

## **2 compassion abstracts** **february/april '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 two recent relevant research abstracts:

(Alden and Trew 2013; Kok, Waugh et al. 2013)

Alden, L. E. and J. L. Trew (2013). **"If it makes you happy: Engaging in kind acts increases positive affect in socially anxious individuals."** *Emotion* 13(1): 64-75. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22642341>

Social anxiety is associated with low positive affect (PA), a factor that can significantly affect psychological well-being and adaptive functioning. Despite suggestions that individuals with high levels of social anxiety would benefit from PA enhancement, the feasibility of doing so remains an unanswered question. Accordingly, in the current study, individuals with high levels of social anxiety (N = 142) were randomly assigned to conditions designed to enhance PA (Kind Acts), reduce negative affect (NA; Behavioral Experiments), or a neutral control (Activity Monitoring). All participants engaged in the required activities for 4 weeks and completed prepost questionnaires measuring mood and social goals, as well as weekly email ratings of mood, anxiety, and social activities. Both the prepost and weekly mood ratings revealed that participants who engaged in kind acts displayed significant increases in PA that were sustained over the 4 weeks of the study. No significant changes in PA were observed in the other conditions. The increase in hedonic functioning was not due to differential compliance, frequency of social activities, or an indirect effect of NA reduction. In addition, participants who engaged in kind acts displayed an increase in relationship satisfaction and a decrease in social avoidance goals, whereas no significant changes in these variables were observed in the other conditions. This study is the first to demonstrate that positive affect can be increased in individuals with high levels of social anxiety and that PA enhancement strategies may result in wider social benefits. The role of PA in producing those benefits requires further study.

Kok, B. E., C. E. Waugh, et al. (2013). **"Meditation and health: The search for mechanisms of action."** *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 7(1): 27-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12006>

(Free full text available) Psychological interest in the impact of mental states on biological functioning is growing rapidly, driving a need for new methods for inducing mental states that last long enough, and are sufficiently impactful, to have significant effects on physical health. The many traditions of meditative practice are one potential pathway for studying mind-body interactions. The purpose of this review is to introduce personality and social psychologists to the field of meditation research. Beginning with a brief introduction to meditation and the heterogeneity of meditative practices, we showcase research linking meditative practice to changes in immune and cardiovascular functioning and pain perception. We then discuss theoretical and empirical evidence that meditation works by inducing changes in psychological capacities such as emotion regulation and self-regulation or through repeated induction of specific mental states such as love or meta-cognitive awareness. At the frontier of the science of meditation is the need to empirically test whether meditation-driven changes in cognitive and affective processes are the cause of improvements in physical health. Emerging challenges in meditation research include a need for large studies using randomized controlled and dual-blind designs with active control groups and an increased focus on measuring mechanisms of action as well as outcomes. Meditation represents a potentially powerful tool for generating new knowledge of mind-body interactions.