How are Students Handling College Life? A Self-Compassion Intervention on Academic Motivation and Stress

Aleah Goold

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HOW ARE STUDENTS HANDLING COLLEGE LIFE?
A SELF-COMPASSION INTERVENTION ON ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND STRESS

by

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Abstract
Self-compassion traits can be beneficial when coping with stressful or painful situations. However, previous research on the subject has not examined how it can specifically benefit students in an academic setting. This study investigated the effects of a self-compassion writing intervention (Neff & Germer, 2018) on academic motivation and academic stress. Recruiting students enrolled in a Midsouth university, this study asked participants to answer questions on a survey relating to their current self-compassion, perceived academic stress, academic motivation, and satisfaction with life. They were then asked to reflect on a stressful academic experience and were randomly assigned into either (1) an attention control writing group or (2) a self-compassion writing group. Participants responded to these prompts while thinking about the stressful academic experience. After they completed the prompts, they were asked to answer the same questions as they had before the writing portion. The current study did not detect any changes in self-compassion, perceived academic stress, or academic motivation. However, future research on how self-compassion can improve the academic life of students is still needed.
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1
   - Self-Compassion 1
   - Interventions on Self-Compassion 1
   - Short-Term Intervention Options 3
   - Correlations between Self-Compassion and Other Variables 4
   - The Current Study 4
   - Hypotheses 5

2. Methods 5

3. Results 9

4. Discussion 11

5. References 15

6. Appendices 19
Introduction

Self-Compassion

The concept of self-compassion originates from Buddhist ideologies and was initially operationalized for research by Kristen Neff (2003a). Neff defines self-compassion as “acknowledging [one’s] suffering, failure, and inadequacies [as] part of the human condition, and that all people … are worthy of compassion” (Neff, 2003b, p. 224). Self-compassion is further defined by three positive and three negative facets: (1) self-kindness (vs. self-judgment) refers to applying understanding and caring attitudes towards one’s own painful experiences, (2) common humanity (vs. isolation), refers to recognizing that when one makes a mistake, this suffering is (a) shared by everyone and (b) it is natural to make mistakes, and (3) mindfulness (vs. over-identification), refers to viewing one’s current upsetting situation and painful emotions in a more observational and neutral way (Neff, 2011).

Because those with higher self-compassion view their own negative life experiences as opportunities to observe and grow, self-compassion correlates negatively with stress (Allen & Leary, 2010; Neff et al., 2007; Neff & Germer, 2013). Research on self-compassion first conceptualized it as a fixed trait (Neff, 2003a), but recent studies have examined self-compassion as a state mindset as well, specifically one that can be taught (Dreisoerner et al., 2020; Mosewich et al., 2013; Neff et al., 2021).

Interventions on Self-Compassion

Several studies have aimed to intervene on state self-compassion. These studies asked participants to practice self-compassion through responding to self-compassion mindset induction (SCMI) writing prompts over the course of a few weeks (Dreisoerner et al., 2020; Mosewich et al., 2013). Writing prompts designed by Leary and colleagues (2007) consisted of
(1) a self-kindness prompt: “write a paragraph expressing understanding, kindness, and concern to yourself” (2) a common humanity prompt: “list ways in which other people experience similar events” and (3) a mindfulness prompt: “describe the event in an objective and unemotional manner”.

Mosewich and colleagues (2013) examined the efficacy of a psychoeducational self-compassion intervention with female athletes. The researchers randomly assigned and separated participants into two instructional sessions – an attention control group and a self-compassion group. Participants in the attention control group received a presentation on the benefits of writing. In the self-compassion group, participants attended a presentation on stress, coping strategies, and an overview on self-compassion based on empirical research. The researchers also explained how self-compassion can be beneficial in the participants’ respective sports and how they can cope with challenges that may arise by using different self-compassionate practices.

Over the course of the seven-day intervention period, Mosewich and colleagues (2013) assigned general writing prompts to participants in the attention control group. Participants in the self-compassion group engaged in self-compassion writing exercises while, “think(ing) about a negative event in sport that occurred over the past week that was personally demanding” (Mosewich et al., 2013, p. 518).

