Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference (WPPNT)

- This teleconference is brought to you by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Bureau of Prevention, Treatment and Recovery and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Department of Psychiatry.
- The Department of Health Services makes no representations or warranty as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, quality, suitability or completeness of or results of the materials in this presentation. Use of information contained in this presentation may require express authority from a third party.

Self-compassion and Social Justice: Self-care as a Revolutionary Act

Abra Vigna, PhD

Today’s agenda:
Situating the self-care in our work

- What makes a difference, supports transformation?
- Analyzing root causes of suffering
- Exploring the evidence that self-compassion is essential for mutual liberation and effective mental health services
  - The lived wisdom
  - The peer-reviewed science
- Strategies for incorporating self-compassion into your practice
What makes therapy effective? (Bruce Wampold, 2013)

- Quality of the intervention? - Nope
- Type of intervention? - Nope
  - Cognitive, behavioral, experiential? - each equally as effective
- Number of degrees and certifications the therapist has? - nope

- The ability to create a compassionate alliance with the client - YES!
  - Unconditional positive regard
  - Understanding — Why the peer support model is so effective
  - Empathy: feeling felt
  - To my mind, empathy is in itself a healing agent. It is one of the most potent aspects of therapy, because it releases, it confirms, it brings even the most frightened clients into the human race. If a person is understood, he or she belongs” (Carl Rogers, 1986, p. 129).

Compassion can only lead to skillful action when there is true understanding

- “When we apply mindfulness to our suffering, our mind calms and we eventually come to understand its causes. This understanding gives rise to compassion” (Desmond, p. 93).
  - The past is always present, just like the 10 year old tree can be seen inside the 100 year old tree
  - People suffering from trauma often experience loneliness and alienation and require a deeply felt companionship in order to reorganize the bodily-based remnants of complex trauma (Stanley, 2016)

Understanding Our Roots

Radical simply means “grasping things at the root.”

~ Angela Davis
STIGMA as a fundamental cause of Health Disparities

- Label & Stereotype
- Us vs Them
- Status Loss
- Discrimination

Coping with more stress and fewer resources = ill health

Braverman et al., 2011; Hatzenbeuhler, Phelan & Link, 2013

Coping with more stress and fewer resources = ill health

The practice of love is the most powerful medicine to the politics of domination.
- Hatzenbeuhler

Braverman et al., 2011; Hatzenbeuhler, Phelan & Link, 2013

Coping with more stress and fewer resources = ill health

The practice of love is the most powerful medicine to the politics of domination.
- Hatzenbeuhler

Braverman et al., 2011; Hatzenbeuhler, Phelan & Link, 2013

Coping with more stress and fewer resources = ill health

The practice of love is the most powerful medicine to the politics of domination.
- Hatzenbeuhler
Us vs Them Policies harm EVERYONE

Teen suicides attempts drop by 7% among the general population and by 14% among LGB kids between 1995-2015 in states where same-sex marriage was made legal.

What value is mindfulness (and self-compassion) in a racially unjust world?

- Angela Davis

In my own research on the association between SC and resilience to adversity among sexual and gender minority adolescents, I found:

- SC a stronger predictor of anxiety levels than bias-based bullying
- At “HIGH” SC, health disparities disappear
- Its relationship with resilience weakens the more adversity one faces
- It cannot overcome the effects of severe adversity


Self-compassion appears to help manage injustice... to a point

- SC a stronger predictor of anxiety levels than bias-based bullying
- At “HIGH” SC, health disparities disappear
- Its relationship with resilience weakens the more adversity one faces
- It cannot overcome the effects of severe adversity


It is likely that stigma impacts health in part by its internalization and reduced SC

- Although sexual and gender minority students had much lower self-compassion rates than did their sexual and gender majority peers
- Among sexual gender minority students, students of color had MUCH higher rates of self-compassion than did white students
- White SGMi students have lowest rates of self-compassion

LOW SC ➔ Highest rates of health risk behaviors
HIGH SC ➔ Lowest rates of health risk behaviors


SELF-COMPASSION & LIBERATION

DIVIDE AND CONQUER MUST BECOME DEFINE AND EMPower
Self-compassion as self-soothing

*Non-contingent positive regard is liberating
*Essential for secure base development!

Mindfulness increases awareness of suffering

** If that suffering is not met with acceptance and warmth, rumination arises in place of integration

Mindfulness increases awareness of suffering

Mindfulness increases awareness of suffering

Two Wings Of "Radical Acceptance"

- The wing of clear seeing: the quality of awareness that recognizes exactly what is happening in our moment to moment experience.
- The wing of compassion: our capacity to relate in a kinder and sympathetic way to what we perceive.

