

9 compassion sig abstracts, june/august '12

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

(Baer, Lykins et al. 2012; Beckman, Wendland et al. 2012; Bergsma and Ardel 2012; De Dreu 2012; Exline and Hill 2012; Gordon, Impett et al. 2012; Gruenewald, Liao et al. 2012; Lekes, Hope et al. 2012; Stellar, Manzo et al. 2012)

Baer, R. A., E. L. B. Lykins, et al. (2012). **"Mindfulness and self-compassion as predictors of psychological wellbeing in long-term meditators and matched nonmeditators."** *Journal of Positive Psychology* 7(3): 230-238.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.674548>

Mindfulness training has well-documented effects on psychological health. Recent findings suggest that increases in both mindfulness and self-compassion may mediate these outcomes; however, their separate and combined effects are rarely examined in the same participants. This study investigated cross-sectional relationships between self-reported mindfulness, self-compassion, meditation experience, and psychological wellbeing in 77 experienced meditators and 75 demographically matched nonmeditators. Most mindfulness and self-compassion scores were significantly correlated with meditation experience and psychological wellbeing. Mindfulness and self-compassion accounted for significant independent variance in wellbeing. A significant relationship between meditation experience and wellbeing was completely accounted for by a combination of mindfulness and self-compassion scores. Findings suggest that both mindfulness and self-compassion skills may play important roles in the improved wellbeing associated with mindfulness training; however, longitudinal studies are needed to confirm these findings.

Beckman, H. B., M. Wendland, et al. (2012). **"The impact of a program in mindful communication on primary care physicians."** *Academic Medicine* 87(6): 815-819 810.1097/ACM.1090b1013e318253d318253b318252.
http://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2012/06000/The_Impact_of_a_Program_in_Mindful_Communication.28.aspx

Purpose: In addition to structural transformations, deeper changes are needed to enhance physicians' sense of meaning and satisfaction with their work and their ability to respond creatively to a dynamically changing practice environment. The purpose of this research was to understand what aspects of a successful continuing education program in mindful communication contributed to physicians' well-being and the care they provide. Method: In 2008, the authors conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with primary care physicians who had recently completed a 52-hour mindful communication program demonstrated to reduce psychological distress and burnout while improving empathy. Interviews with a random sample of 20 of the 46 physicians in the Rochester, New York, area who attended at least four of eight weekly sessions and four of eight monthly sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively. The authors identified salient themes from the interviews. Results: Participants reported three main themes: (1) sharing personal experiences from medical practice with colleagues reduced professional isolation, (2) mindfulness skills improved the participants' ability to be attentive and listen deeply to patients' concerns, respond to patients more effectively, and develop adaptive reserve, and (3) developing greater self-awareness was positive and transformative, yet participants struggled to give themselves permission to attend to their own personal growth. Conclusions: Interventions to improve the quality of primary care practice and practitioner well-being should promote a sense of community, specific mindfulness skills, and permission and time devoted to personal growth. *MedicalXpress* - <http://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-04-physician-mindfulness-skills-patient.html> - comments "Training physicians in mindfulness meditation and communication skills can improve the quality of primary care for both practitioners and their patients, University of Rochester Medical Center researchers report in a study published online this week in the journal *Academic Medicine*. As ways to improve primary care, the researchers also recommend promoting a sense of community among physicians and providing time to physicians for personal growth. "Programs focused on personal awareness and self-development are only part of the solution," the researchers stated. "Our health care delivery systems must implement systematic change at the practice level to create an environment that supports mindful practice, encourages transparent and clear communication among clinicians, staff, patients, and families, and reduces professional isolation." Medical education can better support self-awareness programs for trainees while also promoting role models—preceptors and attending physicians—who exemplify mindful practice in action, they wrote. The *Academic Medicine* article, which will be published in the journal's June print edition, is a follow-up to a study by the researchers published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2009. That study found that mindfulness meditation and communication training can alleviate the psychological distress and burnout experienced by many physicians and can improve their well-being. Seventy physicians from the Rochester, N.Y., area were involved in the initial study. The physicians participated in training that involved eight intensive weekly sessions that were 2 ½ hours long, an all-day session and a maintenance phase of 10 monthly 2 ½-hour sessions. For the new report, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 20 of the physicians who participated in the mindfulness training program. The findings in the new study include: For 75 percent of the physicians, sharing personal experiences from medical practice with colleagues was one of the most meaningful outcomes of the program. A nonjudgmental atmosphere helped participants feel emotionally safe enough to pause, reflect, and disclose their complex and profound experiences, which, in turn, provided reassurance that they were not alone in their feelings. Sixty percent reported that learning mindfulness skills improved their capacity to listen more attentively and respond more effectively to others at work and home. More than half of the participants acknowledged having increased self-awareness and better ability to respond non-judgmentally during personal or professional conversations. Seventy percent placed a high value on the mindfulness course having an organized, structured, and well-defined curriculum that designated time and space to pause and reflect—not something they would ordinarily consider permissible. Participants also described the personal struggles they have with devoting time and energy toward self-care despite acknowledging its importance. The researchers have developed and implemented required mindful practice curricula for medical students and residents at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. They also are studying the effects of an intensive, four-day residential course for physicians."

