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Analysis of the Novel of My Sweet Orange Tree in the Context of Self-Compassion

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Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to examine the concept of self-compassion within the framework of the My Sweet Orange Tree trilogy. To achieve this aim, the factors of attachment theory, schemas, positive psychology, humanist theory, acceptance-commitment therapy, culture, religion, gender and age, which can be effective in the development of individuals' self-compassion, have been tried to be examined. The study was carried out with the document analysis method, one of the qualitative study techniques. It can be said that the results obtained are consistent with the literature. There have been previous studies on self-compassion, but studies examining more factors together are limited. Events experienced by the character Zeze, theoretical perspectives, and environmental factors have helped us to conclude that self-compassion is effective in individual's development.

Key Words

My Sweet Orange Tree • Self-compassion • Zeze

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Introduction

In a world where being average is not accepted due to the innate desire to be good (Neff, 2021), individuals may tend to inflate their self-evaluations with extreme competitiveness (Gerhardt, 2010; Twenge, 2010) as a result of different pressures (Alicke & Preuss, 2009). However, since not all individuals will be above the average, they will encounter inadequacy and feel unsuccessful (Neff & Germer, 2022), and the competitive and humiliating part of the self will be triggered (Gilbert, 2009) and the situation will cause the individual to suffer. In other words, although everyone wants happiness and avoids pain (Lama, 1995) nature does not promise to make us happy by giving the best (Potter, 2019). Because our brain is designed to focus on the negative so that we can survive, not so that we can see the beauty around us (Ak, et al., 2022). Our brain structure has evolved over centuries to cope with threats, to take advantage of opportunities that encourage survival and reproduction (Gilbert, 2014). Despite this, people treat themselves more harshly than others in bitter situations (Neff, 2003a). Because most people have difficulty in giving themselves the compassion they show to their environment (Neff, 2021).

After protecting us in times of danger like a double-edged sword, our brain can cause us to constantly ponder on what would have happened if the danger had not passed, thus causing us to inflict pain on ourselves (Gilbert, 2014). The concept of self-compassion, which has existed in eastern culture for centuries (Salzberg, 1997) against this cruelty of people towards themselves, was put forward as an alternative to concepts such as self-esteem (Seligman, 1995), self-competence (Bandura, 1990) as a result of the interaction of psychology with the philosophy of Buddhism (Neff, 2003a). The concept of self-compassion, which has been recently adapted to Western culture (Neff, 2003a), was translated into Turkish from the Latin word *compassion* (Strauss et al., 2016). Self-compassion, which is defined as a person's directing compassionate attitudes and behaviors towards himself (Neff, 2003a), although sometimes perceived as weakness, actually gives the individual the courage to face distressing emotions (Kolts, 2012). In other words, self-compassion is accepted as one of the healthy ways to deal with grief and difficult experiences (Neff, 2003a).

Self-compassion, which emerges from the concept of compassion (Neff, 2003b), is also defined as striving to relieve another's pain (Wispe, 1991) with a broader perspective (Strauss, et al., 2016; Neff, 2011), accepting that others can suffer as well. Although self-compassion is perceived as being in pain when defined in this way, it is not about self-pity (Neff, 2011). Because self-pity pushes the individual to lack of self-compassion with inaction and uncertainty (Neff, 2003a; Neff, 2003b). As to self-compassion, it requires recognizing humanity shared with kindness and being careful when thinking about one's negative aspects (Neff, 2011). In this way, individuals develop an understanding perspective instead of judging themselves (Neff, 2003a). In order for a person to develop self-compassion, he must be strong, determined and courageous with emotional kindness (Gilbert, 2014). As a result, self-compassion refers to an individual showing the same compassion to others as to himself. (Neff, 2011). This does not mean being selfish or putting one's own needs before others (Germer, 2009).

While defining self-compassion, which does not have a universal definition, Neff (2003a) examined the concept empirically and stated that it consisted of three basic structures. Each component contains positive and negative sub-dimensions (Neff, 2003b). Germer (2009) and Neff (2003b) stated positive components as polite behavior, common