Mosewich and colleagues (2013) found that, compared to the attention control group, participants in the self-compassion intervention group reported higher levels of self-compassion along with lower levels of rumination, self-criticism, and general concern about mistakes made in the previous week.

In 2018, Neff and Germer created a new set of SCMI writing prompts, along with a control set of prompts, and conducted various studies of an eight-week program where
participants were educated on how to develop a more self-compassionate mindset. These writing prompts asked participants to respond to how they can practice more self-kindness, common humanity, or mindfulness when examining a personally negative experience.

In 2020, Dreisoerner and colleagues used Neff and Germer’s (2018) writing prompts to (a) examine the three components of self-compassion in a psychoeducational study, aiming to determine if the practice of one of the three components is more beneficial than the others, as well as (b) to examine the efficacy of the intervention designed by Neff & Germer (2018). Utilizing data from before, during, and after the study concluded, Dreisoerner and colleagues monitored for changes in self-compassion, along with other variables examining life satisfaction (2020). The researchers found that the common humanity and mindfulness groups experienced significant increases in self-compassion, and they noted that using all three writing prompts within one group might provide more significant changes in self-compassion overall (Dreisoerner et al., 2020). In their limitations, they discussed incorporating other methods to create and monitor changes in self-compassion, including a longer intervention period where participants can receive more frequent self-compassion writing tasks.

**Short-Term Intervention Options**

However, interventions that span across weeks – and sometimes months – are not always a viable option. Neff and colleagues (2021) examined the efficacy of the same self-compassion writing prompts (Neff & Germer, 2018) utilizing an intervention study that had participants only respond to the prompts once without previous or further education on self-compassion. The participants were randomly selected to either respond to the self-compassion prompts or to a neutral writing condition that paralleled the self-compassion prompts with objection observations of a stressful or upsetting situation. Researchers found that, even with a
single interaction with a self-compassionate mindset, participants indicated a significant increase in self-compassion in the short-term.

**Correlations between Self-Compassion and Other Variables**

Education on self-compassion can be beneficial to the way people experience their lives. Many researchers have supported the idea that self-compassion increases intrinsic motivation (Breines, & Chen, 2012; Cox et al., 2019; Dearing et al., 2005; Hope et al., 2014; Neely et al., 2009). In high school and higher education alike, motivation is important in maintaining good grades and excellent academic performance (Ayub, 2010; Moore, 2007; Neff et al., 2005; Struthers et al., 2000; Tus, 2020). Academic motivation describes the drive to do well coming from either (a) one’s inner mental and emotional desires, such as wanting to learn more about a subject (intrinsic motivation), and/or (b) rewards from outside of oneself, such as grades (extrinsic motivation) (Deci, 1972). Much research on motivation indicates that intrinsic motivation has a positive effect on academic performance while extrinsic motivation has a neutral or even negative effect on academic performance (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guay et al., 2010; Lepper et al., 2005; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). The pressure to perform well in school over time can diminish intrinsic motivation (Neff et al., 2005; Struthers et al., 2000) and, in turn, decrease academic performance. This phenomenon has encouraged researchers and psychologists to create interventions that decrease academic stress and increase intrinsic academic motivation.

**The Current Study**

The current study aims to implement a self-compassion intervention to college students based on the previous studies by incorporating the writing prompts from Neff and colleagues (2021). While the previous studies focused on the general efficacy of the psychoeducational self-
compassion written intervention (Dreisoerner et al., 2020) and its efficacy with a specific athlete population (Mosewich et al., 2013), the purpose of this study is (a) to examine the efficacy of these psychoeducational tools within a sample of college students regarding their feelings about performance in school, as well as (b) to determine if this self-compassion intervention is correlated with academic stress and academic motivation among college students.

**Hypotheses**

Based on the prior research, the current hypotheses are 1) the self-compassion intervention group will have a greater increase in self-compassion compared to the control group, 2) the self-compassion intervention group will have a greater decrease in perceived academic stress compared to the control group, and 3) the self-compassion intervention group will have a greater increase of academic intrinsic motivation compared to the control group.

