Mindfulness Self-Compassion

Cini Shaw MA, AADC, CASAC II, NCPRSS, MATS

MPRC Conference

2021

Based on the work of

Kristen Neff, PhD

and

Christopher Germer, PhD

Close your eyes Fall in love Stay there

Rumi



COMPASSION



Compassion...

- First you notice her
- You connect with something uncomfortable
- You are willing to be present with her suffering
- You are not judgmental
- Perhaps you feel a softening of your heart
- Perhaps you feel a concern for her suffering
- Perhaps you think, "There but for fortune go I."

What is Compassion for Others?

- Compassion means to: suffer with
- Compassion is not the same as empathy though they are closely related
- Empathy is the ability to read and feel the emotions of others, but it doesn't necessarily mean one cares
- Compassion is the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering

What is Self –Compassion?

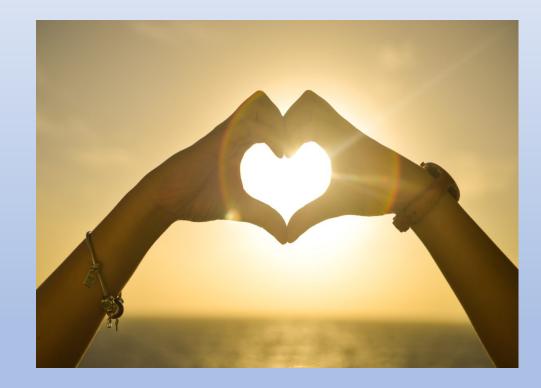
- When we suffer, it is caring for ourselves as would care for someone we truly love
- Instead of ignoring it and putting on a stiff upper lip, we ask how can I comfort and care for myself
- When we struggle, we give ourselves compassion, not to feel better, but because we feel badly

Three components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003)



Self Kindness...

- Gentleness
- Warmth
- Understanding
- Actively comforting ourselves when we fail or feel inadequate
- Treating ourselves like we would treat a good friend



What is Mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is courageous presence
- Being with what is in the present moment
- It is awareness and openness to the reality of the present moment: thoughts, emotions and sensations without resistance or avoidance
- We are not trying to change the moment
- We are not judging the moment
- Awareness of the present moment with acceptance
- Using 5 senses
- Mindfulness helps us to not get lost in our internal narrative so we can be kind to ourselves
- It gives us mental space and perspective to respond not react
- Balanced approach to our negative emotions so that they are not suppressed nor exaggerated

Suffering = Pain x Resistance Shinzen Young

What is Mindfulness?

- What we resist persists
- We are not trying to make pain go away, that would be resistance and make things worse. We accept that things are painful and are kind to ourselves because they are painful
- Pain is unavoidable; Suffering is optional
- Mindfulness allows us to stop resisting reality and hold the experience in non judgmental awareness
- Mindfulness focuses on acceptance of our experience.
 Self compassion focuses on caring for the experiencer
- Mindfulness asks, what am I experiencing right now?
 Self compassion asks what do I need right now

Common Humanity...

- It a sense of interconnectedness
- Suffering is often accompanied by a sense of isolation. As if I am the only person going through this
- Recognizing all human beings are flawed –works in progress
- Everyone fails, everyone makes mistakes, everyone experiences hardships
- Everyone, without exception, experiences suffering
- We feel isolated and alone in our suffering, but it is part of the shared human experience and connects us with all
- By recognizing this, difficulties do not have to be taken so personally



Self Compassion...

The practice of being an inner ally instead on an inner enemy

It is practicing Self Kindness vs. Self Judgement

It is awareness of one's Common Humanity vs.
 Isolation

It is practicing Mindfulness vs Over-Identification

Self Kindness vs. Self Judgement

- We want to alleviate suffering in a moment of pain and we are motivated to do something about it
- We are actively soothing, protective and supportive of self
- We treat ourselves with care and understanding rather than harsh judgement
- Failures and mistakes are inevitable and we do not always get to be what we want or get what we want