experiences of humanity and awareness and expressed that with these components, individuals would embrace rather than pity themselves. The negative dimensions of the components were defined as criticism against polite behavior (self-judgment), isolation against awareness of common sharing (common humanity), and hyper-identification against mindfulness (Neff, et al., 2019). In the face of isolation (Neff & Germer, 2022), which causes more severe distress, the individual believes that this situation develops only due to his failure and inadequacy (Neff, et al., 2019). Courteous behavior is the individual's giving himself the care and attention he needs in the face of distress and inadequacies (Neff, 2003b; Neff, 2009). Courteous behavior involves being kind and sensitive to oneself rather than criticizing oneself (Neff, 2011). On the other hand, in self-judgment, it is observed that the individual has a punishing or corrosive attitude towards himself in the face of distress and inadequacy (Neff, et al., 2019). Being aware of the common sharing (common humanity), that is, knowing that pain and difficulties can be experienced by everyone, is a natural part of being human (Neff, 2003a; Gilbert, 2014). It has the aim of encouraging individuals to a deep sense of belonging within a sense of common humanity. (Neff & Knox, 2017). When it is not approached in this way, the individual would experience disconnection as he suffers due to his weakness (Neff, 2011). The last sub-component of awareness, on the other hand, allows the individual to see clearly the aspects of his life (Neff, 2021), to live without classifying his experiences as good, bad, beautiful, ugly, and to be open to experiences in a balanced way (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Because the individual must be aware of the pain in order to show compassion; an individual who ignores common experiences may think that he is the only one who suffers (Germer, 2009). An individual who cannot take a meta-perspective because of this thought may experience over-identification (Neff, 2003b). Along with over-identification, negative thoughts, and obsessive emotions will occur, and as a result, the mind will be busy and the level of self-compassion will decrease (Neff & Tirsch, 2013). The concept of self-compassion is a whole with its examined sub-dimensions. Many factors affect the specified concept and its sub-dimensions. These can be exemplified as attachment theory, schemas, positive psychology, humanistic theory, acceptance and commitment therapy, post-traumatic stress disorder, and environmental factors. In this study, My Sweet Orange Tree trilogy written by Jose Mauro de Vasconcelos based on his own life story will be examined with the concept of self-compassion. It is also possible to examine self-compassion in a longitudinal way, as it is assumed that the work was written on the basis of the author's life and that he conveyed the character of Zeze from childhood to his early teenage years, in search of love and compassion.

As a result of the research, it was found that the compassion that the individual shows to himself is beneficial for mental health (Neff et al., 2007). In the international literature on self-compassion for the last two decades, and in the national literature for the last ten years, studies about life satisfaction (Neff, 2003b; Umphrey & Sherblom, 2014; Bluth & Blanton, 2014), humor and effective communication skills (Neff et al., 2005; Leary et al., 2007), resilience and psychological well-being (Neff, et al., 2007; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Neff et al., 2008), awareness and resilience (Neff, 2003b), happiness-optimism (Neff, et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Neff et al., 2007), psychological positive self and parental perception (Neff, et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009), depression (Fard, 2016), anxiety (Pauley & McPherson, 2010), stress (Bluth & Blanton, 2014), eating disorders (Ferreira et al., 2013), self-rumination (Neff & Vonk, 2009) and psychological stress (Thimm, 2017) have been carried out. Although there are studies in the

literature about the concept of self-compassion (Diedrich et al., 2014), which is accepted as a kind of emotion regulation, these are not at the desired level.

Although its actuality has increased recently, the concept of self-compassion is not only a concept in science, but also a concept that appeared in literature a long time ago. With this study, it is aimed to examine the concept of self-compassion from different perspectives, to ensure that information about self-compassion is learned better through a literary work and to present it as an example to those working in the field. The study is important in terms of being an example of novel analysis in the field and discussing the data obtained from the novel in a theoretical framework.

Method

In this study, the works written by Brazilian writer José Mauro de Vasconcelos in the form of a trilogy with the name of My Sweet Orange Tree are analyzed with a qualitative research design. The books were examined with the document analysis method, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The document analysis method is called as the researchers' detailed scanning of the information and written texts about the facts and events and the creation of a whole from this information (Creswell, 2002).

Data Collection Tool

As data collection tool, the novels My Sweet Orange Tree, Let's Wake Up the Sun and Loose Cannon, written by Mauro de Vasconcelos, were used. The life of the novel's hero, Zeze, from the age of five or six to his first adulthood, is narrated by Zeze. The novel consists of the hero's early school years, his family and friends, his relationship with the sweet orange tree, his adoption, secondary school education, his relationship with his family and people at school, his choice of profession, and how his dreams affect him, and these are discussed in terms of self-compassion in this study. Within these headings, it has been examined how Zeze's self-compassion is shaped and from what it is affected.

