

Notes on Self-Compassion Studies

This summary is not meant as medical advice. I do hope it helps you recognize the importance of approaching yourself with kindness, and illustrates that you are not alone! If you think the help of a mental health professional would be beneficial for you, please seek that out. You deserve the care you need to be kind to yourself. ❤️

Studies covered in these notes

- Self-Compassion Promotes Personal Improvement From Regret Experiences via Acceptance ([jump to notes](#))
- Self-Compassion and Suicide Risk in Veterans ([jump to notes](#))
- A review of client self-criticism in psychotherapy ([jump to notes](#))
- The Intermediary Role of Burnout in the Relationship Between Self-Compassion and Job Satisfaction Among Nurses ([jump to notes](#))

Additional reading/listening/exercises

Podcast episodes

- [A Compassion Tool When You Don't Feel Worthy of Compassion](#)
- [How Practicing Self-Respect Can Lead to Self-Compassion](#)
- [A Self-Compassion Letter](#)
- [How to Access Your Compassionate Voice](#)
- [Learning to Embody Self-Compassion with Dr. Dennis Tirch](#)
 - 🙌 Refers a lot to an approach detailed in depth in [this study](#) by Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff

Websites

- secretregrets.com 🙌 (Used in one of the studies; major empathy generator)
- [Self-compassion.org](https://self-compassion.org)
- Lots of studies via Google Scholar/other journal databases

News articles

- [Why You Should Stop Being So Hard on Yourself](#), by Charlotte Lieberman (The New York Times, 2018)

Exercises

- Things you can try to cultivate your own self-compassion ([jump to exercises](#))

Self-Compassion Promotes Personal Improvement From Regret Experiences via Acceptance ([Jia Wei Zhang and Serena Chen, 2016](#))

“regrets spur personal improvement particularly when people perceive opportunities to change.”

Definitions:

Self-compassion: Being able to be kind and understanding when you are confronted with your personal failings.

- Three components: Self kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness

Self-esteem: Confidence in your own worth/abilities

Positive emotions: Joy, gratitude, etc.

Negative emotions: Anger, shame, etc.

Acceptance: The ability to acknowledge that a negative event has occurred and embrace it as part of yourself. Promotes the willingness to take responsibility and make amends.

Forgiveness: Situating your own shortcomings or failures as a part of the common human experience. Has been associated with a tendency to perceive positive improvement from traumatic life experiences.

Takeaways from three studies:

- Participants were asked to write about a regret experience. Some were then told to put themselves in a self-compassionate mindset and write about the experience again. **People who described regret with more self-compassion showed and reported both more personal improvement and more positive emotions.**
- Self-esteem is related to self-compassion and personal improvement insofar as it is correlated with positive emotions. However, self-compassion goes beyond what positive emotions alone can do, especially in terms of personal improvement.
- Personal improvement happens because you accept your regret experiences and forgive yourself for them. Self-compassion is an active coping strategy that propels people to confront difficult life events head-on.
- Forgiveness works in both directions:
 - Highly self-compassionate people also report greater forgiveness toward those who let them down, regardless of whether they received an apology.
 - Receiving forgiveness is a big motivator in corrective intentions.

 Self-Compassion and Suicide Risk in Veterans ([Jessica Kelliher Rabon, Jameson K. Hirsch, Andrea R. Kaniuka, Fuschia Sirois, Byron D. Brooks & Kristin Neff, 2019](#))

Takeaway: Exercising self-compassion may be a proactive coping strategy that can be used in times of crisis — a “skillful response to suffering.”

This study looked at the relationship between self-compassion and suicide risk in military veterans. It also examined the link between self-compassion and suicidal behavior, PTSD, anger and shame, and whether someone feels a sense of belonging with other people.

Other protective strategies, like optimism and positivity, are notably absent in times of distress. Self-compassion, on the other hand, may be most effective in these times. Being able to view yourself with kindness and recognizing yourself within a larger community may be critically important to mental health.

Findings:

- Self-compassion is inversely related to suicidal behavior in military veterans.
- The beneficial effect of self-compassion on suicidal behavior was more pronounced when a person was experiencing higher levels of negative emotions. This helped enhance the benefits of self-compassion.

 A review of client self-criticism in psychotherapy ([Divya Kannan, Heidi Levitt, 2013](#))

This study is primarily about how perfectionism and self-criticism impact a person's ability to relate to a therapist, but there are some interesting observations about the role perfectionistic behavior can have in a person's life and relationships.

“Though perfectionist striving can have positive outcomes for performance, accompanying self-criticism can hamper individuals' sense of efficacy and increase self-blame, especially after a perceived stressful or failed experience.”

Foundational concepts for understanding self-criticism:

- Self-criticism is a harmful force in people's lives. There are some benefits to relentless striving, but they're outweighed by the drawbacks of constant self-critique.
- Self-criticism is maintained because of maladaptive coping responses.
- Awareness of both the content of self-criticism and the process of self-criticism — what you think to yourself as when you're most likely to be self-critical — is helpful in overcoming it.
- Resolving self-criticism should be approached in the context of strengthening a person's self-compassion and assertiveness in questioning their own critical thoughts. The goal is not to eradicate self-criticism but to develop and strengthen a healthier sense of self.

 The Intermediary Role of Burnout in the Relationship Between Self-Compassion and Job Satisfaction Among Nurses ([Elise S. Vaillancourt](#) and [Louise Wasyliw](#))

Takeaway: “When nurses experience mental, physical, and/or emotional exhaustion, they are likely to find their work to be less rewarding...”

Self-compassion is associated with lower burnout rate and higher job satisfaction, and better sleep quality.

Symptoms of burnout:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment
- Depersonalization of clients and other people
- Lack of compassion satisfaction (as in, “I get satisfaction from being able to help people”)
- Secondary traumatic stress

The study examined the relationship between self-compassion, burnout, personal satisfaction, and physical well-being.

Self-compassion encompasses three characteristics:

- Self-kindness
- Common humanity
- Mindfulness

Findings:

- The components of self-compassion are positively correlated with job satisfaction, compassion satisfaction, and better sleep quality.
- Conversely, self-compassion is inversely associated with burnout and secondary trauma.

 Things you can try to cultivate your own self-compassion 

Write about a regret from a self-compassionate mindset

1. Think about a regret. Write a few sentences about what happened, how you felt, and what you would do differently.
2. Now, remind yourself that that experience is part of you, and that regret is fundamental to the human experience. Forgive yourself if you can, or think about what forgiving yourself would entail. Recognize that everyone you can think of also has regrets like you do.
3. Try writing about your regret again, from a self-compassionate mindset. See if it feels different.

Find a phrase or visual you can use in times of stress

Pay attention to any words or images that help you feel compassion for yourself.

Some examples:

- Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to someone you love
- An example that works for me: "Maybe it's not your fault."

Start with self-respect and work up to self-compassion

[This podcast](#) from Kimberley Quinlan goes into more detail about how to address these questions:

1. Do my behaviors represent and reflect self-respect?
2. Do my behaviors respect my values?
3. Do my behaviors respect my beliefs?
4. Do my behaviors allow me to achieve my goals and values?
5. What are some times I have felt a true sense of self-respect?
6. Does my behavior lead me towards a sense of mastery (of a skill or a situation)?
7. What behaviors am I doing that damage my sense of self-respect?

Try more structure programs or workbooks

I have no personal experience with these resources, but they might be helpful! [The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#) seems like a good place to start.