Parker Hughes, Tahne Vongsavath, Tyson Bryant, Julianne Christopher, and Erin Freeman

Self-Compassion and its Effects on Physical Pain Response

The current study examined a potential relationship between the attribute of self-compassion, the ability to show compassion towards oneself, and ability to cope with moderate physical discomfort. Literature has shown that individuals higher in self-compassion are better able to cope with mental and social stressors, but little research has studied a physiological component. This study examined the potential protective effects of self-compassion on physiological and self-reported responses to pain. Participants were assessed in regard to their self-compassion, and baseline measurements of heart rate and blood pressure were taken. Participants were then instructed to submerge their hand into cold water (four degrees Celsius) for up to three minutes. The subject’s heart rate and blood pressure, as well as a self-reported pain ratings (scale from 0-100) were recorded every thirty seconds while their hand remained in the water. It is expected that those with higher levels of self-compassion will display less of a change in physiological responses from baseline and report lower levels of pain compared to those with lower levels of self-compassion. The results from this study may contribute to a better understanding of a relationship between self-compassionate attitudes and ability to respond to and cope with physical stressors.