Analysis of Data

The collected data were analyzed by the researchers within the framework of self-compassion, different perspectives and factors, and with information about the development of self-compassion based on Zeze's life story and what he told. As a result of the review, self-compassion was sectioned as attachment theory, schemas, positive psychology, humanistic theory, acceptance-commitment therapy, culture, religion, gender, and age. The book was examined according to these determined subject headings, the data were grouped and interpreted with the examples obtained from the book and given in the findings.

Results

In this part of the study, the findings obtained from the research are included. The findings are evaluated within the framework of the specified topics.

Human offspring need support longer than other species to survive, this support is not only perceived as food and shelter, but the offspring also depend on the parent for the biological regulators of their immature physiological and emotional systems (Potter, 2019). As a result of the attention the individual receives, oxytocin release begins which

functions as a sedative in the individual and also supports the individual's self-compassion development (Neff, 2003c). Studies have shown that even just imagining compassion and kindness triggers the calming system and calms the threat system (Gilbert, 2014). The quality of this relationship with the caregiver is also very important (Bowlby, 1969). The release of oxytocin, which comforts the infant with warmth and gentle touch (Neff, 2003c), influences attachment during infancy, which in turn shapes the child's capacity to cope with stress (Bowlby, 1973), to love people, to feel supported and safe (Carter, 1998; MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010). The same system occurs when self-compassion is shown to the individual, and the threat system disappears, allowing the care system to come into play (Neff, 2021). Although Bowlby states that attachment behavior is completed at the age of two or three, the attachment that occurs continues throughout life; it is effective in determining emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Bowlby, 1969; 1973). Bowlby, who says to activate attachment memories by showing kindness to the client in therapy (Gilbert, 2009), has shown in his studies that attachment increases brain development (Cozolino, 2007; Cozolino, 2008; Gerhardt, 2007) and immunity increases and the release of stress hormones decreases (Gilbert, 2009; Neff, 2021). Similarly, it has been revealed that attachment in adulthood is related to the quality of the relationship and people's perspectives on themselves (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988). Securely attached individuals consider themselves to be lovable and able to receive help in times of need (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In secure attachment, the individual will perceive himself as being supported, secure and accepted, thus the ability to calm himself in difficult situations will develop (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In this respect, it is expected that individuals with secure attachment have high self-compassion (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). It has been revealed that there is a negative relationship between anxious-avoidant attachment, which is one of the other attachment types, and self-compassion (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Wei et al., 2011). It has been determined that individuals with anxious attachment have more self-centered features and the ability to prioritize their own needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). It has been observed that individuals who are not sufficiently relieved in their early stages tend to be more embarrassed by and criticize themselves more, and it is assumed that their self-compassion levels are low (Gilbert, 2009). Self-compassion includes actively relaxing and soothing oneself in times of struggle (Neff & Knox, 2017). The capacity to be compassionate may remain passive in children whose attachment/soothing system is not actively stimulated and developed in childhood (Gilbert, 2014). The caregiver for Zeze, who started to share his story from the age of four or five, is his older sister Gloria –who looks like him, his mother, and his other older sister.

In this process, Zeze is expected to care for his brother named Luis, who is two years younger than him. His older sister, Gloria, whom he often says resembles himself, supports him by complimenting him on how handsome he is and the beauty of his affection for his brother. His uncle Edmunda tells Zeze that he is a brain teaser and answers his questions one by one. Similarly, the primary school teacher often tells Zeze that *you have a gentle heart, you are a child with a heart of gold*. His friend Martinez, whom he prefers to call Portuga, was expressing his good thoughts about Zeze by saying that he was smart as a poison and *you made this old man's heart soft*. Zeze heard similar sentences from some teachers in his next school. There was consistency among the individuals specified in the caregiving process, but this consistency was primarily in the direction of meeting basic needs. His teacher at school also tried to make Zeze feel that he was a loved one and often supported him by giving pocket money for lunch time.

He added that when he frightened a pregnant woman with black pantyhose in the neighborhood, he was beaten by his mother with slippers and even while telling about this, he added that his mother later regretted and felt sorry for him. When Zeze cut his foot, his sister provided first aid, but they hid Zeze's injured foot from the family in case they got angry. On New Year's Eve, which is considered an important holiday, the family consumed toast and coffee instead of a rich table. It is stated by Zeze that the meals eaten on other days are similar. From this point of view, it is understood that there are problems in the family regarding adequate nutrition. In addition, Zeze is aware that the family economy is bad even at a young age, and when he offends his father with his words, he tries to do things like polishing shoes and singing to make up for his mistakes. It is not possible to interpret that there is a secure attachment between him and his father because he does not see his father very often like his mother, his father cannot work while his mother is working, and he cannot see the father's love and attention that he wants. Zeze tried to satisfy the attention and love he wanted from his father with the dream of Portuguese Martinez and later the actor Moris. He wanted to be sick all the time because of his father's taking care of him while he was sick during the adoption period. In his youth, when his relationship with his father started to improve, he tried to end his relationship with his girlfriend by making self-sacrifice from time to time in order not to lose this interest. His father's trust in him, his love and caress were among the things that could not be exchanged for the world for him. He had the thought that one day he would love his father as he was, and it really did happen one day.

