advanced Degree)	Assoc. Degree	-0.5345	0.5941	-0.8997	0.3706
	Bachelor's degree	-0.2915	0.5218	-0.5587	0.5778
Logarithmic of gratitude index		0.3334	0.0931	3.5825	0.0005

After the linear model in Table 6 was adjusted by the gratitude index, the relationship between self-compassion and demographic variables is similar to the unadjusted model. It is within the expectation that self-compassion and gratitude are positively correlated with p-value 0.0005. When the gratitude index increases by one unit, the corresponding increment in the self-compassion index is 0.3334. Furthermore, the variable political affiliation achieves statistical significance ( $p = 0.08$ ) at level 0.1, although the order of self-compassion level across the categories is the same as the unadjusted model. The variable household size also becomes statistically significant ( $p = 0.053$ ) at level 0.1. From the regression coefficient associated with household size in Table 6, we can see that the average self-compassion level of people from households of more than 2 people (3 or more people) is 0.6504 higher than those from the household with 2 or fewer people.

## DISCUSSION

Our findings corroborated the prior studies - self-compassion and gratitude were positively correlated (Booker & Dunsmore, 2018; Voci et al., 2019). As self-compassion is a teachable skill (Neff et al., 2018), our results will benefit university educators and administrators. Integration of self-compassion techniques in core curriculum will contribute to increased gratitude which is a strong indicator of enhanced wellbeing of university students (Ying, 2009). Investing in extracurricular opportunities for developing and fostering self-compassion and gratitude practices in the university setting will help reduce anxiety, stress, and burnout of the students. Students' ability to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds is enhanced as they learn to be kinder, supportive, and non-judgmental toward themselves (Neff et al., 2018).

Our research also suggests that the promotion of student practice of self-compassion and gratitude is affected by demographic factors. Individuals from larger households tended to have a higher level of self-compassion which we have not observed in prior research. Students having a higher level of spirituality documented high self-compassion which was corroborated by Ying (2009). When studying the interaction of self-compassion and gratitude, spirituality was the only demographic variable that was significant and had the same pattern as seen in self-compassion. Khasawneh's (2011) recommendation that centers be established in universities to foster spirituality seems of significance based on our findings. Other demographic variables did not achieve a statistical significance level when studying gratitude and self-compassion together largely because of the relatively small sample size that led to the bigger variation across the categories.

When studying the interaction of self-compassion with demographics, people aged 23 or younger seemed to be more self-compassionate. This again was counter to prior findings by Hwang et al. (2016) who reported that the positive correlation between self-compassion and subjective well-being grew stronger with age. Our results also differ from work by Herriot et al. (2018) where age was not significant when studying self-compassion and the overall well-being of people. Students from rural areas have a higher level of self-compassion than those from suburban regions, but lower self-compassion than those residing in urban areas. This has not been a focus of prior research and needs to be further studied in future research. Moreover, the participants who received an advanced degree have relatively low self-compassion compared with those with a two-year or a four-year degree. This also has never been studied before and might have negative connotations. But we hypothesize that people with higher education become rigid in the critique of themselves resulting in lowered belief in the power of self-compassion. This calls for academia to advance and nurture the call for self-compassion practices throughout academic careers, rather than integrating them only into entry-level courses.

Regarding political affiliation, independent and strong democrats had a higher level of self-compassion than republicans and moderate democrats. Prior research supports that when democrats are more compassionate, their views on policies are more progressive (Lerner, 2020). Furthermore, within each political affiliation, students reporting higher spirituality were more self-compassionate. Additionally, within each political affiliation and each spirituality level, students who live in a household with more than 2 members tend to have a higher self-compassion level. This implies that students with low spirituality and household size of less than 3 have the lowest level of self-compassion. Conversely, students with a higher level of spirituality and household size of three or more have documented higher levels of self-compassion.

Interestingly, these results corroborate with Masullo's work (2020): people with a higher sense of common humanity (subscale of SCS) were able to form relationships with those they disagree with politically. Having the students from diverse political affiliations actively participate in open dialog while immersing in self-compassion and gratitude practices, would promote anti-oppressive practices (Lerner, 2020). Challenging people from diverse spiritual and political backgrounds to engage in opportunities of serving others without an expectation to return the benevolence in the university setting will encourage humility and authentic human relationship building (Lerner, 2020).

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Our research serves as a foundation for future research that can build on our preliminary findings on the association of demographics on self-compassion and gratitude of university students. However, data for this web-based survey research was completed by students who voluntarily participated in the study, and the resulting sample is not random. Secondly, the participating students come from the public university that is characterized as a mid-sized comprehensive four-year institution situated in a metropolitan area in the northeastern United States. The generalization of the findings of this study is appropriate only for universities having similar characteristics to the one in the current study. Moreover, the sample was predominantly White, female, partnered, heterosexual, and not identifying with having a disability. Finally, the demographic variables might not have reached statistical significance in the results due to the small sample size. This research has helped us create new knowledge on the self-compassion of social work students. These results will further the conversations around curriculum analysis of self-compassion content and build self-compassion practices within institutions of higher education. Even though these results are very insightful and provide a starting direction to curriculum development, further investigation is needed at a broader scope to further test these emerging observations.

**Conflicts of Interest:**

No potential conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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Hermeet Kohli: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Investigation, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing, Project Administration;

Donna Wampole: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing;

Amarpreet Kohli: Data Curation, Visualization;

Cheng Peng: Formal Analysis, Validation;

Dasha Polvakova: Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing

**Ethical Statement:**

This quantitative descriptive research was approved by the University of Southern Maine's Office of Research Compliance and the respondents were guaranteed anonymity. A convenient sampling strategy was employed, and the unit of analysis was the students enrolled in the School of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine. All the students were invited to participate in this web-based survey, and the data was collected online using the Qualtrics Software for ten-months starting March 2020. Participation in the study was voluntary and \$5 Amazon gift cards were provided to participants.

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