Embracing the work: "Embodied reflexivity" (Beth Berila, 2016)

- Embrace your grief
- Reflect on your ideologies and experiences,
- Question ways of thinking
- Welcome awareness of your full humanity
- Imagine alternatives
- Commit to doing better

Self-Compassion may increase capacity for sustained transformation
Self-Compassion Increases Distress Stamina

- Less likely to report feeling overwhelmed when confronted with the suffering of others (Neff & Pommier, 2013)
- Increases in SC associated with reductions in thought suppression (Neff, Kirkpatrick & Rude, 2007)

Self-Compassion is associated with Compassion for Others & Taking Action

- Self-compassion and other-focused concern go hand in hand (Longe et al., 2009)
- More likely to help a person in distress (Mikulincer, Shaver, et al., 2005)

Self-compassion is associated with a sense of inter-connection

- “Like many people, I struggle.....” (Neff, Kirkpatrick & Rude, 2007)
Self-compassion increases personal accountability

- Linked to perspective taking (Neff & Pommier, 2013)
- More willing to accept responsibility for failures without feeling super distressed about failing (Leary et al., 2007)
- More likely to admit mistakes and make amends (Breines & Chen, 2013; Leary et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009)

Accepting our responses is not the same thing as accepting oppression.

- Rather than perpetuating violence, we befriend our experiences
- This counters the separation and Othering that uphold oppressive systems (decolonizingyoga.com)
- More likely to take chances; less fear of failure (Neff, Hessein & Dejitthirat, 2005)

Holding Compassion for Self-Criticism:

- It has its purpose!
- Maintain connection/Protecting a relationship
- Maintain the illusion of control
- Maintain a fairness
- Avoiding responsibility for life

Dramaturgical Triangle
A common external and internal dynamic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Body Language</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I can’t believe I did that!”</td>
<td>Defensive, making self small, tearful</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cheer up, what’s up with you?”</td>
<td>Resurring, concerned, trying to get close to him</td>
<td>Rescuer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What’s up with you? As if you don’t know what’s up with me?”</td>
<td>Pointing fingers, furrowed brow, tension in shoulders</td>
<td>Persecutor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Apologize! Calm down! I’m only trying to help and you don’t need to get so angry with me!”</td>
<td>Hands in air, look of shock, tense expression, Most defensive posture</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW IS SELF-COMPASSION DIFFERENT FROM SELF-ESTEEM?

Self-Esteem is ME-focused
- Based upon comparison to others or congruence with ideal standards (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001)
- Emphasizes what makes you unique

Self-Compassion is WE-focused
- Based on unconditional self-worth (Neff, 2003a)
- Emphasizes that you are NOT uniquely flawed
SC has all of the benefits of SE and none of the drawbacks

- Correlates with narcissism (Neff, 2003; Neff & Vonk, 2009)
- Attempts to protect self-esteem may cause distortions in self-knowledge (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1993; Sedikides, 1993; Taylor & Brown, 1988)
- Is difficult to improve (Baumeister et al., 2008; Baumeister et al., 2008)

HOW DOES IT “WORK?”
It changes the narrative

Self-Esteem

- Has no association with narcissism once self-esteem is taken into account (Neff & Vonk, 2009)
- See self more accurately; less likely to self-enhance or deprecate when receive negative feedback (Leary et al., 2007)
- Inductions increase one’s sense of similarity with others (Leary et al., 2007)
- More likely to admit mistakes and make amends; hold greater compassion for others (Breines & Chen, 2013; Leary et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009)

Self-Compassion

Helps you to recognize patterns, de-identify with the narrative

Cognitively reframes interpretation of the stress

Self-Compassion Reduces Rumination (Galla, 2016)

Self-pity tends to overemphasizes the uniqueness of one’s pain. In self-pity, we are defined by our pain.

Self-compassion, emphasizes connection in pain and non-judgmental awareness of thoughts as non-defining.
Reduces the physiological stress response to social evaluative threat

Generating a soothing response activates the parasympathetic system, thus acting as an emotional “approach” strategy

Arch et al., 2014; Bluth, Roberson & Gaylord, 2015; Bluth et al., 2016; Breines et al., 2014; 2016; Gilbert 2005; Gilbert and Procter 2006

For more information:
Watch a conversation between Angela Davis and Jon Kabat-Zinn at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center on the use/purpose of mindfulness in social justice

- Contemplative Practices can ASSIST structural change
- Mindfulness as institutional aikido a method for cultivating WE

Integrating Self-Compassion into your work
(7 principles by Tim Desmond)

1. Connect with the client’s goals
2. Maintain the motivational boundary: Accept the client exactly as they are and be happy to help them change
3. Improvise and experiment: adapt to the needs of the client
4. Be authentic: be curious and ask questions/beginner’s mind “This might help, but it might not. Shall we try?”
5. Empathy: Put yourself in the client’s shoes
6. Our practice is our own best guide
7. Have the client experience a practice before you explain it, but don’t deceive them “Would you like to try an exercise to see if we can understand your anxiety a little better?”

Resources
- [http://Selfcompassion.org](http://Selfcompassion.org) – Kristen Neff’s resource site
- [http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org](http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org) – Christopher Germer’s resource site
- [http://Tarabrach.com](http://Tarabrach.com) – Internationally renowned Buddhist Psychologist
- [https://www.timdesmond.net/](https://www.timdesmond.net/) – Offers web-based trainings and consultation
Resources for training in contemplative, anti-racist work
mindfulnessforthepeople.org

Thank you for your time!

Be kind to yourself.