It has been determined that the attachment established in childhood is carried out through romantic relationships in adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In a study conducted between romantic relationship attachments established in adulthood and self-compassion levels, it was found that there was a positive relationship between secure attachment and self-compassion, and a negative relationship between anxious-fearful attachment and self-compassion. (Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Wei, et al., 2011). In the study conducted by Bolt (2015), it was revealed that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion and partner affection and romantic relationship quality and satisfaction. Accordingly, individuals with low self-compassion and partner affection have lower romantic relationship quality. It has been concluded that individuals who experience negative romantic, family and friendship relationships have lower self-compassion levels (Bayar, 2016). It can be stated that Zeze's character develops a secure attachment in his partner relationships and relationships with other adults in the future. However, information about the attachments between birth parents and adoptive parents in the book is too limited.

The environment in which the child lives in the early stages of his life is effective in shaping his self-compassion. Discovering the environment as a safe place in childhood is related to the reactions of caregivers (Bowlby, 1969; 1973). Physical and emotional abuse experienced during childhood decreases the level of self-compassion (Neff, 2021) and as a result, it increases the possibility of more emotional stress, alcohol use and suicidal behavior (Tanaka et al., 2011). Zeze was present environments where he can learn self-compassion in his childhood, albeit a little. When talking about the household, he talks about all of them with their good features. In more detail, he tells that he receives compassion from outside, and while talking about his mother he says that *although she beats me, she treats me affectionately* and *my sister Gloria supports me because we look alike*. When examined from the perspective of parental attitudes, the self-compassion levels of individuals who grew up in an authoritarian-strict family environment were found to be significantly lower than those who grew up in a democratic environment (Neff, 2003a;

Sargin, 2012; Sargin, 2018). It has been revealed that positive mother-positive father perception during adolescence is in a positive relationship with self-compassion (Andiç, 2013). There were certain rules, both in the first family in which Zeze was brought up and in the family where he was given up for adoption. While Zeze had the right to make changes to some of them, some had strict limits and could not be changed. For example, he had to study the piano for a certain period of time in his adoptive family. But even though he didn't get it right away, he gave up playing the piano by stating that he didn't want it and sacrificing some of his rights. Apart from these, there were some clear rules such as rosary time, news listening time and the precision of meal times, and these rules had to be followed. From time to time, Zeze's more comfortable religious views originating from different sects were greeted with astonishment by the people around him and his family.

The concept of self-compassion begins with the child's perception of the concepts of *me* and *not me*. Because at that time he begins to discover the common sense of humanity that connects himself and others (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Humanist theory defines developing potential as self-actualization (Neff, 2021). Rogers (1960), one of the founders of the theory, stated that change can occur when the individual is self-motivated. Maslow argues that if the need for change that comes with growth is not met, the individual becomes stagnant, stops actively exploring the inner and outer world, and will stop discovering the human flaws (Neff, 2021). In the process of self-development, Zeze made his progress first with the bird in his heart, then with the sweet orange tree, after he was adopted, with Adam, the Cururu frog living in his heart by making him feel compassion, and with the dream of Moris, whom he calls my father. He shared his experiences during the day with these imaginary characters and tried to reach better places in his life and to show compassion himself by telling himself the positive information he heard from others as if they were saying it. For example, although he knew that he had to have tonsil surgery, he accepted what his teacher Father Feliciano had said, assuming he was convinced after his imaginary father Moris told him so the next day.