**Methods**

**Participants**

A total of 34 participants attending a Mid-South university were recruited for this study. Due to incomplete data, four participants were excluded from the analyses. The remaining 30 participants consisted of approximately 46.7% female, 43.3% male, and 10% as “Other” or preferred not to respond. Approximately 36.7% of participants identified as White, 36.7% Black, 1% Hispanic/Latinx, and 26.5% identified as either “Multiracial” or “Other.” A total of 33.3% identified as freshmen, 30% sophomores, 23.3% juniors, and 13.3% seniors.

**Measures**

**Self-compassion**

The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003a; See Appendix A.) is a 26-item scale used to measure the level of compassion by which people treat themselves during times of
distress. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The statements are categorized into three positive components (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and three negative components (self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification) (e.g., “I try to be loving towards myself when I’m feeling emotional pain.”). To create the composite self-compassion score, negative subscales are reverse-coded and averaged with the positive subscales (Leary et al., 2007; see Appendix A for the full scale). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-compassion. This measure has excellent internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.92$, in the current sample.

*Perception of Academic Stress*

The Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS; Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015; See Appendix B) is an 18-item scale used to measure academic stressors and the reactions to those stressors. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (e.g., “Teachers have unrealistic expectations of me”). The PASS is divided into three subscales: academic expectations (four items), workload and examinations (eight items), and students’ academic self-perceptions (six items), with items 1-5 reverse coded. To create a composite perception of academic stress score, the scores on all items are averaged, with higher scores indicating higher perceived academic stress. This measure has good internal consistency, $\alpha = .85$, in the current sample.

*Academic Motivation*

The Academic Motivation Scale College Version (AMS-C 28; Vallerand et al., 1992; See Appendix C) is a 28-item scale used to measure levels of academic motivation in college students. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (does not correspond at all) to 7 (corresponds exactly). It is divided into three subscales: intrinsic motivation (e.g., “I go to school
to know, to accomplish things, and to experience stimulation”), extrinsic motivation (e.g., “I go
to school in order to have a better salary later on”), and amotivation (e.g., “I can’t see why I go to
school and frankly, I couldn’t care less”). Each subscale receives separate composite scores, with
higher scores indicating higher intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation,
respectively. For this study, we utilized the intrinsic motivation subscale as a dependent variable,
with scores ranging from 12-84. This subscale has a good internal consistency, $\alpha = .89$, in the
current sample.

**Satisfaction with Life**

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985; See Appendix D.) is a 5-
item scale used to measure the perception of satisfaction of one’s life. Items are rated on a 7-
point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (e.g., “In most ways my life is
close to my ideal”). To create a composite satisfaction with life score, all item scores are added
together, with scores of 5-9 (*Extremely dissatisfied*), 10-14 (*Dissatisfied*), 15-19 (*Slightly
dissatisfied*), 20 (Neutral), 21-25 (*Slightly satisfied*), 26-30 (*Satisfied*), and 30-35 (*Extremely
satisfied*). This measure has good internal consistency, $\alpha = .84$, in the current sample.

**Procedure**

**Pre-Intervention**

After receiving approval from the Institutional Research Board, participants were invited
to participate in this current research project through the Psychology Department’s subject pool,
SONA. They were asked to meet in a designated research lab on campus and consider providing
consent before completing the pre-intervention survey containing demographic questions, as well
as the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), the Perceived Academic Stress Scale (PASS), the
Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C 28), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Those who participated in the study received one SONA credit.

**Intervention**

Once participants completed the initial survey, they were instructed to reflect on a stressful academic experience that has occurred during their time in college. After their reflection, the participants were asked to respond to several writing prompts, with valid responses requiring at least 200 characters of text, according to the original study (Neff et al., 2021). Participants were instructed to keep this situation in mind as they respond to the writing prompts. Through a random assignment setting in Qualtrics, the participants were randomly assigned to either 1) the control group or 2) the intervention group.

