From Glass Half Empty
to Glass Half Full:

How Self-Compassion Changed My
Outlook and the Way I Relate to Objects

Susan C.  July 20, 2019
Negative Emotions

• When trying to let go of things, negative emotions would get in my way.

• Trying to push through them was arduous and draining.

• I wanted to address my negative emotions to see if that would enable me to discard things with less resistance.
Instead of working from the outside in (focusing on the clutter)

I started working from the inside out (focusing on underlying emotional issues)
Perfectionism & People Pleasing

• From childhood, felt I had to do things perfectly and please people or else I wouldn’t be loved

• Carried those demands on myself into adulthood

• Over the years, developed more and more “rules” I had to follow

• Became enslaved to these “rules” and rigid thinking
Low Self-Worth

- Felt other people, the environment, and even inanimate objects were more deserving of care than I was
- Worried about pleasing other people, saving the environment, and saving things... while I was killing myself in the process
- “I’m not enough”
REVIEW  Past Trauma – Don’t Relive

• Think of it like watching it on a screen

• Third-person narrative, not first person!

• Reviewing helps you realize how an event shaped and influenced you and how it’s affecting your life now

• Review it, understand it, learn from it, and move on
Living in a Fearful State

• Anxious people live in a fearful state, surrounding themselves with items to prevent vague future emergencies.

• Happy people maintain perspective and live in the now.

• When I hoard -- I’m betting on things going wrong.

• Imagine a life where calamities aren’t waiting around every corner....
OPTIMISM vs. FEAR

• Speeding ticket arrived in the mail

• **My mother:**
  “Oh, well. Guess I’ll have to earn that money back playing mah jong!”

• **Me:**
  “We should’ve taken the train. That would’ve been cheaper than this speeding ticket, and we would’ve saved on gas money.” *(shoulda woulda coulda)*
Fight or Flight Response

• Triggered when our brain senses danger

• Survival mechanism that evolved so we could react quickly to life-threatening situations

• Increased adrenaline, our pulse and blood pressure go up, our breath becomes more rapid and shallow...

• **Thinking part of our brain shuts down**

• Feel like we have one option and one option only: RUN AWAY FROM THE TIGER!
“Our brain is like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones. We tend to take the positive for granted, while focusing on the negative as if our life depended on it.”

-- Rick Hanson
Emotional Attacks

• Fight or Flight is activated just as readily by emotional attacks.

• Our brains respond to negative emotions in the same way.

• Our perspective narrows and we don’t see other possibilities.

• Negative emotions prevent us from making wise decisions.
Negative Emotions Narrow Our Thinking

• We ZOOM IN on what’s wrong, and that’s all we can think about.

• We’re not open to new emotions, thoughts, or ideas.

• Our minds tend to focus on the negative rather than the positive.
Negativity Bias

• In the natural environment, negative information usually signals a threat.

• Negative information triggers our Fight or Flight response.

• Positive information isn’t as crucial to immediate survival as it is to long-term survival.
“WHAT IFs”

If I focus on the worst possible outcome...

then I feel like I’m IN the worst possible outcome
Self-Criticism

- An emotional attack from ourselves
- Also triggers Fight or Flight response
- Self-criticism makes us feel worse about ourselves. It can make us depressed. We’re not motivated to keep trying, and we stay STUCK.
Focused Deep Breathing

• When we’re in Fight or Flight, our breath becomes more rapid and shallow.

• Deep breathing can counteract the Fight or Flight response.

• When I encounter a red traffic light, that’s a prompt for me to take some deep breaths 😊
Self-Compassion

• Makes us feel safe, centered, and connected

• Widens our outlook (ZOOM OUT)

• When we pull back and widen our outlook, we can become aware of all those things we had shut out from view.

-- Kristin Neff
Self-Kindness

• Not about making excuses or letting ourselves off the hook

• It’s about acknowledging things we struggle with and encouraging ourselves through it.

• Treating ourselves like we treat a good friend

• Allows us to feel safe... so that we’re no longer operating from a place of fear.
Self-Acceptance

• Accepting the good AND not-so-good parts of myself

• Changes my perspective from

  “I don’t like who I am”

  to

  “I’m going to be my best friend while I create change.”
Seeing Yourself As You Are

- List five culturally valued traits for which you’re **above average**
- List five culturally valued traits for which you’re **just average**
- List five culturally valued traits for which you’re **below average**
Self-Criticism

• Be **aware** of what we say to ourselves.

• When are we self-critical?

• What words do we use?

• Do key phrases come up over and over?

• Do those phrases remind us of anyone in our past who was critical of us?
A Kinder Response

EXAMPLES:

• “I’m allowed to make mistakes and learn from them.”

• “I’m a good and caring person.”

• “I respect myself.”

• “I’m capable of achieving success.”

• “I deserve to be happy.”
We’re Human! We Make Mistakes!

- “I did the best I could with the information and awareness I had at the time.”

- “What can I learn from this?”
Appreciating Yourself

• List 10 things about yourself that you like or appreciate

• You may feel embarrassment, fear of vanity, unfamiliarity, etc.

• You’re not claiming you’re better than anyone else. Everyone has good features 😊
Our Minds Listen to the Language We Use

• We like what’s familiar... even if it’s bad for us.

• Your mind lets in what you tell it – whether it’s right or wrong, true or false, good or bad. So tell your mind **good things**!

• The mind likes repetition. Praise yourself every day.

-- Marisa Peer
Common Humanity

• When we’re feeling shame, the camera is zoomed in tight and all we see is our flawed selves – alone and struggling. Instead of focusing on what we have in common with others – we feel abnormal, isolated, and disconnected.