Like the cognitive-behavioral theory, which is based on the thoughts of individuals, Buddhism philosophy states that the world can be shaped by thoughts. Because both eastern and western philosophers stated that emotions activate thoughts and thoughts inflame emotions more often and put them in a vicious circle (Gilbert, 2014). This thought parallels the understanding that what works is not curse or grace, but thought, as philosophers who lived centuries ago stated (Potter, 2019). Both theories provide guidance on how to deal with some thoughts (Gilbert, 2009). Among the exercises to learn to develop self-compassion, there is a part about how to focus on the worst possible outcome (Gilbert, 2014) and it works just like the question of what happens worst in cognitive behavioral techniques. After hearing about cognitive behavioral therapy, Gilbert (2009) thought about the theory's focus on evolution and compassion and speculated about how erroneous thoughts could be changed with trainings. Zeze thought that there were some who could not find even this, no matter how poorly they lived in their early childhood. With this thought, he shared the money his teacher gave him to buy something to eat at school with another student who was worse off than him and was ostracized by his friends. He showed similar kindness when caring for his younger brother, Luis.

The importance of focusing on the moment in terms of gaining cognitive awareness is mentioned in the Gestalt Therapy approach (Perls, 1972). With the chair techniques applied in the Gestalt approach, the concept of here and

now provides the individual to gain awareness by confronting them over a different role (George & Christiana, 1990). It is assumed that the acceptance phase will begin in the individual who realizes their positive or negative characteristics through confrontation (Corey, 1982). Zeze expressed the problem between him and Martinez, with whom a father-son relationship was established later, and the things he was uncomfortable with when he got into his car after the glass cut his foot. In this way, he accepted the situation and faced his unfinished business, thus creating a different friendship, father-son relationship between them.

Schema therapy states that schemas are shaped by individuals' early negative experiences (Young et al., 2003). In line with the definition, the existence of a relationship between schema therapy and self-compassion can be examined. In other words, the negativities experienced in the early period may limit the ability of individuals to use self-compassion (Germer, 2009). Negative childhood experiences, exposure to maltreatment (Vettese et al., 2011) and events together with early maladaptive schema development can affect emotional reactions and cause a lower level of self-compassion (Masomi et al., 2014). As a result of schema and self-compassion-themed studies (Thimm, 2017; Yakın et al., 2019), it has been concluded that there is a relationship between emotional deprivation schema, failure and enmeshment schemas, insufficient self-control and others-directedness schemas and self-compassion. Among the specified schema areas, the rejection schema area can be encountered as a result of not meeting basic needs, and failure and enmeshment schemas as a result of overprotective or neglectful parental attitudes (Young et al., 2003). Studies have shown that emotional deprivation and self-compassion mediate emotional autonomy (Koçak & Çelik, 2021). Zeze has always been one of the best students throughout his education life, but he did not do this within the framework of perfectionism. It was found that self-motivation (Williams et al., 2008) and self-compassion were positively related to coping with academic failure (Neff, et al., 2009). In this process, while the individual motivates himself, the language he uses against himself is soft and supportive (Neff, 2011). In addition, in the study conducted by Neff (2011) it was found that individuals with higher self-compassion levels were less likely to compare themselves with others in terms of academic or other issues. Zeze also did not blame himself when he fell second in academic studies. He tried to evaluate the situation from his own point of view. Zeze had sincere friends. Their conversation with Zeze took place in a supportive and compassionate way. In addition, Zeze found many fun activities while spending time on his own. Although he has friends who support him emotionally, he has a fairly firm idea that his fictional characters understand him better. Since he believed that they could not understand him, he did not share this thought with anyone except Father Feliciano. Based on these sentences, it can be said that Zeze's emotional deprivation score may be high. Meal times consisted of toasted bread and coffee with his birth family. Even on Christmas, which is considered an important day, Zeze reproached his father for not receiving gifts and having nothing but toast and coffee on their table. One of his brothers, Totoca told Zeze, after this reproach that *you are evil, you are like the devil*. In other words, there were times when he could not see the friendship support from his siblings. In the face of such situations, Zeze often cried because of the thought that he is of no use to anyone, and he thought that he was indeed such a person. On the other hand, positive schemas were formed as a result of Zeze's relations with Gloria, his mother Martinez and his primary school teacher.

