Symposium 4
Compassion Focussed Therapy Interventions
Ernst Bohlmeijer, Marcela Matos, Cristiana Duarte, Emma Warnock-Parkes and James Kirby

CFT as public mental health for chronic stress and well-being
Ernst Bohlmeijer

Bio: Ernst Bohlmeijer graduated in 2007 on the effects of life-review on depression in older adults. Since 2007 he works as an associate professor and since 2011 as full professor at the department of Psychology, Health & Technology at the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences at Twente University. His research comprises two main topics: 1) mental health promotion, 2) the use of (e) technology in (mental) health care. He has a special interest in the development and evaluation of innovative (web-based) interventions in health care. In the last years he was principle investigator and supervisor of more than 10 randomized controlled trials. He developed 8 interventions aiming at enhancing resilience and well-being and reducing distress based on behavioural cognitive therapy (acceptance and commitment therapy and positive psychology). Since 2010 Ernst Bohlmeijer (co-) published over 80 peer reviewed papers and three scientific books. He was editor of the Dutch Handbook of Positive Psychology. Since 2000 he obtained over 10 grants from the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw) and other scientific funds.

Abstract: About ten percent of the Dutch working population suffers from chronic stress and high levels of emotional exhaustion. Chronic stress is associated with depressive and anxiety disorders, which are very prevalent in the population. One of the individual causes of chronic stress may be high levels of self-criticism. This context warrants a public mental approach. A self-help book was written based on CFT. A randomized controlled trial was conducted with two groups (n=230): the intervention group working through the book and receiving weekly email guidance and a waiting-list control group. The intervention, the post-treatment (3 months) and short-term follow-up (6 months) effects on self-criticism, stress and well-being will be presented as well as a case-study of one participant.
Evidence for the beneficial effects of compassionate mind training in two distinct populations
Marcela Matos and Cristiana Duarte

Bio: Marcela Matos is a clinical psychologist and postdoctoral research fellow at the Cognitive and Behavioural Centre for Research and Intervention (CINEICC), University of Coimbra, in Portugal, who has developed research in evolutionary clinical psychology (e.g., social rank theory) and third wave psychological approaches (e.g., Compassion Focused Therapy). She completed her PhD on “Shame memories that shape who we are”, where she investigated how early shame experiences are structured as traumatic memories that become central to personal identity and increase vulnerability to psychopathology. She has worked and trained in Compassion Focused Therapy with Professor Paul Gilbert. At the moment, her main research focus is the design, application and efficacy study of a compassion and mindfulness based group intervention in promoting mental and physical well-being in several populations, and also investigating its impact on epigenetic mechanisms and physiological stress responses.

Bio: Cristiana Duarte (Clinical Psychologist, MSc, Ph.D. student) is a researcher at the Cognitive and Behavioural Centre for Research and Intervention (CINEICC), in the University of Coimbra, Portugal. Her major research interests are focused on the role that self-evaluation and emotion regulation processes play on body image and eating-related problems.

Abstract: The paper “An exploration of two weeks of personal compassion practice on compassion feelings, emotions, mood and heart-rate variability” will be presented by Marcela Matos and explores the impact of Compassionate Self Training practices (e.g., mindfulness, soothing rhythm breathing, voice tones, facial expressions and compassionate focusing) over 2 weeks on mental well-being and heart-rate variability. Using a longitudinal design, Portuguese college students and general population participants were assigned to one of two conditions: Compassionate Self Training (CST; n = 56) and Wait-List Control (WLC; n = 37). Participants in the compassionate self condition were asked to practice compassionate self imagery for 15 minutes everyday and in moments of stress or when facing setbacks during two weeks. Heart rate variability was assessed and self-report measures of shame, self-criticism, compassion feelings and goals, fears of compassion, and psychopathological symptoms were completed at pre and post in the two conditions. Results demonstrated that a brief 2-week compassionate self training produces significant increases in levels of compassion for self and others and of the ability to receive compassion from others, and in positive affect. Furthermore, participants reported a decrease in fears of compassion, in shame and self-criticism, and in depressive symptoms and perceived stress. The CST group reported significant improvement in HRV. These findings support the efficacy of compassionate self training components on the cultivation of a compassionate way of relating both to oneself and to others, and on the promotion of wellbeing.

