Empirical Evidence for the Value of Compassion

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Overview

The ways to think about compassion
Social psychological perspectives
Measurement and correlates of the Quiet Ego
Application and value of Quiet Ego/Compassion
The Problem:

It is getting ugly out there
“Let him die.”
"We have to be honest with ourselves."
“...never lost sleep at night worrying that any one of them might have been innocent. I've never struggled with that at all...”
Compassion:

What do we know?
What is Compassion?

Everyone “knows” what it is

The Golden Rule, empathy, love, sadness

At the “core” of every religious and spiritual tradition (K. Armstrong)

Secular/biological origins (R. Wright)

Extremely popular topic
Helping View of Compassion

“... as the feeling that arises in witnessing another’s suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help.” p. 351

Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010
Psychological Bulletin
Appraisal Processes Leading to Compassionate Helping

1. Witness suffering
2. Evaluate self-relevance
3. Determine “deservingness” of “other”
4. Assess personal resources
5. Take action

Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010
Psychological Bulletin
Broader View of Compassion

Compassion brings with it the recognition that any perceived distinction between ourselves and others is only a "fleeting, deceptive phenomenon"

--Schopenhauer
Broader View of Compassion
Broader View of Compassion

Compassion is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all things.

--Merton
There is a deep-felt sense of being tender. Not sad in a depressed way, but tender, and somewhat delighted at the same time. There’s no sadness for oneself. Nor is there sadness for anyone in particular, either.
It’s like being saturated with juice, just like an apple is full of juice.
What keeps us from compassion?
Psychological Defensiveness

Psychological mechanisms that protect:

- Individuality
- Self-esteem
- Life’s predictability
- Sense of control

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Psychological Defensiveness

Compassion
Can it be quantified?

The Quiet Ego
The Quiet Ego Conference

October 27-29, 2005
Flagstaff, Arizona

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Transcending Self-Interest

Psychological Explorations of the Quiet Ego
The Quiet Ego

“Balanced recognition of one’s strengths and weaknesses that paves the way for personal growth and compassion for the self and others”

Wayment & Bauer (2008)
Compassion
Detached Awareness

Interdependence

Compassion

Interpersonal Reactivity Index Empathy Scale

Allo-Centric Identity

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

Well-Being Growth & Development Scale

Growth

Quiet Ego
Research Findings
Studies (N = 1305)

Buddhist Practitioners (N = 117)
College Students’ Health (N = 217)
College Students’ Well-Being (N = 573)
Under-Represented Minority Students (N = 194)
Unemployed Adults (N = 170)
EEG Study (N = 34)
Big 5 Personality Traits

- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Conscientiousness
- Openness to experience
- Neuroticism
- Honesty-Humility
Other Personality Traits

+ Self-Esteem
- State Anxiety
- Trait Anxiety
Positive Psychology Constructs

- Self-Compassion
- Savoring
- Generativity
- Autonomy (SDTheory)
- Meaning in Life
- Searching for Meaning
- Authenticity
Cognition/Coping

+ Coping efficacy
- Negative thinking
+ Holistic thinking
+ Reappraisal skills
+ Resiliency
Social Outcomes

+ Friendship quality
+ Compassionate friendship goals
- Egoistic friendship goals
+ Community involvement
+ Cultural respect
+ Sustainable behavior (attitudes/values)
Health Outcomes

- Risk taking
- Physical aggression
- Verbal aggression
- Anger/hostility
+ Health practices
+ Self-reported health
Coping with Unemployment

- About 220 adults from Phoenix One-Stop Center
- Questionnaire
- Reported high levels of economic distress
- $N = 40$ employed; $N = 117$ unemployed
Coping with Economic Stress

Quiet Ego \( \rightarrow ^{0.40^{***}} \) Growth

Unemployed
The “God Lobe” Study

Universal “Oneness” characterized by a unique EEG frequency signature (d’Aquili & Newberg, 1993).

Could concentrating on the 4 Quiet Ego Characteristics show this same pattern?
Frontal Gamma Absolute Power Differences by Condition

Stevens, Denny, Heimann, Wartz, & Wayment (2011)
The Quiet Ego...

- is the sense of interdependence with all living things, motivated by a desire to grow, arises from being mindful, aware, with an open heart; a type of humility

- is associated with many positive thoughts, feelings, and behavior

- is observable in the brain with brief shifted focus

- is associated with growth when experiencing economic distress
Relevance

- Is the subject of renewed interest; timely
- Can be cultivated IF we are AWARE and MOTIVATED to correct our tendencies to self-protect and self-enhance
- May not be easy--or pain free
- Is a way to connect personal well-being and the well-being of others
Importance of the Real World

- Need to understand the connection to everyday life
- NAU SBS Compassion Project
  - generating great deal of enthusiasm
  - teaching: mindfulness in the curriculum
  - community: compassion charter
  - conferences: 2012 “Living Compassion”
- variety of compassion-related projects
Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by *widening our circle of compassion* to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

-Albert Einstein
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