Common Humanity vs. Isolation

- Seeing our experience as part of the larger human experience, not isolating or abnormal
- Recognizing that life is imperfect (us too!)
- Everyone experiences hardships, loss and failures
- Pain is part of the shared human experience
- Every moment of suffering can be transformed into a moment of connection with others
- My pain does not make me unique it unites me with others

Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification

- Mindfulness gives us a balanced approach to our negative feelings
- Allows us to be with painful feelings as they are
- Once we are mindful of our pain, not running away from it or avoiding it, we can respond with kindness
- Like a clear pool, mindfulness perfectly mirrors what is occurring without distortion
- Mindfulness is nonjudgmental, we try not to over identify with thoughts and feelings so that we are not caught up and swept away by negative reactivity

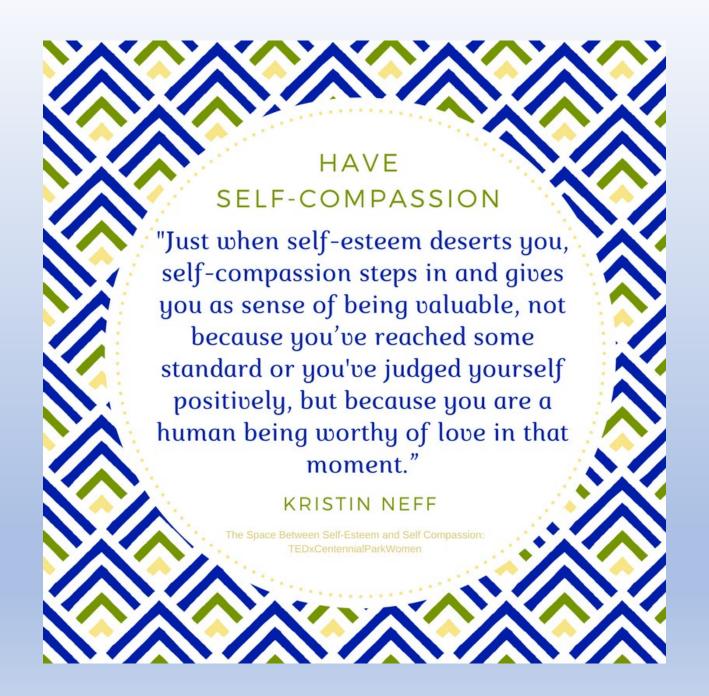
What Self-Compassion is Not

- Is not a pity party
- Is not just for for wimps
- Is not selfish
- It does not undermine motivation

Self Esteem vs. Self Compassion

Both are linked to psychological well being, however they are different in many ways

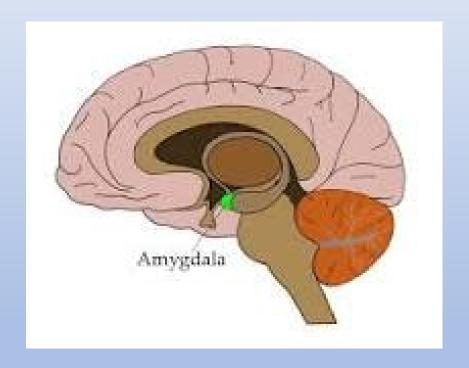
- Self esteem is a positive evaluation of self worth, a judgement. Self compassion is not judgmental. It is a way of relating to ourselves kindly, even when we fail.
- Self esteem requires feeling better than others in order to feel better than ourselves. Self compassion requires acknowledging that we are all imperfect.
- Self esteem seems to be a fair weather friend, there for us when we succeed, elusive when we fail. Self compassion is always there for us, a reliable source of support. Failures still hurts but we can be kind to ourselves because it hurts.
- Compared with self esteem, self compassion is less contingent on physical attractiveness or performance and provides a more stable sense of self worth over time.

