

## Editorial

### ***Compassion: Research, applications and multi-cultural considerations***

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Compassion is an ancient concept but novel hot topic across the social sciences, from psychology, to sociology, to health, to communication and media, to politics and beyond. Burgeoning research has demonstrated the benefits of compassion for mental health and emotion regulation (e.g., MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Matos et al., 2022), physiological health (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2020; Klimecki et al., 2014), and interpersonal and social relationships (e.g., Crocker & Canevello, 2012; Yarnell & Neff, 2013). In particular, self-compassion has been shown to be a protective factor, increasing resilience to common mental health issues (e.g., shame, self-criticism; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Muris & Petrocchi, 2017) and promoting wellbeing (Zessin et al., 2015). In addition to compassion offering wellbeing benefits, compassion and self-compassion can also be cultivated and enhanced through interventions, in diverse populations and contexts, where they have been shown to promote well-being and to diminish mental health difficulties (e.g., depression, anxiety, stress, shame, self-criticism) (e.g., Craig et al., 2020; Ferrari et al., 2019; Kirby et al., 2017).

Given the global challenges facing our world and the need for collective action, and inspired by the notion in evolutionary science that a conscious evolution toward a more compassionate world is possible (see Wilson, 2020), this special issue of the journal *Psychologica* presents research, applications and multi-cultural considerations related to compassion. In this special issue, several researchers and clinicians, including prominent names in the field and history of compassion, such as Prof. Paul Gilbert, made valuable contributions to expand the science of compassion and disseminate this knowledge into community, educational, clinical and public health

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settings. These studies are focused on different cultures (Portuguese, Australian, Singaporean), populations (clinical and nonclinical), age groups (adolescents and adults), clinical conditions (Borderline Personality Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder Hoarding Disorder), and applications (compassion-based programs for adolescents and adults, for distinct clinical conditions and with different formats). Let us give you a short-guided tour through the headlines of this special issue.

“What is Compassion?” is a central question to this science field, however, there are several conceptualizations of compassion, arising from different models and approaches, and definitions of compassion may vary between cultures and amongst researchers, clinicians, and lay people. Aiming to address this critical query, in the first paper Marcela Matos, Paul Gilbert, Stan Steindl and colleagues define compassion from the perspective of Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), distinguish it from other commonly related concepts (e.g., empathy, sympathy, kindness) and examine people’s understanding of compassion via semantic associations and recalled subjective experiences of compassion. In addition, this paper explores cultural differences in people’s understanding of compassion by comparing data from Portuguese, Australian and Singaporean samples collected among these countries’ adult general population.

The following three papers focus on the importance of cultivating compassion in adolescence. Given the early onset of borderline features and the developmental trajectory of borderline personality disorder, intervening with adolescents that show emergent and persistent borderline features is critical. In a cross-sectional study, Diogo Carreiras, Paula Castilho and Marina Cunha examine the mediator role of self-compassion on the association between self-disgust and borderline features in Portuguese adolescents. Their findings revealed that self-compassion mediates the impact of self-disgust on borderline features, and hence highlight that cultivating self-compassion competencies can be a potential positive regulation mechanism for self-disgust’s effect on borderline features in adolescents.

Even though there is evidence supporting the practice of sports can be linked to mental health difficulties, as well as evidence documenting the benefits of compassion, acceptance and mindfulness skills in athletes, research of the efficacy of an intervention targeting these processes in adolescent athletes is lacking. The second paper on this topic aims to fill this gap in the literature and presents the study protocol of a Mindfulness, Acceptance and Compassion-Based Programme for adolescent athletes. In their paper, Sara Oliveira, Marina Cunha, António Rosado and Cláudia Ferreira describe a controlled non-randomized trial to test a novel integrative intervention for adolescent athletes derived from contextual-behavioral therapies: the PLAYwithHEART programme. The goal of this novel programme is to foster mindfulness, acceptance and self-compassion skills and to reduce shame

and self-criticism in athletes, and therefore to diminish the experience of anxiety in sport and improve athletes' quality of life and competencies to deal with the challenges and demands of sport contexts.

Compassion Focused Therapy (Gilbert, 2020) is an evidence-based approach to psychotherapy that integrates clinical, social, developmental and evolutionary psychology, psychophysiology and neuroscience, along with the wisdom traditions, and targets physiological processes directly involved in the capacity to engage in a supportive way with one's own suffering. CFT aims at fostering long term changes in one's compassionate response by developing their inner ability to feel safe and supported. Evidence supporting the benefits of CFT in different clinical conditions and mental health symptoms is mounting (e.g., Craig et al., 2020), however, there is a dearth of research investigating its therapeutic gains for social anxiety disorder (SAD) in adolescence. In the third paper targeting adolescents, Diana Vieira Figueiredo, Paula Vagos and colleagues, present preliminary data on the efficacy of an online CFT intervention for SAD in adolescence: the CFT@TeenSAD, based on data collected throughout treatment. This study found evidence of a continuous decrease in the severity of social anxiety symptoms during treatment, with trajectories of change being similar across gender. Their findings provide preliminary but encouraging support for the benefits of this online CFT intervention in the treatment of SAD in adolescents.

The last paper of this special issue is related to the relevance and development of a CFT approach for Hoarding Disorder (HD). Firstly, Chia-Ying Chou and Troy DuFrene provide an overview of the current standard of treatment for HD and describe the rationale for developing CFT as an alternative treatment option. Secondly, they offer a detailed introduction to the group CFT protocol for Hoarding Disorder they developed: the CFT-HD, describing the theoretical framework, its treatment structure and content of modules. Moreover, they review existing evidence of CFT for HD and ongoing studies, outlining their hypotheses and implications for the future research and treatment of HD.

In conclusion, this special issue provides a look into some of the latest advances in our understanding of compassion, its scientific exploration and promising clinical application in distinct developmental stages, clinical conditions and cultures. This collection of papers will hopefully inspire innovation in research and serve to inform the transfer of knowledge into community, educational, clinical and public health settings, and hence contribute to the dissemination of the science of compassion in favor of cultivating compassion to increase our individual and collective wellbeing.

Our sincere acknowledgement to all the authors who contributed with their knowledge to this special issue. We hope that our readers will learn as much

as we did from your work, and that may be inspired to think about innovative compassion-based research. Finally, it is also our profound wish that many other authors across the world may join us in the future.

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