**Self-Compassion Group (See Appendix F).**

The self-compassion group participants responded to three directive prompts encouraging them to practice self-compassion towards the stressful academic situation as they wrote their responses. They answered prompts based on each one of the main components of self-compassion: a) self-kindness, b) common humanity, and c) mindfulness. These prompts by Neff et al. (2021; See Appendix E) were modified to fit this stressful academic scenario.

After the last prompt in this condition, they were given a short debriefing statement:

Please take some time to read what you wrote to yourself and see how it feels to hear these words of kindness and concern directed towards you. Notice if anything is particularly comforting or helpful. Take a few slow, deep breaths as you read your own words. Let yourself receive this support.
Control Group (See Appendix H).

Control group participants received three neutral writing prompts asking them to write a) a detailed description of the stressful academic situation, b) who was involved in the situation, and c) what words were spoken during the situation. The control condition prompts adapted from Neff et al. (2021; See Appendix G) were modified to fit this stressful academic scenario. After the last prompt in this condition, they were given a short debriefing statement: “Please take some time to read what you wrote. See if anything particularly stands out to you”.

Post-Intervention
Once participants finished their respective writing prompts, they completed the post-intervention survey, which consisted of the SCS, PAS, and AMS, and included questions regarding whether they had heard of self-compassion and what they knew about the term. At the end of the study, participants were given the opportunity to enter their school email into a drawing to be one of four people to win a $25 virtual Amazon gift card. At the conclusion of data collection, four participants were randomly selected for the drawing. These four participants were notified by email and received their respective virtual gift cards.

Results
First, we created a change score by subtracting the pre-score from the post-score for each outcome. We used this change score as our primary dependent variable (e.g., Self-compassion post-score minus self-compassion pre-score). We explored whether there was an effect of condition (self-compassion vs. control) on each outcome (self-compassion, perceived academic stress, and academic intrinsic motivation) using a multivariate ANOVA. Specific means of each score can be seen in Table 1.
Hypothesis 1: Self-Compassion

For our first hypothesis, we found that participants in the self-compassion condition ($M = .001, SD = .22$) did not report improved self-compassion from pre to post intervention compared to participants in the control condition ($M = -.10, SD = .37$), $F(1,28) = .76, p = .40$; 95% CI [-.33, .14], partial $\eta^2 = .03$.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived Academic Stress

We also found that participants in the self-compassion condition ($M = -.02, SD = .21$) did not report a significant decrease in perceived academic stress compared to participants in the control condition ($M = -.004, SD = .20$), $F(1,28) = .04, p = .85$, 95% CI [-.14, .17], partial $\eta^2 = .001$.

Hypothesis 3: Academic Intrinsic Motivation

Lastly, we found that participants in the self-compassion condition ($M = .12, SD = .58$) did not report improved academic intrinsic motivation compared to those in the control condition ($M = -.09, SD = .61$), $F(1,28) = .04, p = .03$, 95% CI [-.50, .41], partial $\eta^2 = .001$. 
Table 1

Mean Scores of Dependent Variables Between Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Writing Condition</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Change Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Compassion</strong></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Compassion</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived Academic Stress</strong></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Compassion</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Intrinsic Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Compassion</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Mean scores for self-compassion, perceived academic stress, and academic intrinsic motivation by group.

**General Discussion**

This study aimed to determine the efficacy of a single-instance self-compassion writing intervention and to explore the relationship of self-compassion with academic motivation and perceived academic stress. We first hypothesized that participants who responded to the self-compassion writing prompts would show a greater increase in state self-compassion than those who responded to the control condition prompts. Neither condition demonstrated a significant increase in state self-compassion, but instead, scores remained largely the same. This insignificant change in self-compassion opposes Neff and colleagues’ (2021) findings from their most recent study examining the single-instance use of self-compassion writing prompts.