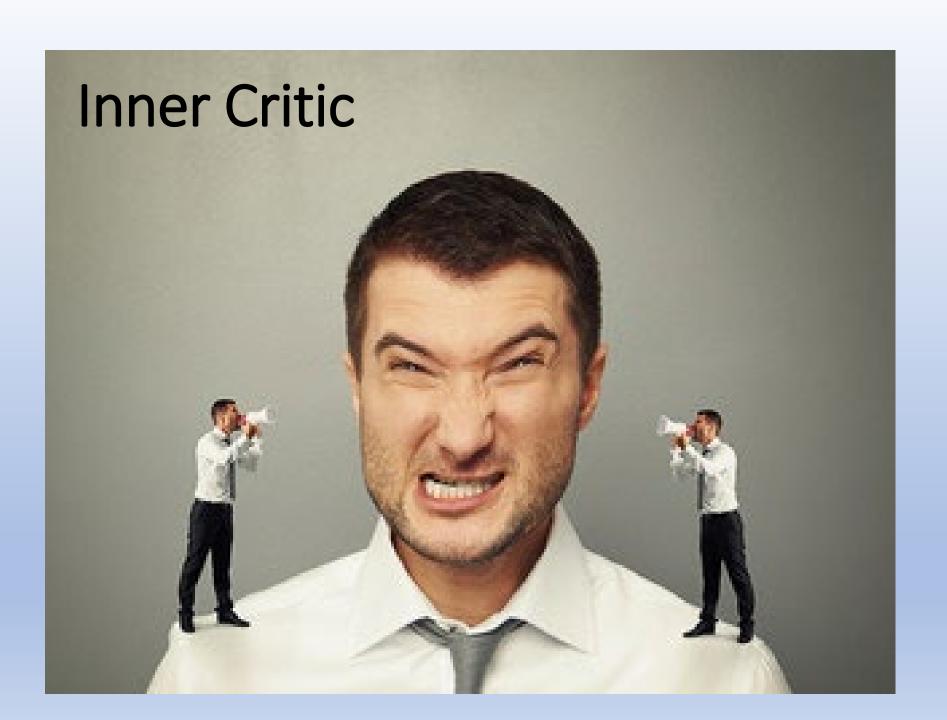


Physiology of Self Criticism and Self Compassion

Fight or Flight Response

- Our body's fight and flight response is activated in response to an *actual* or *perceived* harmful event, attacks or threats
- The amygdala, which registers danger in the brain, gets activated and we release cortisol and adrenaline in preparation for fight, flight or freeze
- This system works very well for protecting against physical threats to our body
- However today most threats are to our self image, self concept or self esteem
- Feeling threatened is stressful to the mind and body, and chronic stress can cause anxiety and depression
- The brain evolved for survival and reproduction, not happiness





Inner Critic

- Paul Gilbert, the founder of Compassion –Focused Therapy (CFT) has found that when we criticize ourselves we are tapping into the bodies threat-defense system
- Habitual self-criticism is bad for emotional and physical well being
- When we feel inadequate, our self concept or self esteem is threatened, so we attack the problem- ourselves
- With self criticism we are both the attacker and the attacked



Soothing Care Response

 As mammals, who must take care of their young for a long period of time, we also have well evolved mammalian care system.



- When this system is activated, oxytocin, the love hormone and endorphins, feel good opiates, part of the reward system, are released
- This helps to reduce stress and increase the feelings of safety and security
- Reliable ways of activating the care system are warmth, soothing touch and gentle vocalizations

Soothing Care Response

- Compassion, including self compassion, activates the soothing care system.
- When we feel inadequate, self compassion can can make us feel safe and cared for, like a child in a warm embrace
- Self compassion can downregulate the flight and fight response.
- Self compassion can change our mental and emotional experience there by changing our body chemistry, calming cardiovascular stress
- When we feel safe and comforted we are in the optimal mind state to do our best
- We become an inner ally instead of an attacker

Soothing Care Response

Stress Response	Stress Response turned Inward	Self- Compassion
Fight	Self-Criticism	Self-kindness
Flight	Isolation	Common Humanity
Freeze	Rumination	Mindfulness

Unlike self criticism, which asks if you are good enough, self compassion asks, what's good for you?

