

## **8 compassion sig abstracts, may/july '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:

(Aknin, Dunn et al. 2012; Boyle, Buchman et al. 2012; Lammers, Galinsky et al. 2012; Matsubayashi and Ueda 2012; Poulin, Holman et al. 2012; Sabol and Pianta 2012; Twenge, Campbell et al. 2012; Verschuere, Doumen et al. 2012; Verschuere and Koomen 2012; Vess 2012)

Aknin, L., E. Dunn, et al. (2012). **"Happiness runs in a circular motion: Evidence for a positive feedback loop between prosocial spending and happiness."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 13(2): 347-355. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9267-5>

We examine whether a positive feedback loop exists between spending money on others (i.e. prosocial spending) and happiness. Participants recalled a previous purchase made for either themselves or someone else and then reported their happiness. Afterward, participants chose whether to spend a monetary windfall on themselves or someone else. Participants assigned to recall a purchase made for someone else reported feeling significantly happier immediately after this recollection; most importantly, the happier participants felt, the more likely they were to choose to spend a windfall on someone else in the near future. Thus, by providing initial evidence for a positive feedback loop between prosocial spending and well-being, these data offer one potential path to sustainable happiness: prosocial spending increases happiness which in turn encourages prosocial spending.

Boyle, P. A., A. S. Buchman, et al. (2012). **"Effect of purpose in life on the relation between Alzheimer Disease pathologic changes on cognitive function in advanced age."** *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 69(5): 499-504. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22566582>

CONTEXT: Purpose in life is associated with a substantially reduced risk of Alzheimer disease (AD), but the neurobiologic basis of this protective effect remains unknown. OBJECTIVE: To test the hypothesis that purpose in life reduces the deleterious effects of AD pathologic changes on cognition in advanced age. DESIGN: A longitudinal, epidemiologic, clinicopathologic study of aging was conducted that included detailed annual clinical evaluations and brain autopsy. PARTICIPANTS: Two hundred forty-six community-based older persons from the Rush Memory and Aging Project participated. MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Purpose in life was assessed via structured interview, and cognitive function was evaluated annually and proximate to death. On postmortem examination, 3 indexes of AD pathologic features were quantified: global AD pathologic changes, amyloid, and tangles. The associations of disease pathologic changes and purpose in life with cognition were examined using linear regression and mixed models. RESULTS: Purpose in life modified the association between the global measure of AD pathologic changes and cognition (mean [SE] parameter estimate, 0.532 [0.211];  $P = .01$ ), such that participants who reported higher levels of purpose in life exhibited better cognitive function despite the burden of the disease. Purpose in life also reduced the association of tangles with cognition (parameter estimate, 0.042 [0.019];  $P = .03$ ), and the protective effect of purpose in life persisted even after controlling for several potentially confounding variables. Furthermore, in analyses examining whether purpose in life modified the association between AD pathologic effects and the rate of cognitive decline, we found that higher levels of purpose in life reduced the effect of AD pathologic changes on cognitive decline (parameter estimate, 0.085 [0.039];  $P = .03$ ). CONCLUSION: Higher levels of purpose in life reduce the deleterious effects of AD pathologic changes on cognition in advanced age.

Lammers, J., A. D. Galinsky, et al. (2012). **"Power increases social distance."** *Social psychological and personality science* 3(3): 282-290. <http://spp.sagepub.com/content/3/3/282.abstract>

Five experiments investigated the effect of power on social distance. Although increased social distance has been suggested to be an underlying mechanism for a number of the effects of power, there is little empirical evidence directly supporting this claim. Our first three experiments found that power increases social distance toward others. In addition, these studies demonstrated that this effect is (a) mediated by self-sufficiency and (b) moderated by the perceived legitimacy of power—only when power is seen as legitimate, does it increase social distance. The final two studies build off research showing that social distance is linked to decreased altruism and find an interaction between power and legitimacy on willingness to help others. The authors propose that the concept of social distance offers a synthesizing lens that integrates seemingly disparate findings in the power literature and explains how power can both corrupt and elevate.

