

when masturbating to a pornographic film? If the male viewer identifies with the female performer and then with the male performer, or both simultaneously, what implications does this identification have *vis-à-vis* his sexual desire/orientation?

Finally, while I was not expecting the author to corroborate all of his viewpoints with 'scientific' fact, some justification for the sweeping conclusions issued would have been appreciated. The reader is informed that sexual desire is neither a biological imperative nor a social construction, but, rather, an existential need. Why? The author states that 'many people' do not require same-gender non-sexual interactions and that their 'opposite-gender sexual partners are also their best friends' (p. 184). Is there any evidence to substantiate this claim? The author reports that genitals are fundamental to our experience of gender. If so, how would the author account for transgenderists or the 'genderfuck' phenomenon in which individuals consciously play with gender presentation?

In conclusion, *The nature of sexual desire* was disappointing. The ideas expressed were not particularly innovative (Do we need another critique of Masters and Johnson's sexual response cycle?); the writing style was an odd mixture of florid descriptive passages and 'academicese'; and there were numerous instances in which the author provided insufficient support for the broad generalizations he issued.

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The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions

By Christopher K. Germer

New York: The Guilford Press 2009, Paperback \$15.95, ISBN – 978-1-59385-975-6

In this intelligent, concise, and easy-to-read book, Christopher Germer presents an exciting synthesis of mindfulness and self-compassion that is much needed and long overdue. Drawing upon decades of practice as a clinician and meditator, Dr Germer offers a rich and insightful guide to emotional healing. While thoroughly covering the relevant psychological research, the book is written for a general audience, and will be of enormous benefit to both therapists and their clients.

The last decade has seen a burgeoning interest in mindfulness, with hundreds of books written on the topic. Mindfulness, a construct central to Buddhist psychology, appeals to Western psychologists because it offers an effective cognitive framework for relating to difficult emotions. In Buddhism, however, equal emphasis is placed on self-compassion as a way to relate to difficult emotions. From this perspective, the heart and mind *both* need to be engaged in order to heal mental suffering. While researchers are now starting to study the link between self-compassion and well being (e.g. Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Neff, 2009), and to examine the mental health benefits of compassion-focused meditation (e.g. Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004), there have been few attempts to integrate the practice of mindfulness and self-compassion in a meaningful way. Until now.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 (chapters 1-5) explains the concepts of mindfulness and self-compassion, including how they relate to each other. The first chapter discusses the importance of turning towards emotional pain, so that it is held in mindful awareness rather than resisted. It also describes stages of emotional acceptance: (1) aversion, (2) curiosity, (3) tolerance, (4) allowing, and (5) friendship. However, Germer argues that mere

acceptance is not enough: we must actively and explicitly soothe our pain with self-compassion in order for healing to be complete. 'Self-compassion is a form of acceptance. Whereas acceptance usually refers to what's happening to us - accepting a feeling or a thought - self-compassion is acceptance of the person to whom it's happening. It's acceptance of ourselves while we're in pain' (p. 35). Chapters 2 and 3 provide mindfulness techniques centred on body awareness and emotional labelling. Chapter 4 explicitly defines self-compassion (drawing primarily upon my own work - Neff, 2003), and discusses the reciprocal relationship between mindfulness and self-compassion. 'Self-compassion practice is a special method for whittling away our stubborn tendencies to resist pain and grasp for pleasure. It's mindfulness from the neck down, emphasizing qualities of heart - motivation and emotion - rather than awareness and wisdom' (p. 89). Chapter 5 discusses various pathways into self-compassion: physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual.

Part 2 of the book (chapters 6-7) goes into detail about loving-kindness (or metta) meditation. Loving-kindness is the foundational practice in Dr Germer's approach to developing self-compassion. This form of meditation was introduced by the Buddha but elaborated upon by fifth century monk Buddhaghosa. Loving-kindness meditation first involves repeating a set of phrases designed to cultivate goodwill towards oneself: 'May I be safe, May I be happy, May I be healthy, May I live with ease'. Then the target of the phrases shift to others - a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, a difficult person, and eventually all sentient beings. Germer offers one of the best set of instructions around for how to do loving-kindness meditation, including tips for how to mix it with mindfulness meditation and use the phrases in daily life.

Part 3 of the book focuses on customizing self-compassion practice for different personality types, such as caregivers, intellectuals, and perfectionists. It also offers a very useful description of the stages of self-compassion practice: the enthusiasm felt in the initial 'infatuation' stage, the discouragement felt in the 'disillusionment' stage when people discover that self-compassion would not magically make their pain go away, and the wisdom found in the 'true acceptance' stage, which shifts the focus from 'cure' to 'care'. 'In the true acceptance phase, we care for ourselves because life is hard and a merciful response seems the only intelligent option' (p. 227).

Throughout the book Germer includes interesting research highlights to provide support for the claim that self-compassion is an effective way to alleviate suffering. He also offers a wealth of easy exercises to help develop mindfulness and self-compassion skills. And it is here that the book really shines, offering a concrete, step-by-step manual for people who want to learn how to be more self-compassionate in daily life.

Dr Germer certainly has the right background to write this book. He is a clinical instructor in psychology at Harvard Medical School, a founding faculty member of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy, and co-editor of the professionally acclaimed book *Mindfulness and psychotherapy* (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005). He is also a co-director of the annual Harvard Medical School 'Meditation and Psychotherapy' conference, which hosted His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 2009.

Despite these impressive credentials, Germer's narrative voice is warm, gentle, and down-to-earth. His years of meditation practice have clearly paid off in the writing of this book: every word is infused with wisdom and compassion. An invaluable guide to anyone wanting to learn how to transform their relationship with difficult emotions, this important book will undoubtedly change the lives of many who read it.

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