

6 compassion abstracts

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Currently the Compassion SIG covers four overlapping areas - Self Compassion, General Compassion, Compassion in Close Relationships and Compassion in the Therapeutic Relationship. Here are six recent relevant research abstracts:

(Aknin, Barrington-Leigh et al. 2013; Bergen-Cico and Cheon 2013; Eicher, Davis et al. 2013; Koerner, Antony et al. 2013; Legate, DeHaan et al. 2013; Stevens, Wiesman et al. 2013)

Aknin, L. B., C. P. Barrington-Leigh, et al. (2013). **"Prosocial spending and well-being: Cross-cultural evidence for a psychological universal."** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 104(4): 635-652. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23421360>

This research provides the first support for a possible psychological universal: Human beings around the world derive emotional benefits from using their financial resources to help others (prosocial spending). In Study 1, survey data from 136 countries were examined and showed that prosocial spending is associated with greater happiness around the world, in poor and rich countries alike. To test for causality, in Studies 2a and 2b, we used experimental methodology, demonstrating that recalling a past instance of prosocial spending has a causal impact on happiness across countries that differ greatly in terms of wealth (Canada, Uganda, and India). Finally, in Study 3, participants in Canada and South Africa randomly assigned to buy items for charity reported higher levels of positive affect than participants assigned to buy the same items for themselves, even when this prosocial spending did not provide an opportunity to build or strengthen social ties. Our findings suggest that the reward experienced from helping others may be deeply ingrained in human nature, emerging in diverse cultural and economic contexts.

Bergen-Cico, D. and S. Cheon (2013). **"The mediating effects of mindfulness and self-compassion on trait anxiety."** *Mindfulness (N Y)*: 1-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0205-y>

Research has found meditation to be associated with improved mental health; however, less is known about how these positive outcomes develop. To better understand the operant effects of meditation on mental health, this study is set forth to examine the potential mediating effects of commonly measured constructs of mindfulness and self-compassion on trait anxiety, a personality trait prevalent in many psychiatric conditions. This longitudinal study uses a meditation treatment (n = 108) and comparative control (n = 94) designed to examine relational changes in mindfulness, self-compassion, and trait anxiety data collected in three waves: (a) baseline, (b) mid-program, and (c) post-program. Structural equation modeling (SEM) revealed significant increases in mindfulness and self-compassion scores among the treatment cohort and cross-lagged regression models that revealed significant reductions in trait anxiety were mediated by preceding increases in mindfulness. SEM model testing found that increases in mindfulness precipitate increases in self-compassion, but neither self-compassion nor anxiety mediated mindfulness. Whereas both self-compassion and mindfulness were associated with reductions in anxiety, the cultivation of mindfulness had the most robust mediating effect on reductions in trait anxiety. These findings reinforce previous studies that have suggested that increases in mindfulness skills may mediate the effects of meditation on mental health outcomes. Among the strengths of the current study are the longitudinal three waves of data, including mid-program data that enables cross-lagged regression. The cross-lagged models indicate the temporal ordering of changes and reveal mindfulness as the key mediating variable preceding substantive changes in self-compassion and trait anxiety.

Eicher, A. C., L. W. Davis, et al. (2013). **"Self-compassion: A novel link with symptoms in schizophrenia?"** *J Nerv Ment Dis.* <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23588223>

Self-compassion has been linked to both positive aspects of well-being and less psychopathology in nonclinical samples. Although this construct has begun to be investigated in case studies, the clinical correlates of self-compassion for those with schizophrenia spectrum disorders have yet to be explored. This study aimed to explore the relationship between self-compassion, symptoms, and insight in individuals with schizophrenia. A total of 88 participants with either schizophrenia (n = 51) or schizoaffective disorder (n = 37) who were enrolled in a study of metacognition at a Midwestern Veterans Affairs medical center completed measures of self-compassion and insight, along with a symptom interview. Higher self-compassion scores were associated with lower scores on the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale positive, excitement, and emotional discomfort symptom scales in addition to poorer insight. Implications for treatment and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Koerner, N., M. Antony, et al. (2013). **"Changes in beliefs about the social competence of self and others following group cognitive-behavioral treatment."** *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 37(2): 256-265. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10608-012-9472-5>

The current study examined changes in social anxiety thoughts and beliefs following cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT). Participants (N = 77) were adults with a principal diagnosis of SAD who received 12, 2-h sessions of group CBT at a hospital-based outpatient anxiety disorders clinic. There were significant decreases from pretreatment to posttreatment in social anxiety symptoms and in symptoms of depression, nonspecific anxiety and tension, as well as significant improvements in social anxiety beliefs, as assessed via the Social Thoughts and Beliefs Scale (STABS; Turner et al., *Psychol Assess* 15:384-391, 2003). Change in social anxiety beliefs made a significant contribution to the prediction of social anxiety symptoms at posttreatment over and above pretreatment social anxiety symptoms and changes in depression, nonspecific anxiety and tension. A positive change in the belief that others are more socially-competent emerged as a significant unique predictor of social anxiety symptoms at posttreatment. The findings demonstrate that the STABS is sensitive to cognitive-behavioral treatment. The findings also suggest that social comparison processes in particular are a key aspect of improvement in social anxiety symptoms. This is an important direction for future research.

Legate, N., C. R. DeHaan, et al. (2013). **"Hurting you hurts me too: The psychological costs of complying with ostracism."** *Psychological Science* 24(4): 583-588. <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/24/4/583.abstract>

Much research has documented the harmful psychological effects of being ostracized, but research has yet to determine whether compliance with ostracizing other people is psychologically costly. We conducted two studies guided by self-determination theory to explore this question, using a paradigm that borrows from both ostracism research and Milgram's classic study of obedience. Supporting our guiding hypothesis that compliance with ostracizing others carries psychological costs, the results of Experiment 1 showed that such compliance worsened mood compared with complying with instructions to include others and with receiving no instructions involving inclusion or exclusion, an effect explained by thwarted psychological needs resulting from ostracizing others. Experiment 2 revealed increases in negative affect both when individuals ostracized others and

when individuals were ostracized themselves. Our findings point to the robust psychological costs associated with ostracizing other people, with implications for group behaviors.

Stevens, F. L., O. Wiesman, et al. (2013). **"Oxytocin and behavior: Evidence for effects in the brain."** *J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosci* 25(2): 96-102. <http://neuro.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleid=1688307>

(Free full text available) Knowledge about the oxytocin (OT) system in the brain has increased greatly over the past decade. Although this neuropeptide is best known for its peripheral effects, direct modulation of central nervous system (CNS) areas has also been implicated in OT's actions, which include a major role in a wide range of affiliative behaviors. Often referred to as the "social bonding" hormone, speculations are being made as to its applications and potential uses in enhancing human relationships. Alterations in the OT system have been implicated in several neuropsychiatric disorders. Multiple types of psychopathology manifest in deficits in social functioning, including inability to maintain interpersonal relationships and engage in socially appropriate behavior. The OT system may influence the efficacy of psychotherapy, as research has repeatedly shown that the therapeutic relationship is one of the largest predictors of therapeutic change. OT may also have value as a therapeutic intervention.