For our second hypothesis, we expected that those in the self-compassion writing condition would experience a greater decrease in perceived academic stress than those in the
control writing condition. However, neither condition indicated a significant change after the intervention. For our last hypothesis, we expected that participants that responded to the self-compassion writing prompts would demonstrate a greater increase in academic intrinsic motivation. We found that there was no significant change in academic intrinsic motivation for either group.

We were unable to support any of our hypotheses, as we found that self-compassion, perceived academic stress, and academic intrinsic motivation were largely unaffected by either set of writing prompts (Neff & Germer, 2018). However, examining self-compassion in the world of education can provide researchers with important insights.

**Limitations**

There were multiple factors that could have impacted our results. First, we had a small sample size in our study. We lacked power to detect differences between groups. Our a priori analysis indicated that, for a typical effect size, $r = .20$, to detect a significant finding at $p = .05$ and power of .80, a minimum of 50 participants per condition were needed. With only 15 participants in each condition, our results do not represent a large enough portion of the student population to suggest a powerful relationship for any of our variables.

Our study also had participants take the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), Perceived Academic Stress Scale (PASS), and Academic Motivation Scale – College Version (AMS-C 28) before reflecting on a stressful academic experience. In the study by Neff and colleagues (2021), they prompted the reflection on the difficult experience before responding to the pre-intervention survey. Because we measured these variables before prompting them about a stressful situation,
results from the pre-test may not have been as accurate when studying their feelings about the stressful situation.

This study was also conducted in a single setting. Participants completed their pre-intervention measures, responded to the randomly assigned writing prompts, and completed the post-intervention measures within the same timeframe. With multiple lengthy measures repeated during the study, participants may have experienced survey fatigue. This could lead to inaccurate responses on the various measures.

**Future Directions/Implications**

Due to various limitations on the study, the results did not align with our hypotheses. Future studies utilizing this intervention design would benefit from a larger population of students, a reorganization of the reflection prompt, and an implementation of multiple follow-up data collection points.

Based on research examining motivation and academic performance (Ayub, 2010; Moore, 2007; Neff et al., 2005; Struthers et al., 2000; Tus, 2020), it would be beneficial to examine how students’ grades may be impacted by this self-compassion intervention. This could demonstrate additional ways instructors can help students improve their grades and overall performance in school.

Previous self-compassion intervention studies examined effects on rumination, affect, and self-criticism (Leary et al., 2007; Mosewich et al., 2013; Neff & Germer, 2013). Utilizing the current study’s intervention, future studies could examine these variables and attempt to replicate the results from the previous studies. Knowing self-compassion’s impact on the variables has the potential to improve student lives.
To make this study more equitable, participants in the control condition could be given the option to reflect on the self-compassion writing prompts at the conclusion of the study (Mosewich et al., 2013). This would provide all participants with additional coping tools to improve their mental health.

It would also be beneficial to collect multiple follow-up data to understand how a single intervention on self-compassion can impact students’ lives. For example, researchers could educate first-year students on self-compassion and utilize these self-compassion writing prompts, then examine long-term changes in academic motivation, academic stress, and even academic performance. Providing these tools to students has the potential to greatly improve student life by engaging them more in the learning process and offering more ways to cope with overall stress.
References


Appendix A

**Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)**

**HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almost never (1)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Almost always (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

_____ 1. I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.

_____ 2. When I’m feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong.

_____ 3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.

_____ 4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.

_____ 5. I try to be loving towards myself when I’m feeling emotional pain.

_____ 6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.

_____ 7. When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.

_____ 8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.

_____ 9. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.

_____ 10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.

_____ 11. I’m intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
12. When I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.

13. When I’m feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.

14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.

15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.

16. When I see aspects of myself that I don’t like, I get down on myself.

17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.

18. When I’m really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.

19. I’m kind to myself when I’m experiencing suffering.

20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.

21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I’m experiencing suffering.

22. When I’m feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.

23. I’m tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.

24. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.