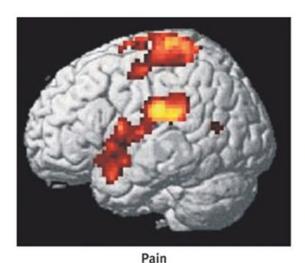
Kristen Neff

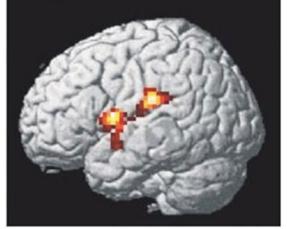
How we can use Self-Compassion as Caregivers

Mirror Neurons

Neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons – frontal lobe neurons that fire when performing certain actions or when observing another doing so – in the brains of animals and humans that are active during observational learning.

PET scans of different brain areas shows that humans have a mirror neuron system that supports empathy and imitation.





Empathy

Empathy Fatigue

- When we are present for others when they are experiencing pain, we feel the pain inside us, literally
- Scientists have determined that we have mirror neurons dedicated to experiencing in our own bodies what others are experiencing
- Additionally, there are areas of the brain dedicated to evaluating social situations and resonating with the emotions of others
- This empathic resonance happens at a preverbal, visceral level
- Empathic resonance means you are feeling an others pain. You are being traumatized, causing empathy fatigue.

Self-Compassion as Care Givers

- Self Compassion is crucial for care givers because it helps us forgive ourselves for mistakes and allows us to comfort self for the difficulties of our care giving role
- Self- Compassion can allow us to give to others without losing ourselves (Kindness, Mindfulness, Common Humanity).
- Self Compassion activates the reward and care centers of the brain, it is a positive emotion, it is energizing
- With self compassion can hold another's pain in loving connected presence
- Compassion enables to hold pain mindfully without having to make it go away, care for the other person even though we may not be able to fix the situation
- Additionally, mirror neurons go both ways, when you give yourself compassion the other person resonates with you
- When we engage in self compassion we activate the care system

Reducing Empathy Fatigue

- Boundary setting
- Self care It is important to identify the physical, psychological, relational and work activities that help you reduce stress and take care of yourself. However the reality is, you can't always engage in these in the moment you need it. Self compassion is self care
- We practice self- compassion with equanimity We recognize that our control is limited and everyone is on their own journey. We can be calm even in difficult situations
- Self compassion- you feel the pain (empathy), but you are not lost in it using the core components of MSC-mindfulness, kindness and common humanity and you activate the soothing care system of the brain to reduce the stress and care for yourself.

Evidenced Based Benefits of Mindfulness Self-Compassion

 Reduction in negative mind states: anxiety, depression, stress, rumination, thought suppression, perfectionism and shame

 Increase in positive mind states: life satisfaction, happiness, connectedness, self confidence, optimism, curiosity and gratitude.

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond. ~Rumi

Thank You

Cini Shaw

MA, AADC, CASAC, NCPRSS, MATS

cini@cinishawrecovery.com

www.cinishawrecovery.com 203-246-2798

Appendix

(in chronological order)

Long, P., & Neff, K. D. (2018). Self-compassion is associated with reduced self-presentation concerns and increased student communication behavior. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 67, 223-231. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2018). Setting the record straight about the Self-Compassion Scale. *Mindfulness*, 1-3. PDF

Neff, K. D., Long, P. Knox, M., Davidson, O., Kuchar, A., Costigan, A., Williamson, Z., Rohleder, N., Tóth-Király, I., & Breines, J. (2018). The forest and the trees: Examining the association of self-compassion and its positive and negative components with psychological functioning. *Self and Identity.* 17 (6), 627-645. PDF

Neff, K. D., Tóth-Király I., Colisomo, K. (2018). Self-compassion is best measured as a global construct and is overlapping with but distinct from neuroticism: A response to Pfattheicher, Geiger, Hartung, Weiss, and Schindler (2017). European Journal of Personality, 1-22. DOI: 10.1002/per.2148 PDF

Neff, K. D., Tóth-Király, I., Yarnell, L., Arimitsu, K., Castilho, P., Ghorbani, N.,...Mantios, M. (2018). Examining the Factor Structure of the Self-Compassion Scale using exploratory SEM bifactor analysis in 20 diverse samples: Support for use of a total score and six subscale scores. *Psychological Assessment, 1-19.* PDF