It has been observed that those who show self-compassion with post-traumatic stress disorder show less avoidance strategies (Thompson & Waltz, 2008; Vettese, et al., 2011). Close (2013) found that the level of self-

compassion was negatively correlated with showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress. In other words, it can be assumed that individuals with low self-compassion may show more stress and anxiety reactions as a result of negative events that may cause traumatic effects. Individuals who are compassionate towards themselves are less likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder after trauma (Neff, 2021). In a different study, it was concluded that in individuals with post-traumatic stress symptoms, those who received social support had higher self-compassion levels (Gündoğan & Sargin, 2018; Maheux & Price, 2016). When Zeze, who lost Martinez, fell ill, all of his family, neighbors and even his friend with whom he sang on Tuesdays came to visit and tried to support him. Although he saw what kind of grief his brother Totoca went through as a result of losing his bird, Zeze did not easily get over it. Also, what he heard about the sweet orange tree being cut down made it more difficult for him to overcome this process. Studies have found that traumas encountered as a result of early childhood experiences also affect the level of self-compassion (Germer & Neff, 2015). After the death of Portuguese Manuel, whom he said *I learned the compassionate side of life from you*, Zeze experienced a great shock and then showed post-traumatic symptoms. He tried to describe it when he said that *every time I closed my eyes, I could see how the train hit Manuel's car*. With the effect of shock, he did not talk to anyone for a long time, could not recover from diseases, and tears constantly flowed from his eyes. He had the same inexperience in every period of his life in stopping the tears in his eyes. Even in his early youth, he had tears in his eyes, even when he was arguing with his older sister in the house where he was adopted, and thinking about his father's illness.

Working with acceptance and commitment therapy, Leaviss and Uttley (2015) stated that the psychological flexibility sub-dimensions of this theory –acceptance, values, cognitive defusion, flexible contact with the present moment, self as context, stability in value-driven behaviors (Hayes et al., 2011)– have a relationship with sub-dimensions of self-compassion which are acceptance and awareness. With awareness, there is balancing the painful experience by noticing it (Brown & Ryan, 2003), that is, accepting it as it is instead of suppressing it (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). As stated by Neff (2021), the concept of fierce self-compassion conveys the accepted and put into action aspect of self-compassion. In other words, the individual who does not try to change negative emotions will reach positive emotions more easily by embracing them, thanks to acceptance in both self-compassion and acceptance commitment therapy (Neff, 2003a). Although Zeze was interested in the geography lesson in his youth, he struggled with the phrase ‘geography is a lesson specific to the lazy and vagrant’ at first and tried to direct himself to other courses and professional fields. However, in time, he accepted his love of geography and that his profession would be in this field, assuming that he was a vagrant and lazy person, and continued his interest in geography, and realized his first professional experiments in this framework. In his early adulthood, he heard the sentence, “The city we live in is small, there are worlds inside you,” in his conversation with his father, and he tried to shape his life plan by interpreting this as receiving a blessing from his father.

In the effect of environmental factors on self-compassion, culture, gender and age range can be examined. Culture tends to provide a false narrative about self-compassion (Neff, 2021). Individuals tend to be more compassionate towards others than they are to themselves (Neff & Knox, 2017). Because in many cultures, care and compassion for others is considered positive, while directing it to oneself is perceived as passivity or weakness (Neff, 2021). In a study conducted by Neff (2003a), they found that individuals who came from Buddhism culture had

higher levels of self-compassion than those who did not. Self-compassion studies started in Brazil, the country where Zeze lived, in the same years as Turkey, and the first scientific research was carried out by [Castilho and Gouveia \(2011\)](#), to bring the self-compassion scale into the literature. According to the data of the Brazilian Embassy, 86% of the people are Christians and the rest are dispersed among different religions. There is a thought that the negative situations encountered in the world are the punishment of God, even there is a belief in an old Christian sect that the universe was created by a malevolent god ([Gilbert, 2009](#)). Based on these findings, Brazilian people are more likely to be distant to the concept of self-compassion. It is assumed that this situation, which is desired to be seen in society, may negatively affect the development of self-compassion ([Koçak & Çelik, 2021](#)). While Zeze was very affectionate towards his own brother Luis, he displayed a similar attitude to himself less frequently. Later in his life, he showed compassionate behavior even to his dog, and tried not to deprive himself of this affection. When Zeze was not even six years old he took great care of his brother Luis, took care of him and played games with him. He carefully answered his questions. At that time, he did not exhibit a similar behavior for himself. He exhibited a similar behavior when he broke his own father's heart, and tried to win his father's heart by making an unexpected sacrifice from his age, working all day. In the same way, he made a sacrifice by breaking up with his lover, as he made it up with his father, whom he was adopted by, during his illness and did not want to lose it. Despite this, he thought that in his early childhood, when he only drank coffee and ate bread, he thought that there were people who could not find even these, and that he should be thankful. He shared his meal with his friend who was in a poor condition. After his life with Martinez, he started to treat himself more affectionately. The change in the environment in which he lives may also have an effect on this.

