

10 compassion abstracts

december/february '12/'13

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

(Benson, Scales et al. 2012; Layous, Nelson et al. 2012; Legault, Al-Khindi et al. 2012; Nelson, Kushlev et al. 2012; Niezink, Siero et al. 2012; Pepping and Halford 2012; Shim and Ryan 2012; Tarabulsky, Larose et al. 2012; Werner, Jazaieri et al. 2012; Neff and Germer 2013)

Benson, P. L., P. C. Scales, et al. (2012). **"Is youth spiritual development a universal developmental process? An international exploration."** *Journal of Positive Psychology* 7(6): 453-470. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.732102>
(Free full text available) This article describes a new conceptual approach to youth spiritual development, positing it as a universal aspect of positive youth development, and presents initial empirical evidence for the cross-cultural validity of this theory. Based on an international survey with 6725 youth in eight countries, it provides a global portrait of the spiritual lives of 12-25 year olds. The development and psychometric properties of core spiritual development and religious/spiritual engagement across nations and religious traditions are described. Finally, a person-centered analytic technique is used to explore profiles of the unique ways spiritual development manifests itself in the lives of young people. Results suggest that spiritual development is an active process among the majority of youth across diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, with most having spiritual development unfold without particularly strong engagement in explicitly religious or spiritual practices.

Layous, K., S. K. Nelson, et al. (2012). **"Kindness counts: Prompting prosocial behavior in preadolescents boosts peer acceptance and well-being."** *PLoS ONE* 7(12): e51380. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0051380>
(Accessible in free full text): At the top of parents' many wishes is for their children to be happy, to be good, and to be well-liked. Our findings suggest that these goals may not only be compatible but also reciprocal. In a longitudinal experiment conducted in 19 classrooms in Vancouver, 9- to 11-year olds were instructed to perform three acts of kindness (versus visit three places) per week over the course of 4 weeks. Students in both conditions improved in well-being, but students who performed kind acts experienced significantly bigger increases in peer acceptance (or sociometric popularity) than students who visited places. Increasing peer acceptance is a critical goal, as it is related to a variety of important academic and social outcomes, including reduced likelihood of being bullied. Teachers and interventionists can build on this study by introducing intentional prosocial activities into classrooms and recommending that such activities be performed regularly and purposefully.

Legault, L., T. Al-Khindi, et al. (2012). **"Preserving integrity in the face of performance threat: Self-affirmation enhances neurophysiological responsiveness to errors."** *Psychological Science* 23(12): 1455-1460. <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/23/12/1455.abstract>
Self-affirmation produces large effects: Even a simple reminder of one's core values reduces defensiveness against threatening information. But how, exactly, does self-affirmation work? We explored this question by examining the impact of self-affirmation on neurophysiological responses to threatening events. We hypothesized that because self-affirmation increases openness to threat and enhances approachability of unfavorable feedback, it should augment attention and emotional receptivity to performance errors. We further hypothesized that this augmentation could be assessed directly, at the level of the brain. We measured self-affirmed and nonaffirmed participants' electrophysiological responses to making errors on a task. As we anticipated, self-affirmation elicited greater error responsiveness than did nonaffirmation, as indexed by the error-related negativity, a neural signal of error monitoring. Self-affirmed participants also performed better on the task than did nonaffirmed participants. We offer novel brain evidence that self-affirmation increases openness to threat and discuss the role of error detection in the link between self-affirmation and performance.

Neff, K. D. and C. K. Germer (2013). **"A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program."** *J Clin Psychol* 69(1): 28-44. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jclp.21923/abstract>
OBJECTIVES: The aim of these two studies was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program, an 8-week workshop designed to train people to be more self-compassionate. METHODS: Study 1 was a pilot study that examined change scores in self-compassion, mindfulness, and various wellbeing outcomes among community adults (N = 21; mean [M] age = 51.26, 95% female). Study 2 was a randomized controlled trial that compared a treatment group (N = 25; M age = 51.21; 78% female) with a waitlist control group (N = 27; M age = 49.11; 82% female). RESULTS: Study 1 found significant pre/post gains in self-compassion, mindfulness, and various wellbeing outcomes. Study 2 found that compared with the control group, intervention participants reported significantly larger increases in self-compassion, mindfulness, and wellbeing. Gains were maintained at 6-month and 1-year follow-ups. CONCLUSIONS: The MSC program appears to be effective at enhancing self-compassion, mindfulness, and wellbeing. (Full text freely downloadable from <https://webspace.utexas.edu/neffk/pubs/listofpublications.htm>).

Nelson, S. K., K. Kushlev, et al. (2012). **"In defense of parenthood: Children are associated with more joy than misery."** *Psychological Science*. <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/11/30/0956797612447798.abstract>
Recent scholarly and media accounts paint a portrait of unhappy parents who find remarkably little joy in taking care of their children, but the scientific basis for these claims remains inconclusive. In the three studies reported here, we used a strategy of converging evidence to test whether parents evaluate their lives more positively than do nonparents (Study 1), feel relatively better than do nonparents on a day-to-day basis (Study 2), and derive more positive feelings from caring for their children than from other daily activities (Study 3). The results indicate that, contrary to previous reports, parents (and especially fathers) report relatively higher levels of happiness, positive emotion, and meaning in life than do nonparents. (Available in free full text from Sonja Lyubomirsky's website: <http://sonjalyubomirsky.com/papers-publications/>).