Yarnell, L. M., Neff, K. D., Davidson, O. A., & Mullarkey, M. (2018). Gender differences in self-compassion: Examining the role of gender role orientation. *Mindfulness*, 1-17. PDF

Neff, K. D., Whittaker, T. & Karl, A. (2017). Evaluating the factor structure of the Self-Compassion Scale in four distinct populations: Is the use of a total self-compassion score justified? *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 99(6), 596-607. PDF

Neff, K. D. & Germer, C. (2017). Self-Compassion and Psychological Wellbeing. In J. Doty (Ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, Ch. 27. Oxford University Press. PDF

Neff, K. D., & Knox, M. (2017). Self-Compassion. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. Shackelford (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. New York: Springer. PDF

Warren, R., Smeets, E. & Neff, K. D. (2016). Self-criticism and self-compassion: Risk and resilience for psychopathology. *Current Psychiatry*, 15(12), 18-32. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2016). Does Self-Compassion Entail Reduced Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-Identification? A Response to Muris, Otgaar, and Petrocchi (2016). *Mindfulness*. Advance online publication. DOI 10.1007/s12671-016-0531-y. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2016). The Self-Compassion Scale is a valid and theoretically coherent measure of self-compassion. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 264-274. PDF 40

(in chronological order)

Neff, K. D. & Davidson, O. (2016). Self-compassion: Embracing suffering with kindness. In I. Ivtzan & T. Lomas (Eds.), *Mindfulness in Positive Psychology* (pp. 37-50). Rutledge. PDF

Neff, K., D., & Seppala, E. (2016). Compassion, Well-Being, and the Hypoegoic Self. In K. W. Brown & M. Leary (Eds), Oxford Handbook of Hypo-egoic Phenomena: Theory and Research on the Quiet Ego (pp. 189-202). Oxford University Press. PDF

Dahm, K., Meyer, E. C., Neff, K. D., Kimbrel, N. A., Gulliver, S. B., & Morissette, S. B (2015). Mindfulness, self-compassion, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, and functional disability in U.S. Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, (ahead-of-print), *1*-5. PDF

Germer, C. K., & Neff, K. D. (2015). Cultivating self-compassion in trauma survivors. In V. M. Follette, J. Briere, D. Rozelle, J. W. Hopper, D. I. Rome, V. M. Follette, ... D. I. Rome (Eds.), Mindfulness-oriented interventions for trauma: Integrating contemplative practices (pp. 43-58). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press. PDF

Yarnell, L. M., Stafford, R. E., Neff, K. D., Reilly, E. D., Knox, M. C. & Mullarkey, M. (2015). Meta-analysis of gender differences in self-compassion. *Self and Identity*. PDF

Albertson, E. R., Neff, K. D., & Dill-Shackleford, K. E. (2014). Self-Compassion and Body Dissatisfaction in Women: A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Brief Meditation Intervention. *Mindfulness*, 1-11. PDF

Lockard, A. J., Hayes, J. A., Neff, K. D. & Locke, B. D. (2014). Self-Compassion Among College Counseling Center Clients: An Examination of Clinical Norms and Group Differences. *Journal of College Counseling*, 17, 249-259. PDF

Neff, K. D., & Costigan, A. P. (2014). Self-compassion, wellbeing, and happiness. Psychologie in Österreich, 114-117. PDF

Neff, K. D., & Dahm, K. A. (2014). Self-Compassion: What it is, what it does, and how it relates to mindfulness (pp. 121-140). In M. Robinson, B. Meier & B. Ostafin (Eds.) *Mindfulness and Self-Regulation*. New York: Springer. PDF

Neff, K. D., & Faso, D. J. (2014). Self-Compassion and Well-Being in Parents of Children with Autism. *Mindfulness*, 1-10. PDF

Smeets, E., Neff, K., Alberts, H., & Peters, M. (2014). Meeting Suffering With Kindness: Effects of a Brief Self-Compassion Intervention for Female College Students. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 70(9), 794-807. PDF

Germer, C. K., & Neff, K. D. (2013). Self-compassion in clinical practice. *Journal Of Clinical Psychology*, 69(8), 856-867. doi:10.1002/jclp.22021 PDF