25. When I fail at something that’s important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.

26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don’t like.
Appendix B

Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS)

Please rate your perception about the following statements in contributing to academic stresses

1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree

1. I am confident that I will be a successful student
2. I am confident that I will be a successful in my future career
3. I can make academic decisions easily
4. The time allocated to classes and academic work is enough
5. I have enough time to relax after work
6. My teachers are critical of my academic performance
7. I fear failing courses this year
8. I think that my worry about examinations is weakness of character
9. Teachers have unrealistic expectations of me
10. The size of the curriculum (workload) is excessive
11. I believe that the amount of work assignment is too much
12. I am unable to catch up if getting behind the work
13. The unrealistic expectations of my parents stress me out
14. Competition with my peers for grades is quite intense
15. The examination questions are usually difficult
16. Examination time is short to complete the answers
17. Examination times are very stressful to me
18. Even if I pass my exams, am worried about getting a job
### ACADEMIC MOTIVATION SCALE (AMS-C 28)

#### COLLEGE VERSION


*Educational and Psychological Measurement, vols. 52 and 53*

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#### WHY DO YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

*Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to college.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does not correspond at all</th>
<th>Corresponds a little</th>
<th>Corresponds moderately</th>
<th>Corresponds a lot</th>
<th>Corresponds exactly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

#### WHY DO YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

1. Because with only a high-school degree I would not find a high-paying job later on. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Because I think that a college education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Honestly, I don't know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my college degree. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. For the pleasure that I experience when I read interesting authors. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. I once had good reasons for going to college; however, now I wonder whether I should continue. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. Because of the fact that when I succeed in college I feel important. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. Because I want to have "the good life" later on. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. For the pleasure that I experience when I feel completely absorbed by what certain authors have written. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. I can't see why I go to college and frankly, I couldn't care less. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. To show myself that I am an intelligent person. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. In order to have a better salary later on. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. Because I believe that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. For the "high" feeling that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I don't know; I can't understand what I am doing in school. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. Because college allows me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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**KEY FOR AMS-28**

# 2, 9, 16, 23  Intrinsic motivation - to know
# 6, 13, 20, 27  Intrinsic motivation - toward accomplishment
# 4, 11, 18, 25  Intrinsic motivation - to experience stimulation
# 3, 10, 17, 24  Extrinsic motivation - identified
# 7, 14, 21, 28  Extrinsic motivation - introjected
# 1, 8, 15, 22  Extrinsic motivation - external regulation
# 5, 12, 19, 26  Amotivation
Appendix D

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

Scale:
Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

___ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
___ The conditions of my life are excellent.
___ I am satisfied with my life.
___ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
___ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Scoring:
Though scoring should be kept continuous (sum up scores on each item), here are some cut-offs to be used as benchmarks.

- 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied
- 26 - 30 Satisfied
- 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied
- 20 Neutral
- 15 - 19 Slightly dissatisfied
- 10 - 14 Dissatisfied
- 5 - 9 Extremely dissatisfied
Neff et al. 2021 Self-Compassionate Mindstate Induction

[Bolded text in brackets is information for researchers only. Note that the examples of self-compassionate writing given below should be changed so that they are appropriate for the cultural context of participants and the purposes of the study.]

Please think about a particular situation you are experiencing right now that is painful or difficult. It could be some struggle in your life, or perhaps you are feeling inadequate in some way. Please don’t think of a situation in which you are upset with someone else, but instead think of a situation where you are feeling badly about yourself or else you are going through a hard time. Decide on a single situation that you will focus on throughout this study.

[State measures inserted here, answered in reference to the painful or difficult situation.]

We would now like you to take part in a brief exercise, to see if it is helpful in dealing with this painful or difficult situation.

[1. Mindfulness writing prompt]

Please complete this brief writing exercise and follow the instructions as closely as possible.

In the space below, please write about what thoughts and emotions are coming up for you right now regarding this difficult situation.

Note any uncomfortable emotions you may have, such as feeling stressed, ashamed, sad, anxious, and so on.

As you write and notice your feelings, see if you can validate your experience with an attitude of acceptance and non-judgment. Try not to downplay your feelings, but at the same time please try not to exaggerate them either.