Matsubayashi, T. and M. Ueda (2012). **"Government partisanship and human well-being."** *Social Indicators Research* 107(1): 127-148. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9831-8>

This paper shows that the partisan composition of government is strongly related to the well-being of citizens, measured by the reported level of life satisfaction and suicide rates in industrial countries. Our analysis, using survey data of 14 nations between 1980 and 2002, shows that the presence of left-leaning parties in government is associated with an increase in the level of individual life satisfaction. The relationship holds true even after controlling for the effects of macroeconomic variables such as gross domestic product, unemployment rates and government welfare policies. Our panel data analysis of 21 nations between 1980 and 2004 also shows that suicide rates decrease when a country experiences a shift to more left-leaning government. The increased presence of right-wing parties in government has a negligible effect on suicide rates.

Poulin, M. J., E. A. Holman, et al. (2012). **"The neurogenetics of nice."** *Psychological Science* 23(5): 446-452. <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/23/5/446.abstract>

Oxytocin, vasopressin, and their receptor genes influence prosocial behavior in the laboratory and in the context of close relationships. These peptides may also promote social engagement following threat. However, the scope of their prosocial effects is unknown. We examined oxytocin receptor (OXTR) polymorphism rs53576, as well as vasopressin receptor 1a (AVPR1a) polymorphisms rs1 and rs3 in a national sample of U.S. residents ( $n = 348$ ). These polymorphisms interacted with perceived threat to predict engagement in volunteer work or charitable activities and commitment to civic duty. Specifically, greater perceived threat predicted engagement in fewer charitable activities for individuals with A/A and A/G genotypes of OXTR rs53576, but not for G/G individuals. Similarly, greater perceived threat predicted lower commitment to civic duty for individuals with one or two short alleles for AVPR1a rs1, but not for individuals with only long alleles. Oxytocin, vasopressin, and their receptor genes may significantly influence prosocial behavior and may lie at the core of the caregiving behavioral system.

Sabol, T. J. and R. C. Pianta (2012). **"Recent trends in research on teacher-child relationships."** *Attachment & Human Development* 14(3): 213-231. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.672262>

Theoretical and empirical work on relationships between teachers and children relies on developmental systems theory as the foundational conceptual model, drawing heavily from basic work in attachment as well as research on social development. Recently, the focus on relational processes in effort to support children's development in the classroom has proliferated, with multiple disciplines and fields engaging in research on teacher-child relationship quality to understand and improve the experiences and learning of students. This paper updates the conceptual framework and continues the necessary integration between disciplines by exploring three areas of research: (1) concordance between children's relationships with teachers and parents; (2) the moderating role of teacher-child relationships for the development of at-risk children; and (3) training teachers from a relational perspective. Each of the three areas of research on teacher-child relationships is examined in light of recent findings and considers implications for understanding the nature and impact of relationships between teachers and children.

Twenge, J. M., W. K. Campbell, et al. (2012). **"Generational differences in young adults' life goals, concern for others, and civic orientation, 1966-2009."** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 102(5): 1045-1062. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22390226>

Three studies examined generational differences in life goals, concern for others, and civic orientation among American high school seniors (Monitoring the Future; N = 463,753, 1976-2008) and entering college students (The American Freshman; N = 8.7 million, 1966-2009). Compared to Baby Boomers (born 1946-1961) at the same age, GenX'ers (born 1962-1981) and Millennials (born after 1982) considered goals related to extrinsic values (money, image, fame) more important and those related to intrinsic values (self-acceptance, affiliation, community) less important. Concern for others (e.g., empathy for outgroups, charity donations, the importance of having a job worthwhile to society) declined slightly. Community service rose but was also increasingly required for high school graduation over the same time period. Civic orientation (e.g., interest in social problems, political participation, trust in government, taking action to help the environment and save energy) declined an average of  $d = -.34$ , with about half the decline occurring between GenX and the Millennials. Some of the largest declines appeared in taking action to help the environment. In most cases, Millennials slowed, though did not reverse, trends toward reduced community feeling begun by GenX. The results generally support the "Generation Me" view of generational differences rather than the "Generation We" or no change views.