Germer, C. & Neff, K. (2013). The Mindful Self-Compassion training program. In T. Singer & M. Bolz (Eds.) *Compassion: Bridging theory and practice: A multimedia book* (pp. 365-396). Leipzig, Germany: Max-Planck Institute. PDF

(in chronological order)

Neff, K. D., Beretvas, S. N. (2013). The role of self-compassion in romantic relationships. Self and Identity, 12(1), 78-98. PDF

Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion program. *Journal Of Clinical Psychology*, 69(1), 28-44. PDF

Neff, K. & Germer, C. (2013). Being kind to yourself: The science of self-compassion. In T. Singer & M. Bolz (Eds.) Compassion: Bridging theory and practice: A multimedia book (pp. 291-312). Leipzig, Germany: Max-Planck Institute. PDF

Neff, K. D., Pommier, E. (2013). The relationship between self-compassion and other-focused concern among college undergraduates, community adults, and practicing meditators. *Self and Identity*, 12(2),160-176. PDF

Neff, K., & Tirch, D. (2013). Self-compassion and ACT. In T. B. Kashdan, J. Ciarrochi (Eds.), Mindfulness, acceptance, and positive psychology: The seven foundations of well-being (pp. 78-106). Oakland, CA US: Context Press/New Harbinger Publications.

Neff, K. D. (2012). The science of self-compassion. In C. Germer & R. Siegel (Eds.), Compassion and Wisdom in Psychotherapy, 79-92. New York: Guilford Press. PDF

Yarnell, L. M., Neff, K. D. (2013). Self-compassion, interpersonal conflict resolutions, and well-being. Self and Identity. 2:2, 146-159. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2011). Self-compassion, self-esteem, and well-being. Social and Personality Compass, 5, 1-12. PDF

Raes, F., Pommier, E., Neff, K. D., & Van Gucht, D. (2011). Construction and factorial validation of a short form of the Self-Compassion Scale. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*. 18, 250-255 PDF

Neff, K. (2010). Review of The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions. *British Journal of Psychology*, 101, 179-181. PDF

Neff, K. D. & McGeehee, P. (2010). Self-compassion and psychological resilience among adolescents and young adults. *Self and Identity*, 9, 225-240. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2009). Self-Compassion. In M. R. Leary & R. H. Hoyle (Eds.), *Handbook of Individual Differences in Social Behavior (pp. 561-573)*. New York: Guilford Press. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2009). The role of self-compassion in development: A healthier way to relate to oneself. Human Development, 52, 211-214. PDF

Neff, K. D. & Lamb, L. M. (2009). Self-Compassion. In S. Lopez (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology* (pp. 864-867). Blackwell Publishing. PDF

Neff, K. D. & Vonk, R. (2009). Self-compassion versus global self-esteem: Two different ways of relating to oneself. *Journal of Personality*, 77, 23-50. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2008). Self-compassion: Moving beyond the pitfalls of a separate self-concept. In J. Bauer & H. A. Wayment (Eds.) *Transcending Self-Interest: Psychological Explorations of the Quiet Ego*(95-105). APA Books, Washington DC. PDF

Neff, K. D., Pisitsungkagarn, K., & Hseih, Y. (2008). Self-compassion and self-construal in the United States, Thailand, and Taiwan. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39, 267-285. PDF

(in chronological order)

Neff, K. D., Kirkpatrick, K. & Rude, S. S. (2007). Self-compassion and its PDF to adaptive psychological functioning. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 139-154. PDF

Neff, K. D., & Rude, S. S., & Kirkpatrick, K. (2007). An examination of self-compassion in relation to positive psychological functioning and personality traits. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 908-916. PDF

Neff, K. D., Hseih, Y., & Dejitthirat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Self and Identity*, 4, 263-287. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2004). Self-compassion and psychological well-being. Constructivism in the Human Sciences, 9, 27-37. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2003a). Development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. Self and Identity, 2, 223-250. PDF

Neff, K. D. (2003b). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. Self and Identity, 2, 85-102. PDF