

Abstract

Compassion for the self and for others, despite being widely conceptualized as parallel processes with a slight difference of directing to oneself or to others, were found to be weakly or non-significantly correlated. One study suggested the low generalizability of self-compassion to compassion for others. Equanimity, a stable and balanced state of mind towards all experiences irrespective of their hedonic tone (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), conceptually possesses the potential to reduce self-other distinction. This study compared the effects of direct cultivations of equanimity and self-compassion, and explored the moderating effect of equanimity on compassion for the self and for others. Two hundreds and thirty-eight adults participated in an online experiment with four conditions, watched didactic animated videos about on equanimity, self-compassion, equanimity and self-compassion, and rock (control), and engaged in the corresponding guided contemplative practice. Questionnaires on equanimity, self-compassion, and compassion for others were completed before and after the experiment, and at one-week follow-up. Results of repeated measures ANOVAs showed significant increase in compassion to others in all experimental conditions, while the combined cultivation yielded the largest effect size (moderate-large). The cultivation of equanimity and self-compassion, whether separately or together, increased compassion to others, and promoted distress tolerance while relating to others' suffering. Although no significant moderating effects of equanimity was found on the relationship of compassion for the self and for others, the interaction of equanimity and self-compassion produced the greatest effect on compassion to others, enhanced the understanding of universality of suffering, and sustained effects on the general prosociality.

Keywords: Equanimity, Compassion, Self-compassion, Even-mindedness, Self-other distinction