Bergsma, A. and M. Ardel (2012). **"Self-reported wisdom and happiness: An empirical investigation."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 13(3): 481-499. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9275-5>

(Free full text available) Possible tensions between wisdom and happiness have been extensively debated in philosophy. Some regard wisdom as the 'supreme part of happiness', whereas other think that a more accurate and wiser view on reality might reduce happiness. Analyzing a Dutch internet survey of 7037 respondents, we discovered that wisdom and happiness were modestly positively related. Wisdom, measured with the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS), explained 9.2% of the variation in hedonic happiness. The correlation with the reflective dimension of wisdom was the strongest. In

addition, wisdom was more important for happiness among adults with only an elementary education. Our results suggest that happiness and wisdom do not conflict.

De Dreu, C. K. W. (2012). **"Oxytocin modulates cooperation within and competition between groups: An integrative review and research agenda."** *Hormones and Behavior* 61(3): 419-428. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0018506X11002868>

The author reviews evidence that hypothalamic release (or infusion) of the neuropeptide oxytocin modulates the regulation of cooperation and conflict among humans because of three reasons. First, oxytocin enables social categorization of others into in-group versus out-group. Second, oxytocin dampens amygdala activity and enables the development of trust. Third, and finally, oxytocin up-regulates neural circuitries (e.g., inferior frontal gyrus, ventromedial prefrontal cortex, caudate nucleus) involved in empathy and other-concern. Consistent with an evolutionary perspective on the functionality of cooperation, it is concluded that oxytocin-motivated cooperation is mostly parochial—it motivates (i) in-group favoritism, (ii) cooperation towards in-group but not out-group members, and (iii) defense-motivated non-cooperation towards threatening outsiders. Thus, in addition to its well-known role in reproduction and pair-bond formation, oxytocin's primary functions include in-group "tend-and-defend." This review concludes with avenues for new research on oxytocin's functions in within-group cooperation and between-group competition. This article is part of a Special Issue entitled Oxytocin, Vasopressin, and Social Behavior.

Exline, J. J. and P. C. Hill (2012). **"Humility: A consistent and robust predictor of generosity."** *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 7(3): 208-218. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.671348>

Does humility predict generous motives and behaviors? Although earlier studies have suggested a positive connection, it has remained unclear whether another trait might better account for the humility/generosity link. Three studies examined associations between a self-report measure of humility, related traits, and generosity. In Study 1 (197 adults in a community sample), humility predicted greater generosity on two behavioral measures: Charitable donations and mailing back an extra survey. In Study 2 (286 undergraduates), humility predicted giving more money to an anonymous future participant. In Study 3 (217 undergraduates), humility was associated with greater self-reported motives to be kind to others, including benefactors, close others, strangers, and enemies. Across all three studies, the role of humility was not better explained by the Big Five, self-esteem, entitlement, religiosity, gratitude, or social desirability. These studies complement prior work by demonstrating that the link between humility and generosity is both consistent and robust.