• But when we ZOOM OUT, we see many people in the same struggle. Feelings of inadequacy and disappointment are shared by all.
Mindfulness

• Paying attention to the **present moment** without judgment

• What’s the big deal about being in the present moment??

• Latching on to negative events in the **past** leads to depression.

• Latching on to potentially negative events in the **future** leads to anxiety.
Mindfulness = Meta-Awareness

“\text{I’m aware} \text{ I’m feeling hyper-responsible.}”
(I can \text{reflect} on my reaction and \text{question} it)

\text{vs.}

Being lost in my sense of hyper-responsibility
(I’m just \text{reacting})
Mindfulness

• Being aware of my feelings without being hijacked by them

• Allows me to see the situation with more objectivity and clarity

• Broadens my perspective

• Enables me to make wiser choices
WHEN – THEN Thinking

• “When I’m financially secure – then I’ll be able to let go of stuff.”

• “When I get my clutter cleared out – then I’ll be happy.”

• When-Then thinking demands that conditions be perfect.

• Life will never be perfect.
Confirmation Bias

• The tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms our beliefs.

• Think of your brain as having a filter.

• Your filter lets in information that supports what you believe... and blocks out other information.
Notice the Good

• Because of our negativity bias, we have to work **harder** to see the upside of things. It takes **effort**.

• When something good happens, or you feel a positive emotion, take a moment to **savor it**.

• Don’t let good things or positive emotions slip by unnoticed!

• **Record those positive feelings** in your mind like a favorite song! Write about them in your journal.
Practice GRATITUDE

• Affects your brain at the biological level

• Just trying to think of things you’re grateful for forces you to focus on the positive aspects of your life.

• Remember simple things that are easily taken for granted, like “I’m grateful I can read.”

• When I encounter a green traffic light, that’s a prompt for me to think “I’m so lucky ____________!” 😊
Saving Things Instead of Using Them

• Don’t want to “ruin” my nice things

• Want to keep my nice things “perfect”

• These are decisions based on fear.

• Worried about something bad happening to my nice things

• WHAT IF ....
Stepping Back and Being Mindful

• “I’m aware I’m worried something bad might happen to my nice things.”

Then I can reflect and question:

• “Why did I get these things in the first place?”

• “Am I enjoying these things when they sit in the closet?”
Reid Wilson

• Presentation on managing anxiety using self-talk to apply a new response.
Barb Frederickson

If we can pull up a positive emotion on the heels of a negative emotion... that will dismantle a mental and physical preparation to run.
Les Greenberg

Transform your fear reaction. Let yourself become afraid, then call up a competing emotion. Not by thinking or reasoning. Not by allowing, letting go of, or facing the feeling. Not by exposure or extinction or habituation. But by activating a competing emotion that expresses a competing point of view.
Fear of Contamination Example

• He lets himself become afraid by touching a dirty surface.

• Instead of engaging in his compulsion to wash his hands – he says, “I want this. I want to do this even though it feels risky. I want to get stronger.”
Hebb’s Law

• Neurons that fire together, wire together.

• The more our brains do a certain task... the stronger that neural network becomes... the more ingrained that association becomes.
Positive Emotion vs. Negative Emotion

• Instead of “forcing myself” to discard something while feeling a negative emotion, I activate a competing positive emotion for why I’m letting go.

• **Positive** emotions **broaden** our thinking; we make wiser decisions.

• Instead of going **against** my negative emotion, I’m going **with** my positive emotion.
Clutter Blindness

• The inability to see and recognize the accumulation of clutter and its impact

• If we get used to being in the clutter, we don’t see it anymore.

• Taking a photograph of the space is a way to see through different eyes because it’s an objective perspective.

• Like going from first-person narrative to third person
“Ragged Blindness”

• I don’t see how worn out something is because all I’m focused on is the remaining utility.

• Putting the worn item next to a new one gives me an objective perspective.

• WOAH. I knew it was worn... but I didn’t realize it was that worn!
Examples of Positive Competing Emotions

• “I respect and value myself. I deserve to use nice things.”

• “I already do a lot to minimize waste. I care about the environment and I care about myself. It feels good to take care of myself.”

• “I’m letting this go because I love myself. When I love myself first, then I have love to give.”

• “I love myself and clear space more than the money I would save buying that item on sale.”
Which lead to wiser decision making?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Emotions 😊</th>
<th>Negative Emotions 😞</th>
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<tr>
<td>Safe, centered, and connected</td>
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<td>Narrow perspective</td>
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<td>See more possibilities</td>
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Practice **self-compassion** and use **positive emotions** to let go of clutter and minimize acquisitions.
Resources

• If you have access to the internet and a public library, these are no-cost resources!

• 8 Strategies for Overcoming Shame
  https://bit.ly/2xpu2Eo

• *The Gifts of Imperfection*: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are by Brené Brown
Resources

- **Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind** by Kristin Neff

- **Dying to Be Me** by Anita Moorjani

- **Change Your Breath, Change Your World**

- **How to Tell if You’re Learning from Your Past – or Just Reliving It**
Resources

• Marisa Peer: Your Mind Should Be Your Best Friend
  https://bit.ly/2RKSnOx

• Self Esteem Mini-Course by Marisa Peer
  https://bit.ly/2DP8ns1

• Logic vs Emotion: How to Win the Battle and Make Better Decisions Every Day
Resources

- **Happiness Podcast**
  [http://www.happinesspodcast.org](http://www.happinesspodcast.org)

- **Relationship with Guilt**

- **Slides from my 2016 IOCDF Presentation: Coming Out of the Hoarding Closet**

- **My YouTube Channel: I Can Let Go**