(For example, “I feel frustrated about the fact that my mom doesn’t understand why I don’t want to come home for Thanksgiving. It’s only natural that I want to spend time with my friends. I also feel guilty though because I don’t want to hurt her feelings. This is really hard for me right now…”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]
[2. Common humanity writing prompt]

In the space below, please write about how other people may share similar feelings when encountering situations like this.

Consider that experiencing difficult situations is a part of being human, and that you are not alone. Although the way people struggle is different and the amount of challenge varies, all people face difficulties in life. What you are experiencing is not abnormal, but is a part of life.

(For example, “I am not the only one who struggles with these types of holiday situations. Part of being human is learning how to get through times like these. Most people have a difficult transition when they go away to college. It's not just me...”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

[3. Self-kindness writing prompt]

In the space below, please write any words of support, encouragement and kindness to yourself that would be helpful to hear right now.

If you are not sure what to say, imagine what you would say to a close friend who was struggling with a similar difficult situation. What words would you use to convey compassion, support, and non-judgmental understanding? Now see if you can use this as inspiration for what to say to yourself.

(For example, “You're doing the best you can. I'm so sorry you're struggling with this. It's going to be okay. I will help you and support you to get through this...”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

Please take some time to read what you wrote to yourself and see how it feels to hear these words of kindness and concern directed towards you.

Notice if anything is particularly comforting or helpful.

Take a few slow, deep breaths as you read your own words. Let yourself receive this support.

[Attention check and post-test state measures completed in reference to the difficult situation inserted here.]
Appendix F

Modified Self-Compassionate Mindstate Induction

[Bolded text in brackets is information for researchers only. Note that the examples of self-compassionate writing given below should be changed so that they are appropriate for the cultural context of participants and the purposes of the study.]

Please spend the next few minutes to think about a particular situation in your academic career that you are experiencing right now that is painful or difficult. It could be that you received a bad grade on an assignment, you were called on in class when you did not know the answer, or maybe you had a stressful one on one meeting with a professor, etc.

Please don’t think of a situation in which you are upset with someone else, but instead think of a situation where you are feeling badly about yourself or are going through a hard time with school.

Decide on a single situation related to your academics or academic performance that you will focus on throughout this study.

[State measures inserted here, answered in reference to the painful or difficult situation.]

We would now like you to take part in a brief exercise, to see if it is helpful in dealing with this painful or difficult situation.

[1. Mindfulness writing prompt]

Please complete this brief writing exercise and follow the instructions as closely as possible.

In the space below, please write about what thoughts and emotions are coming up for you right now regarding this difficult situation you reflected on earlier.

Note any uncomfortable emotions you may have, such as feeling stressed, ashamed, sad, anxious, and so on.

As you write and notice your feelings, see if you can validate your experience with an attitude of acceptance and non-judgment. Try not to downplay your feelings, but at the same time please try not to exaggerate them either.

(For example, “I feel frustrated about the fact that I answered a question wrong in front of people. It’s only natural to feel upset when I feel like I am embarrassing myself. I also feel guilty because I was supposed to know this before class began. This is really hard for me right now...”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous, and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.
[2. Common humanity writing prompt]

In the space below, please write about how other people may share similar feelings when encountering situations like this.

Consider that experiencing difficult situations is a part of being human, and that you are not alone. Although the way people struggle is different and the amount of challenge varies, all people face difficulties in life. What you are experiencing is not abnormal, but is a part of life.

(For example, “I am not the only one who answers questions wrong in class. Part of being human is making mistakes sometimes. Everybody, at some point, has made mistakes and answered questions wrong. It's not just me...”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

[3. Self-kindness writing prompt]

In the space below, please write any words of support, encouragement and kindness to yourself that would be helpful to hear right now.

If you are not sure what to say, imagine what you would say to a close friend who was struggling with a similar difficult situation. What words would you use to convey compassion, support, and non-judgmental understanding? Now see if you can use this as inspiration for what to say to yourself.