Gordon, A. M., E. A. Impett, et al. (2012). **"To have and to hold: Gratitude promotes relationship maintenance in intimate bonds."** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 103(2): 257-274. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22642482>

This multimethod series of studies merges the literatures on gratitude and risk regulation to test a new process model of gratitude and relationship maintenance. We develop a measure of appreciation in relationships and use cross-sectional, daily experience, observational, and longitudinal methods to test our model. Across studies, we show that people who feel more appreciated by their romantic partners report being more appreciative of their partners. In turn, people who are more appreciative of their partners report being more responsive to their partners' needs (Study 1), and are more committed and more likely to remain in their relationships over time (Study 2). Appreciative partners are also rated by outside observers as relatively more responsive and committed during dyadic interactions in the laboratory, and these behavioral displays are one way in which appreciation is transmitted from one partner to the other (Study 3). These findings provide evidence that gratitude is important for the successful maintenance of intimate bonds.

Gruenewald, T. L., D. H. Liao, et al. (2012). **"Contributing to others, contributing to oneself: Perceptions of generativity and health in later life."** *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*. <http://psychsocgerontology.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/03/27/geronb.gbs034.abstract>

Objectives. To examine whether perceptions of generativity (a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation) predict the likelihood of increases in levels of impairment in activities of daily living (ADLs) or of dying over a 10-year period in older adults aged 60–75 from the Study of Midlife in the United States (MIDUS). Method. Perceptions of generativity and current generative contributions as well as select sociodemographic, health status, health behavior, and psychosocial factors, assessed at a baseline exam, were examined as predictors of change in ADL disability level or mortality over the 10-year period between the baseline and follow-up waves of the MIDUS Study. Results. Greater levels of generativity and generative contributions at baseline predicted lower odds of experiencing increases in ADL disability (2 or more new domains of impairment; generativity odds ratio [OR] = 0.93 and generative contributions OR = 0.87), or of dying (generativity OR = 0.94 and generative contributions OR = 0.88), over the 10-year follow-up in models adjusted for sociodemographics and baseline health and disability. Associations remained relatively unchanged with the inclusion of different sets of health behavior and psychosocial variables in analytic models. Discussion. Findings indicate that greater perceptions of generativity are associated with more favorable trajectories of physical functioning and longevity over time in older adults.

Lekes, N., N. H. Hope, et al. (2012). **"Influencing value priorities and increasing well-being: The effects of reflecting on intrinsic values."** *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 7(3): 249-261. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.677468>

A four-week experimental study (N=113) examined the effects of reflecting on intrinsic values. In the experimental group, participants learned about the distinction between intrinsic (e.g. having close relationships) and extrinsic (e.g. being popular) values, wrote about two personal intrinsic values, and then reflected on these values weekly for four weeks. In the control group, participants completed parallel exercises related to the daily details of their lives. Results revealed that participants in the intrinsic values group experienced greater well-being immediately following the written reflection than participants in the control group. Four weeks later, the more engaged participants felt in the reflection exercises, the more they prioritized intrinsic over extrinsic values and the greater their well-being. These effects occurred only for participants in the intrinsic values condition. The implications for changing value priorities and improving well-being are discussed.

Stellar, J. E., V. M. Manzo, et al. (2012). **"Class and compassion: Socioeconomic factors predict responses to suffering."** *Emotion* 12(3): 449-459. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22148992>

Previous research indicates that lower-class individuals experience elevated negative emotions as compared with their upper-class counterparts. We examine how the environments of lower-class individuals can also promote greater compassionate responding—that is, concern for the suffering or well-being of others. In the present research, we investigate class-based differences in dispositional compassion and its activation in situations wherein others are suffering. Across studies, relative to their upper-class counterparts, lower-class individuals reported elevated dispositional compassion (Study 1), as well as greater self-reported compassion during a compassion-inducing video (Study 2) and for another person during a social interaction (Study 3). Lower-class individuals also exhibited heart rate deceleration—a physiological response associated with orienting to the social environment and engaging with others—during the compassion-inducing video (Study 2). We discuss a potential

mechanism of class-based influences on compassion, whereby lower-class individuals' are more attuned to others' distress, relative to their upper-class counterparts.