Niezink, L., F. Siero, et al. (2012). **"Empathic concern: Distinguishing between tenderness and sympathy."** *Motivation and Emotion* 36(4): 544-549. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11031-011-9276-z>
(Free full text available) The recent research proposes that empathic concern, as assessed by six items of the ERQ, consists of two separate emotions, i.e., tenderness and sympathy. To test this assumption, nine studies were conducted among, in total, 1,273 participants. In these studies participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario of someone in need, after

which empathic concern was assessed. Factor analyses showed that, indeed, the ERQ items that assess empathic concern can be split up in two factors, that is, one reflecting sympathy and one reflecting tenderness. In addition, in line with previous studies, our research showed that, in response to a need-situation that reflects current needs, individuals scored higher on the ERQ factor reflecting sympathy than on the ERQ factor reflecting tenderness. Findings are discussed in terms of the practical and theoretical implications of distinguishing between sympathy and tenderness.

Pepping, C. A. and W. K. Halford (2012). **"Attachment and relationship satisfaction in expectant first-time parents: The mediating role of relationship enhancing behaviors."** *Journal of Research in Personality* 46(6): 770-774. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0092656612001183>

Individual differences in attachment are well established as a correlate of couple relationship satisfaction. However, less is known about the role of attachment in predicting satisfaction at specific milestone points in couple relationships. The present study explored the role of attachment in predicting relationship satisfaction during couples' first pregnancy, and the mediating role of relationship enhancing behaviors. Male and female attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted their own low relationship satisfaction, and this was partially mediated by relationship enhancing behaviors. Male attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted low female satisfaction, and this was fully mediated by relationship enhancing behaviors. This study is the first to highlight the important role of male attachment during pregnancy, and the mediating role of relationship enhancing behaviors.

Shim, S. and A. Ryan (2012). **"What do students want socially when they arrive at college? Implications of social achievement goals for social behaviors and adjustment during the first semester of college."** *Motivation and Emotion* 36(4): 504-515. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11031-011-9272-3>

This study investigated if the social achievement goals that students endorsed at the beginning of their freshman year were associated with social behaviors and adjustment 6 months later (N = 276; 52% female). Students were recruited from a residential hall and Resident Advisors provided multi-dimensional assessments of students' social behaviors. A social development goal (a focus on improving social skills and relationships) promoted adjustment, indicated by a positive association with overall social competence. A social demonstration-avoid goal (a focus on avoiding negative judgments) hindered adjustment, indicated by negative associations with overall social competence, popularity and prosocial behavior and positive associations with anxious and internalizing behavior. A social demonstration-approach goal (a focus on gaining positive judgments) had benefits, as shown by positive associations with overall social competence and popularity, and negative associations with anxious behavior, but also drawbacks for adjustment, as shown by a positive association with aggression.

Tarabulsky, G. M., S. Larose, et al. (2012). **"Attachment states of mind in late adolescence and the quality and course of romantic relationships in adulthood."** *Attachment & Human Development* 14(6): 621-643. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.728358>

(Free full text available) The purpose of this study was to examine the longitudinal relations between attachment state of mind in late adolescence and romantic relationships in adulthood. Participants were drawn from two independent studies that were conducted respectively in 1992 and 1996 and that involved the administration of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) to 167 college students. They were followed-up in 2007 (N = 99) to investigate different aspects of their romantic relationships since college. Those who had shown greater preoccupation with attachment in the AAI were more likely to be single in adulthood and to report romantic relationships of shorter length. In addition, they reported lower levels of intimacy, commitment, and passion in their current or recent romantic relationships. Dismissing tendencies were associated with higher levels of perceived passion in romantic relationships. Most of these associations remained significant after controlling for intervening life events, different dimensions of individual adjustment, socio-economic status, as well as probable life events derived from the AAI.

Werner, K. H., H. Jazaieri, et al. (2012). **"Self-compassion and social anxiety disorder."** *Anxiety Stress Coping* 25(5): 543-558. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21895450>

Self-compassion refers to having an accepting and caring orientation towards oneself. Although self-compassion has been studied primarily in healthy populations, one particularly compelling clinical context in which to examine self-compassion is social anxiety disorder (SAD). SAD is characterized by high levels of negative self-criticism as well as an abiding concern about others' evaluation of one's performance. In the present study, we tested the hypotheses that: (1) people with SAD would demonstrate less self-compassion than healthy controls (HCs), (2) self-compassion would relate to severity of social anxiety and fear of evaluation among people with SAD, and (3) age would be negatively correlated with self-compassion for people with SAD, but not for HC. As expected, people with SAD reported less self-compassion than HCs on the Self-Compassion Scale and its subscales. Within the SAD group, lesser self-compassion was not generally associated with severity of social anxiety, but it was associated with greater fear of both negative and positive evaluation. Age was negatively correlated with self-compassion for people with SAD, whereas age was positively correlated with self-compassion for HC. These findings suggest that self-compassion may be a particularly important target for assessment and treatment in persons with SAD.