5 compassion abstracts, july/september '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 four recent relevant research abstracts:

(Anderson, Kraus et al. 2012; Burson, Crocker et al. 2012; Keng, Smoski et al. 2012; Mikulincer, Shaver et al. 2012; Moeller, Robinson et al. 2012)

Anderson, C., M. W. Kraus, et al. (2012). ***"The local-ladder effect."*** Psychological Science 23(7): 764-771.
http://pss.sagepub.com/content/23/7/764.abstract
        Dozens of studies in different nations have revealed that socioeconomic status only weakly predicts an individual's subjective well-being (SWB). These results imply that although the pursuit of social status is a fundamental human motivation, achieving high status has little impact on one's SWB. However, we propose that sociometric status—the respect and admiration one has in face-to-face groups (e.g., among friends or coworkers)—has a stronger effect on SWB than does socioeconomic status. Using correlational, experimental, and longitudinal methodologies, four studies found consistent evidence for a local-ladder effect: Sociometric status significantly predicted satisfaction with life and the experience of positive and negative emotions. Longitudinally, as sociometric status rose or fell, SWB rose or fell accordingly. Furthermore, these effects were driven by feelings of power and social acceptance. Overall, individuals' sociometric status matters more to their SWB than does their socioeconomic status. *The 'Greater Good' website - http://tinyurl.com/d84exdd - comments "Money really can't buy happiness, research shows. Instead, a new study suggests, those pursuing a happier life would be smart to sharpen their social skills. In a series of four experiments, researchers found that it is the level of respect and admiration we receive from peers—not overall wealth or success—that more likely predicts happiness. They refer to this level of respect and admiration as our "sociometric status," as opposed to socioeconomic status (SES). In one experiment, 80 college students from 14 different student groups rated how much they respected and admired the other people in their group, and how respected and admired they felt themselves; they also answered questions about their family's income and their own level of happiness. The results, published in the journal Psychological Science, show that people with higher sociometric status reported greater happiness, whereas their socioeconomic status was not linked to their happiness. In a similar experiment, more than 300 people answered questions about the respect and admiration they received within their friends, family, and work circles. They also reported their personal sense of power in those social circles, and how liked and accepted they felt, along with their income and happiness. Again, people of high sociometric status were much more likely to be happy than were people of high SES. Through their data analysis, the researchers also found that these people were happier because they felt a greater sense of power and acceptance within their groups. "Where people stand in their local hierarchy matters to their happiness," they write. But does feeling respected and admired actually cause people to be feel happier—or could it be that people admire peers who project happiness? The researchers addressed that question in two additional experiments. In one, they manipulated people's sense of status by asking them to compare themselves to people who were much more or much less respected and admired than they were. Other participants had to compare themselves to people who had much more or much less wealth, education, and professional success. Then all participants had to think about how their "similarities and differences" might come into play if they were to interact with these imaginary others. In this case, people temporarily made to feel like they were of higher sociometric status were happier than people made to feel like they were of lower sociometric status, regardless of their actual status outside of the experiment. By contrast, people made to feel like they had high socioeconomic status were not happier than people made to feel like they had low SES. The results strongly suggest that feeling respected and admired can actually cause our happiness to increase, whereas feeling wealthy (without also feeling respected) doesn't carry the same effect. In the final part of the study, the researchers tracked 156 MBA students, following them from shortly before their business school graduation through nine months after graduation. For many of these students, their graduation brought a change in sociometric status—someone admired on campus, for instance, could be disrespected at his or her post-graduate job, even if his or her income went up. The results show that as the students' sociometric status rose or fell, their happiness level rose or fell accordingly; in fact, changes to their sociometric status were much more strongly linked to happiness than were changes to their socioeconomic status. The findings echo past research finding that income has surprisingly little effect on happiness, says Cameron Anderson, a professor at the University of Calfiornia, Berkeley's Haas School of Business and the lead author of the study. Instead, Anderson and his colleagues' research suggests that what really matters is the respect, admiration, and feelings of power we get from others within our face-to-face groups. "You don't have to be rich to be happy, but instead be a valuable contributing member to your groups," says Anderson. "What makes a person high in status in a group is being engaged, generous with others, and making self sacrifices for the greater good."*