(For example, “You're doing the best you can in this class. I'm so sorry you're struggling with understanding the content. It's going to be okay. I will help you and support you to get through this...”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous, and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]
Appendix G

Neff et al., 2021 Control Condition

[Bolded text in brackets is information for researchers only. Note that the examples of self-compassionate writing given below should be changed so that they are appropriate for the cultural context of participants and the purposes of the study.]

Please think about a particular situation you are experiencing right now that is painful or difficult. It could be some struggle in your life, or perhaps you are feeling inadequate in some way. Please don’t think of a situation in which you are upset with someone else, but instead think of a situation where you are feeling badly about yourself or else you are going through a hard time. Decide on a single situation that you will focus on throughout this study.

[State measures inserted here, answered in reference to the painful or difficult situation.]

We would now like you to take part in a brief exercise, to see if it is helpful in dealing with this painful or difficult situation.

[1. Description writing prompt]

Please complete this brief writing exercise and follow the instructions as closely as possible.

In the space below, please write about what exactly is occurring in this difficult situation. Try to be as descriptive as possible.

(For example, "Our family is having an argument about whether or not I should go home for Thanksgiving break. I want to stay in Austin but my mother feels upset because..."

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

[2. People involved writing prompt]

In the space below, please write about who is involved in the situation if it involves more than just you. Please describe the people involved with as much detail as possible, even if you are the only one involved (in this case describe yourself).

(For example, "My mother, sister, and brother are taking different sides in the dispute over Thanksgiving. My brother supports me, but my sister doesn’t. My sister is two years older and my brother one year younger... ”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.
[3. Words spoken writing prompt]

In the space below, please write any words that have been spoken in the situation, either what you have said to yourself, what other people have said to you, or what you have said to other people. Please use as much detail as possible.

(For example, “I told my mom that I really didn’t want to come back for Thanksgiving and that I wanted to rest and hang out with my friends. She told me that I should think of her feelings more...”)

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

Please take some time to read what you wrote see if anything particularly stands out for you.

[Attention check and post-test state measures completed in reference to the difficult situation inserted here.]
Appendix H

**Modified Control Condition**

[Bolded text in brackets is information for researchers only. Note that the examples of self-compassionate writing given below should be changed so that they are appropriate for the cultural context of participants and the purposes of the study.]

Please spend the next few minutes to think about a particular situation in your academic career that you are experiencing right now that is painful or difficult. It could be that you received a bad grade on an assignment, you were called on in class when you did not know the answer, or maybe you had a stressful one on one meeting with a professor, etc.

Please don’t think of a situation in which you are upset with someone else, but instead think of a situation where you are feeling badly about yourself or are going through a hard time with school.

Decide on a single situation related to your academics or academic performance that you will focus on throughout this study.

[State measures inserted here, answered in reference to the painful or difficult situation.]

We would now like you to take part in a brief exercise, to see if it is helpful in dealing with this painful or difficult situation.

**[1. Description writing prompt]**

Please complete this brief writing exercise and follow the instructions as closely as possible.

In the space below, please write about what exactly is occurring in this difficult situation you reflected on earlier. Try to be as descriptive as possible.

(For example, "I am not retaining the content I need to know for my math class, so when I answered a question during class, I was told I was wrong. Another student spoke up and gave the correct answer.")

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]
[2. People involved writing prompt]

In the space below, please write about who is involved in the situation if it involves more than just you. Please describe the people involved with as much detail as possible, even if you are the only one involved (in this case describe yourself).

(For example, "This situation happened in a class of 30 students. My math professor was involved by asking me a question, and the other student was involved because they gave the correct answer.")

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

[3. Words spoken writing prompt]

In the space below, please write any words that have been spoken in the situation, either what you have said to yourself, what other people have said to you, or what you have said to other people. Please use as much detail as possible.

(For example, “My math professor asked, "What is the next step in this equation?", I answered, "The next step is to add", but the professor said that it was incorrect. Then, another student answered, "The next step would be multiplication.")

*Remember-- your responses are completely anonymous and your writing is confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar.

[SPACE FOR WRITING]

Please take some time to read what you wrote. See if anything particularly stands out for you.