You can’t hate yourself thin

Food addiction and self-compassion

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Introduction: Self-compassion
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“Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?”
(Neff, 2003)
Introduction: Self-compassion

3 dimensions of self-compassion:

- Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment
- Common humanity vs. Isolation
- Mindfulness vs. Over-identification
Introduction: Obesity

Obesity rates – OECD

By country, 2015 or most recent year available

- OECD - Total: 19.0
- New Zealand: 30.7

Source: OECD

Adapted from: Obesity. Archive.stats.govt.nz
Introduction: Obesity and food addiction

- Obesity in NZ now leading health risk (Sharpe & Bradbury, 2015)

- Behavioural, neurobiological, and genetic similarities between consumption of certain foods and addiction related disorders

- Potential to facilitate overeating and weight gain in susceptible individuals (Volkow, 2005)
Introduction: Obesity and food addiction

“Therefore, it is likely that aspects of addiction based treatment models would be useful in the treatment of people with obesity.”

(Volkow, 2005)
Introduction: Kia Ākina

“Be supported and encouraged”

- Obesity recovery network
  - Based on addiction treatment principles

- Randomised controlled trial (Sellman et al., 2017):
  - Green Prescription vs. Green Prescription + Kia Ākina
    - Results: overall more weight loss and less weight gain in experimental group
    - Further research and development of Kia Ākina needed to improve weight loss outcomes
‘You can’t hate yourself thin’ study
An exploratory, mixed methods study

Qualitative exploration:
1. How do people with obesity experience their journey of recovery?
2. What, if anything, does Kia Ākina add to this journey?
3. Do perceptions of self-compassion change during participation in Kia Ākina, and if so, how?

Quantitative analysis:
4. Do levels of self-compassion change throughout the recovery process?
5. Is there an association between changing levels of self-compassion and weight loss during the recovery process?
Quantitative analysis & results

Surveys baseline and 6 months:
- Self-compassion, Involvement with Kia Akina, Weight

Quantitative analysis:
- T-Test: Δ Weight, Δ Self-compassion
- Correlation: Δ Weight, Δ Self-compassion, ∑ Involvement

Quantitative results:
- Δ Self-compassion: \( t=2.616 \), sig. (2-tailed) .017
Findings: Key research questions

1. How do people with obesity experience their journey of recovery?

2. What, if anything, does Kia Ākina add to this journey?

3. Do perceptions of self-compassion change during participation in Kia Ākina, and if so, how?
1. How do people with obesity experience their journey of recovery?

- Motivations for weight loss
- Barriers and enablers to weight loss
Motivations for weight loss
Motivations for weight loss

‘I want to be around for my daughter's children. I want to be a grandma. So obviously I want to be healthy.’

I don't see it as quite the health issue that needs recovering from. Okay, I'm overweight, but my blood pressure is fine, my cholesterol is fine, you know, all those other indicators are okay.’
2. What, if anything, does Kia Ākina add to this journey?

- Barriers to engagement with Kia Ākina
- Contested terminology and concepts
- Benefits of Kia Ākina
Contested terminology and concepts: obesity

- Normalisation of overweight
- Not me
- Shame and social pressure

I've had friends who have been to the doctor, and they look like healthy people, and they get told they're obese. And you just look at them and laugh, and they're like 'Oh yeah, whatever.'
Contested terminology and concepts: obesity

- Normalisation of overweight
- Not me
- Shame and social pressure

‘I hate that word. Because I don't think that I'm obese. I'm a big girl. But I don't class myself as being obese. Obese people can barely walk …’
Contested terminology and concepts: obesity

- Normalisation of overweight
- Not me
- Shame and social pressure

‘Because nobody wants to be socially excluded. And obesity is a thing that people look at and judge instantly. ... Obesity is worse than just putting on weight, it's putting on lots of weight. So therefore someone must have just sat on the sofa, and eaten chips for weeks and weeks and weeks. That's what obesity sounds like.’
3. Do perceptions of self-compassion change and if so, how?

- Understanding self-compassion
- Changes in perceptions of self-compassion
- Self-compassion and obesity recovery
Understanding self-compassion

3 Categories:

1. Self-acceptance
   “Being kind to yourself. And giving yourself a bit of a break. Not being so hard on yourself.”

2. Reward
   “A quiet bath with no children.”

3. Assertiveness
   “It's okay to say no. And not be angry with yourself for it.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-acceptance</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
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Understanding self-compassion, continued

<table>
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<th>Participants' understanding</th>
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<td>Self-acceptance</td>
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<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Key points

Quantitative results:

- Significant increase in self-compassion

Examples of qualitative findings:

- **Recovery experience:**
  - Varying motivation for weight loss

- **Kia Ākina:**
  - Contested terminology and concepts

- **Self-compassion:**
  - Difference in understanding of concept
Reference list


Thank you.