In studies conducted on self-compassion and religion, which has an impact on culture, [Yağbasanlar \(2017\)](#) found a positive relationship among them, while [Neff et al. \(2008\)](#) did not. For more than 3000 years, compassion has been seen in many religions and cultures in the human mind and its healing process ([Gilbert, 2009](#)). When he was a child, Zeze was called the devil's son in his first neighborhood. After a while, Zeze also accepted this title. He and his own brothers often reproached that the baby Jesus only gave gifts to the wealthy at Christmas. In his later life, although he was educated in the schools where he was given religious education, he tried to understand religion by asking questions, but he gave up asking questions to people because he could not find satisfactory answers. However, he often prayed as a coping method when he faced stress, and his prayer behavior was reinforced because it saved him from trouble. When he learned that his father was going to have a second surgery, he went to the church to pray for healing. One day, while talking to his teacher, he stated that religion is actually good.

Babies begin to perceive the difference in the concept of gender when they are 3-8 months old, and when they are 4-5 years old, they begin to describe men as tough and brave, and women as gentle ([Neff, 2021](#)). Although the concepts of kindness and compassion are associated with women, studies have shown that women's self-compassion levels are lower than men's ([Neff, 2003a; Neff, et al., 2005](#)). The findings were similar in the study conducted with young girls and boys ([Bluth et al., 2017](#)). It has been found that women judge themselves more than men in the face of negative situations, have repetitive thoughts ([Neff, et al., 2007](#)) and feel lonely ([Sümer, 2008](#)). The basis of this situation is the higher standards for women determined by the society ([Neff, 2003c; Tor et al., 2015](#)). Considering the period in which the book was written, the situation works in a slightly different process. While parents and even

children, leaving their education, may have to work in the first family, it is sufficient for the father to work in the family where Zeze is adopted. There were staff members who provided support for cooking and cleaning in the house, and when Zeze started to hit adolescence, he was forbidden to enter the kitchen where the staff was and to address the employees by their names. This situation makes us feel that there are differences between men and women, and status relationships, even if they are invisible.

When his brother Luis cried when they went to the place where free toys were distributed on the next day of the New Year and could not get toys, Zeze consoled him that *you have the name of a king, someone with a king's name does not cry*. When Luis asked why he was crying, he stated that he did not have the name of a king and that he was a cull and that it would be okay for him to cry. When Zeze cried on the day he reconciled with his father, his father tried to console him by saying that if you become such an emotional child, you will have a hard time in life. One day when he was sad, Zeze asked the sweet orange tree, *Xururuca if it would be a shame if I cried*, and the tree replied that it was not shameful to cry and that crying is a condition that exists for all people. Based on the information, although crying in society is associated with feelings such as shame or weakness, Zeze has also learned that he has a soft heart and therefore it is normal to cry. His teacher Feliciano reinforces the normality of his behavior by wiping his tears without judgment when Zeze cries. Similarly, although he did not like the sweet orange tree when he first encountered it, when he looked carefully, he realized that its trunk resembled a horse and that it was a child like himself, and he embraced it. Zeze, saddened by realizing that when it blooms at the time of fruiting it grows like himself, he learned mindful awareness from the sweet orange tree.

When the subtitle of age is examined, especially the adolescence period is emphasized. In this period, individuals are considered as a risk group because they develop incompatible relationships with themselves and their environment (Kendall-Tackett, 2002), and exhibit behaviors such as alcohol-substance abuse (Cicognani & Zani, 2014; Dunn et al., 2002) and self-dislike (Gilbert & Procter, 2006). Studies have shown results that support the predictions, and adolescence has been identified as the period with the lowest self-compassion score (Neff, 2003a). In a study conducted with students in this period, it is seen that there is a tendency to dangerous sports activities (Diehm & Armatas, 2004). During his adolescence, Zeze was interested in swimming and could take this swimming business to dangerous levels at his own risk. Even once, when he was so open that he wanted to die, he reached the shore with the help of a fishing boat and went home, and struggled with different problems due to being late at home. Although he thought of doing a similar behavior with the poison stone he secretly took from the chemistry cabinet, he gave up on it thanks to his teacher. He started smoking, also, in adolescence to avoid these problems. It has been concluded that individuals develop a more positive perspective towards their own bodies with self-compassion (Braun et al., 2016). In a study, it was found that self-compassion exists as a protective factor in body image and eating disorders in women (Neff & Knox, 2017). Zeze, who was stated to be handsome by his father during adolescence and had a healthy and fit body due to sports, struggled a lot with himself about his nose. He tried different techniques to shrink his nose and failed. In a study, it was found that with self-compassion training, the idea that all living things deserve compassion is settled (Neff & Knox, 2017) and psychological well-being increases (Neff et al., 2010). In a different study, it was concluded that as the age increases, the self-compassion that individuals show towards themselves also increases, and that self-compassion predicts psychological well-being

between the ages of 59-95 (Homan, 2016). At the end of the book Zeze says, *now I'm the same age as my friend Martinez. I try to make children happy by buying them soda and marbles.* When Zeze states that he is at Martinez's age, it also shows parallelism with the period of research findings. In other words, the level of self-compassion that individuals show to themselves can vary according to the age range.