Verschueren, K., S. Doumen, et al. (2012). **"Relationships with mother, teacher, and peers: Unique and joint effects on young children's self-concept."** *Attachment & Human Development* 14(3): 233-248. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.672263>

This study tested the unique and joint effects of three significant relationships in young children's social lives, namely their relationships with mother, teacher, and peers, on three dimensions of self-concept (general, academic, and social). A sample of 113 children participated. Mother-child attachment quality was observed in preschool. In first grade, teacher ratings of teacher-child relationship quality, peer ratings of peer acceptance, and child reports of self-concept were administered. The results revealed domain-specific links between social relationships and self-concept dimensions. Specifically, academic self-concept related to teacher-child relationship quality, social self-concept to peer acceptance, and general self-concept to the quality of attachment to mother. Moreover, an indirect effect was revealed of earlier mother-child attachment quality on the academic dimension of self through its effect on current adult-child relationships in school. This way, the study uncovered the pathways through which significant social relationships shape the formation of young children's self-concept.

Verschueren, K. and H. M. Y. Koomen (2012). **"Teacher-child relationships from an attachment perspective."** *Attachment & Human Development* 14(3): 205-211. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.672260>

This special issue aims to prompt reflection on the mutual contribution of attachment theory, on the one hand, and teacher-child relationship research, on the other, by bringing together conceptual and empirical contributions taking an attachment perspective on teacher-child relationships. In this introductory article, we contend that the teacher can be regarded as an ad hoc attachment figure with a safe haven and secure base function, although for most children the relationship with the teacher is probably not an attachment bond. Furthermore, we explain how attachment theory and research: (1) shape the way in which high quality teacher-child relationships are conceptualized and operationalized; (2) highlight the importance of teacher sensitivity to children's needs, as a central proximal determinant of relationship quality; (3) guide research hypotheses regarding the consequences of teacher-child relationship quality and the intervening mechanisms; and (4) inspire the development of interventions to improve teacher-child relationships.

Vess, M. (2012). **"Warm thoughts."** *Psychological Science* 23(5): 472-474. <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/23/5/472.short>

Recent work on embodied cognition has shown that perceptions of interpersonal intimacy are conceptually grounded in physical temperature. For example, holding warm (vs. cold) beverages increases perceptions of social proximity (IJzerman & Semin, 2009), and social isolation promotes perception of temperature as colder (Zhong & Leonardelli, 2008). Such results suggest that temperature and intimacy are psychologically interchangeable (cf. Williams & Bargh, 2008). Activating one, through either physical experience or semantic priming (e.g., IJzerman & Semin, 2010), produces changes in the other. Such results are also reminiscent of classic work on the importance of temperature for attachment bonds (Harlow, 1958), which means that they may be useful for understanding attachment processes. Might individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety, given their enhanced sensitivity to intimacy cues (Mikulincer, Birnbaum, Woddis, & Nachmias, 2000), also show an enhanced sensitivity to temperature cues? In the present research, I tested the hypothesis that attachment anxiety positively predicts sensitivity to temperature cues, with the aim of integrating research on associations between temperature and intimacy with perspectives on adult attachment ... Conclusion: This research was a preliminary examination of the relationship between attachment anxiety and sensitivity to temperature cues. Study 1 indicated that individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety desire physical warmth after reflecting on a distressing event, whereas Study 2 indicated that in individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety, exposure to warm-temperature cues increases satisfaction with their current romantic relationships. These results suggest that individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety may engage associations between temperature and intimacy as a secondary regulatory strategy and may be especially influenced by such associations when evaluating their current romantic relationships. Thus, this research offers future researchers solid ground from which to explore the links between temperature experiences and attachment-relevant outcomes.