Burson, A., J. Crocker, et al. (2012). ***"Two types of value-affirmation: Implications for self-control following social exclusion."*** Social psychological and personality science 3(4): 510-516. http://spp.sagepub.com/content/3/4/510.abstract
        The authors tested the hypothesis that affirming self-transcendent values attenuates negative consequences of self-threat better than affirming self-enhancement values. If value-affirmation buffers against threat because it bolsters the self, then affirming either a self-transcendent or self-enhancement value should similarly prevent typical decreased self-control after exclusion. However, if value-affirmations buffer the effects of threat because they promote self-transcendence, then affirming values related to self-transcendence should provide a better buffer against decreased self-control after exclusion. Ninety-two undergraduate students received either intentional or unintentional social exclusion. Participants then affirmed either a self-transcendent or self-enhancement value, or wrote about their daily routine. Consistent with predictions, participants ate more cookies when they were intentionally rather than unintentionally excluded; this effect was attenuated by affirming an important value, especially a self-transcendent value. This suggests that value-affirmation may be a particularly effective method of coping with self-threats when it increases self-transcendence.

Keng, S.-L., M. J. Smoski, et al. (2012). ***"Mechanisms of change in mindfulness-based stress reduction: Self-compassion and mindfulness as mediators of intervention outcomes."*** Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy 26(3): 270-280. http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/springer/jcogp/2012/00000026/00000003/art00008
http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/0889-8391.26.3.270
        Research has demonstrated support for the efficacy of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) in alleviating psychological distress and symptoms. Less is known, however, about the mechanisms through which MBSR achieves its outcomes. This study examined mindfulness and self-compassion as potential mediators of MBSR's effects on several processes and behaviors related to emotion regulation, using data from a randomized trial of MBSR versus waitlist (WL), in which MBSR

participants demonstrated significantly greater improvements in worry, fear of emotion, difficulties in emotion regulation, suppression of anger, and aggressive anger expression. Mediation analysis using bootstrap resampling indicated that increases in self-compassion mediated MBSR's effects on worry, controlling for change in mindfulness. Increases in mindfulness mediated the intervention's effects on difficulties in emotion regulation, controlling for change in self-compassion. Both variables mediated MBSR's effects on fear of emotion. These findings highlight the importance of mindfulness and self-compassion as key processes of change that underlie MBSR's outcomes.

Mikulincer, M., P. R. Shaver, et al. (2012). *"An attachment perspective on therapeutic processes and outcomes."* Journal of Personality: n/a-n/a. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2012.00806.x

       Over the past decade there has been an explosion of interest in clinical applications of attachment theory. In the present paper, we briefly describe John Bowlby's model of therapeutic change, the therapeutic relationship, and the therapist's role in emotional healing. We then review empirical evidence for three key propositions in Bowlby's model. First, a client's sense of security during therapy is crucial for facilitating therapeutic work. Second, a therapist's own sense of security contributes to positive therapeutic outcomes. Third, attachment insecurities can be effectively reduced in therapy, and movement toward greater attachment security is central to achieving favorable therapeutic outcomes. In sum, research evidence confirms the importance of establishing what Bowlby called a safe haven and a secure base within a therapeutic relationship.

Moeller, S. K., M. D. Robinson, et al. (2012). *"The big chill: Interpersonal coldness and emotion-labeling skills."* Journal of Personality 80(3): 703-724. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2011.00738.x

       Interpersonally cold (relative to warm) individuals may be less skilled in inferring the emotional states of others, a factor that should contribute to their poorer social relationships. Systematic support for this hypothesis was obtained in 4 studies (total N = 434 undergraduates) involving diverse emotion- and affect-decoding tasks. Specifically, relatively cold individuals exhibited lower accuracy in decoding emotional facial expressions (Study 1), in labeling the emotions of others from audio and video clips (Study 2), in predicting the emotions of others from social scenario descriptions (Study 3), and in the normative accuracy of their word evaluations (Study 4). Altogether, the results demonstrate that cold individuals appear broadly deficient in linking emotion and affect to relevant environmental stimuli. Implications of the findings for understanding the nature and correlates of interpersonal coldness are discussed.