In a study conducted by Breine and Chen (2012) on past moral violations and self-compassion, on the concept of morality and moral thought (Gilbert, 2009), which is one of the concepts that compassion is closely related to, it was shown that as the level of self-compassion increases, individuals have more motivation to try to repair past harms and not repeat mistakes. Immoral behaviors are triggered in higher arousal states by the brain's desire to attain more (Simon-Thomas et al., 2012). While the individual adopts the rules of justice and morality on the basis of parental punishment and praise during childhood, he then exhibits behaviors related to the moral values of the group he is affiliated with. (Gilbert, 2009). Adopting moral rules can also be shaped within the concepts of deserve and need (Batson et al., 1995). Drawing attention to two types of moral thought, Gilligan (1982) distinguished them as fairness-justice and care-emotions. Although the character of Zeze is a mischievous child, when he realizes that people are hurt by this situation, he tries to win their hearts. In the neighborhood where they just moved to, he waited wisely alone at home so that the neighbors would believe that he was good. After frightening a pregnant neighbor with black pantyhose, he regretted it, saying he didn't know she was pregnant. When he was caught stealing flowers from someone else's garden to bring flowers to his primary school teacher, he defended himself by stating that it was unfair that there was not a flower only in his teacher's glass, but he also stated that he would not repeat it. When he scared people in the forest by saying that the spirit has come, he continued to be mischievous until he was caught, but he stated that the reason was his anger at people's bigoted thoughts. In his early childhood, when he upset his father on New Year's Day, he tried to make up for the situation by working until the evening the next day and trying to buy gifts that would please him.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Self-compassion is the individual's being kind to himself in the face of inadequacies and failures and accepting that these situations can happen (Neff, 2003a; Raes, et al., 2011; Ak & Kesici, 2021). In this way, the individual can look at life from a wider perspective (Neff, 2021). However, if the individual is resistant to self-compassion, it is unlikely that they can develop deeper levels of compassion (Tsering, 2008). Just as Tsering stated, Zeze left his parents and had similar problems with his adoptive family. Zeze somehow rejected his father's attempts to show rapprochement and affection. In fact, although he aims to take an objective stance and create a safe emotional distance against negative events (Finlay-Jones, Rees & Kane, 2015) with this behavior, he sometimes accepts the experiences as they are and was able to maintain a healthy attitude (Neff, 2003a; Neff, 2003b; Neff et al., 2007). Studies have also concluded that individuals who are self-compassionate are happier and more resistant to difficulties (Kolts, 2012). Zeze who said in the first book that compassion is something that forms piecemeal, created parts of his own compassion with various factors throughout his life. Although it was difficult in the beginning, Zeze started to take the form of a character that is more compassionate towards himself in the later parts of the book. At the end of the book, Vasconcelos states that he understands self-compassion not only as passive self-pity, but as trying to take it

into his life with all its dimensions, with these sentences: “Now I know that there is a compassionate side of life. Compassion sometimes makes me happy and sometimes disappoints.”

Written by Jose Mauro de Vasconcelos, one of the important writers of world literature, the Sweet Orange trilogy has a special importance because we can examine not only the field of literature but also the concept of self-compassion. The concept of self-compassion, which affects the lives of individuals by many factors, can be observed in the Sweet Orange Trilogy and therefore has been examined. It was observed that the findings matched the literature information.

In the trilogy, which is examined in relation to attachment, schemas, positive psychology, humanist theory, acceptance-commitment, perspectives and culture, religion, gender and age factors in the formation of self-compassion, it has been observed that how self-compassion affects the individual. Based on these results, some suggestions are offered. Similar academic studies can be done. Different novels can also be used in the lessons and in the processing of the subjects.

Ethic

It should be stated which ethics committee approval was obtained from the research data. (Date, Number of Board Decisions)

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This article was written with the joint contributions of three authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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