Cristiana Duarte will present the paper "Compassion in body image, weight and eating-related problems". This paper will explore the role of shame and self-criticism on difficulties related to body image, weight and eating and
the beneficial effect of compassion. A series of path analyses conducted in both nonclinical and clinical samples, supported that shame and self-criticism are significant predictors of disordered eating symptoms, namely binge eating symptoms. A brief 4-week compassion and mindfulness-based online intervention was delivered to women diagnosed with Binge Eating Disorder. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: intervention (n = 11) or wait-list control (n = 9). Participants in the intervention condition were invited to practice mindfulness, soothing rhythm breathing and compassionate imagery practices with a focus on awareness and acceptance of emotional states and triggers to binge eat and engagement in adaptive actions. Results revealed that, in the intervention group, there were significant reductions in eating psychopathology symptoms, binge eating, self-criticism and indicators of psychological distress; there were significant increases in compassionate actions and body image-related psychological flexibility. These data suggest that developing compassion competencies may improve eating behaviour and psychological wellbeing in individuals with eating disorders.

**Integrating compassion focused and cognitive therapy for social anxiety disorder**

**Emma Warnock-Parkes**

**Bio:** Dr Emma Warnock-Parkes is a clinical psychologist and senior research fellow at the University of Oxford and King’s College London. She works alongside Professors David Clark and Anke Ehlers as part of the Anxiety Disorders Research Group, developing new and effective psychological treatments for anxiety disorders. Emma’s current research is focused on improving the efficacy and accessibility of talking therapies for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia). Emma is particularly interested in the potential benefit of incorporating compassion focused interventions with cognitive therapy for highly self-critical patients.

**Abstract:** Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is associated with high levels of self-criticism and low levels of self-compassion and some research indicates that untreated self-criticism can negatively impact on therapy outcome. However, these processes are not typically directly targeted in standard cognitive therapy treatments for SAD (see Clark et al., 2003; 2006). This presentation will briefly present recent research on the forms and functions of self-criticism in people with high social anxiety (Gale, Warnock-Parkes, Gilbert & Clark, In preparation). A case series of four patients with social anxiety disorder and high levels of self-criticism treated with a combination of compassion focused and cognitive therapy will then be presented (Warnock-Parkes, Gilbert & Clark, In preparation). Two patients had previously received a high quality course of cognitive therapy for social anxiety disorder and had made significant gains, but had subsequently relapsed and been re-referred for further treatment. A further two patients had not received any previous cognitive therapy. Case examples of how compassion focused therapy was applied and integrated with cognitive therapy interventions in these cases will be presented alongside outcome data and video of patient testimony. Implications for the treatment of people with SAD who report high levels of self-criticism will be discussed.
**Current state of evidence for compassion-based interventions**

**James Kirby**

*Bio:* James is a Lecturer at the School of Psychology at The University of Queensland and a practicing clinical psychologist where he delivers Compassion-Focused Therapy. He just completed a 6-month Fellowship at the Center for Compassion and Altruism for Research and Education at Stanford University. His current research focus is on examining the differences between compassionate and competitive-based motivations in relation to success.

*Abstract:* This paper reports on a recently completed meta-analysis that evaluated 23 randomised controlled trials of compassion-based interventions. The meta-analysis included the following interventions, Compassion-Focused Therapy, Mindful Self-Compassion program, Compassion Cultivation Training, amongst others. Significant short-term effects were found for compassion (\(d = 0.559\)), self-compassion (\(d = 0.691\)), and mindfulness (\(d = 0.525\)). Significant moderate effects were also found for reducing suffering-based outcomes of depression (\(d = 0.656\)), anxiety (\(d = 0.547\)), and small to moderate effects for psychological distress (\(d = 0.374\)). Significant moderate effects were also found for life satisfaction and happiness (\(d = 0.540\)). Based on the meta-analysis some important methodological considerations are suggested to improve the quality of current RCTs for compassion-based interventions, such as minimising risk of bias and facilitating independent evaluations.