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# Self-Compassion as a Protective Resource When Working Under Time Pressure

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We all face situations in which we are required to work under time pressure...

# What protects against distress?

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- Self-esteem?
    - People with high self-esteem are
      - happier
      - more optimistic
      - more motivated
- than those with low self-esteem

# The problem with self-esteem

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- Self-esteem interventions in schools don't work
  - Psychology students showed no change or worse academic performance (Forsyth, Lawrence, Burnette, & Baumeister, 2007)
  - Self-esteem is the result of good performance rather than the cause (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Voths, 2003)

# Self-compassion

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- ❖ Taking a kind and understanding stance toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical (Neff, 2003).
  - Includes **self-kindness**: *I'm not disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.*
  - **Common humanity**: *I try to see my failings as part of the human condition*
  - **Mindfulness**: *When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance*

# Differences between self-compassion and self-esteem

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## SELF-COMPASSION

- Comes from being open to and aware of one's trials or suffering
- Based on a realistic understanding
- Leads to feelings of security and safety

## SELF-ESTEEM

- Based on evaluations and judgements of ourselves and/or others
- Based on unrealistic praise
- Leads to feelings of superiority and self-confidence

Self-compassion is available when self-esteem fails us!

# Self-compassion is associated with:

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- Approaching negative emotions with kindness and understanding (Neff, 2011)
- Lower levels of negative emotions when thinking about past failures (Leary et al., 2007)
- Other positive outcomes such as greater life satisfaction and happiness (Neff, 2009)



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# The current study

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# Overview

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160 young adults (77.6% female) were randomly assigned to one of four time limit conditions (normal time, five minute time pressure, ten minute time pressure, and no time limit).

**Cover story:** This vocabulary test predicts how successful you'll be in the future. Participants in the time pressure conditions were told that the study was running behind schedule so they had less time than they normally would have to complete the test

# Vocabulary test

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For each of the word stems presented, please try to generate as many words as you can. Write out whatever words come to mind in full in the textbox for each word stem until you cannot think of any more words to make or the textboxes have been filled up.

*For example:*

EX\_\_\_\_\_ → **EX**tras or **EX**amination or EX....  
FRE\_\_\_\_\_ → **FRE**eze or **FRE**e or FRE.....

# Self-compassion

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## HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES

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

| 1<br>ALMOST NEVER | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>ALMOST ALWAYS |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
|-------------------|---|---|---|--------------------|

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

# Self-esteem

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## SSES

Using the following scale, place a number on the line to the right of the statement that indicates what is **true for you at this moment**:

| 1          | 2            | 3        | 4         | 5         |
|------------|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Not at all | A little bit | Somewhat | Very much | Extremely |

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel confident about my abilities                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

# Mood

***Right now, I am feeling....***

←—————→  
Not interested at all  
Extremely interested

←—————→  
Not upset at all  
Extremely upset

←—————→  
Not enthusiastic  
at all  
Extremely enthusiastic

←—————→  
Not anxious at all  
Extremely anxious

# Mood

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Overall, how do you feel right now? Please select the face that best corresponds to how you are feeling at this moment.



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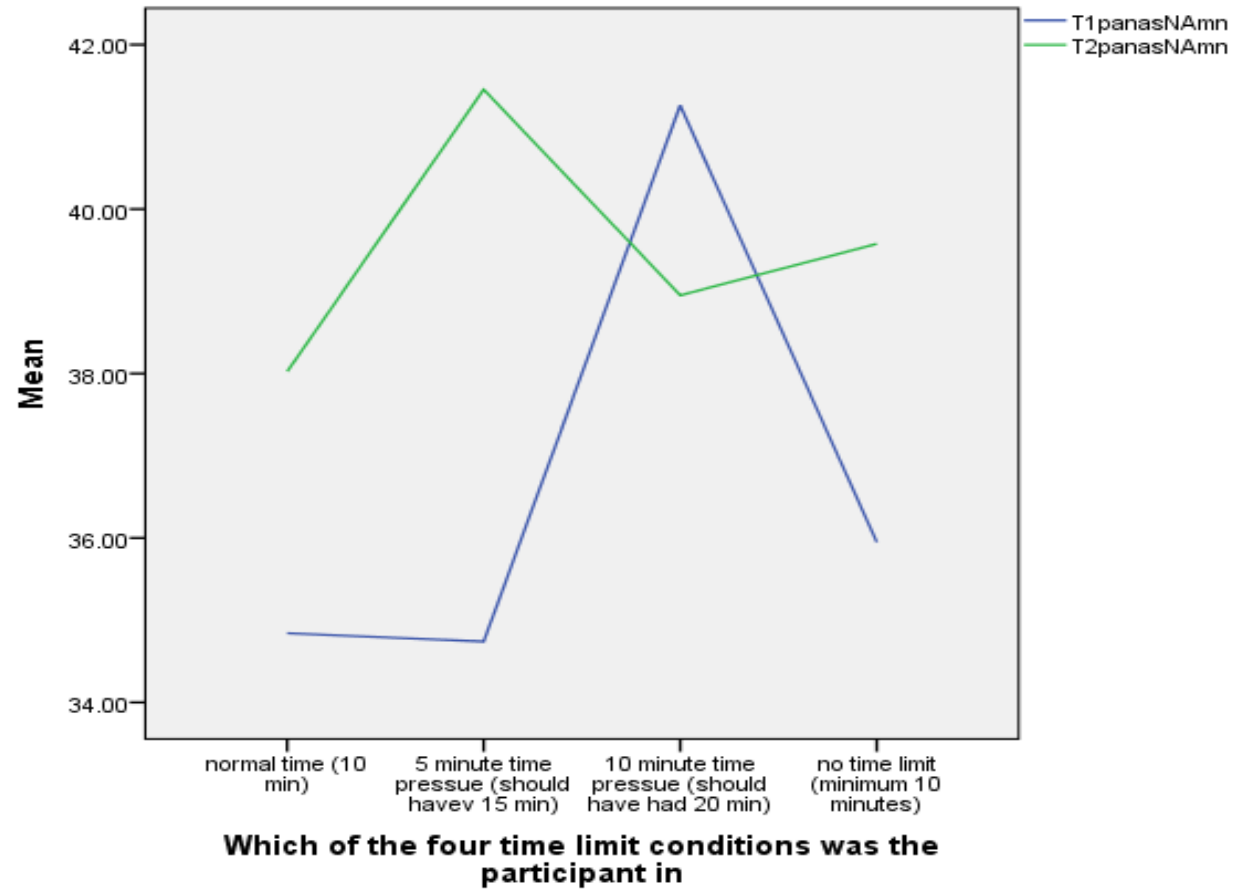


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# Mood pre and post-test



# Results

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Regression results for self-compassion as a predictor of post-test outcomes

| Measure                  | $\beta$ | $R^2$ |
|--------------------------|---------|-------|
| Negative Affect          | -.316   | .348  |
| FACES                    | .004    | .519  |
| Performance Satisfaction | .035    | .217  |



# Conclusions

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- Higher self-compassion associated with lower distress post-vocabulary test
  - Regardless of time limit condition
- Self-compassion was a better predictor of distress than self-esteem

# Implications and Future Directions

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- Future research:
  - Other time-pressure situations
  - Self-compassion interventions
    - Reduction of performance distress
    - Beneficial to everyone



Thank you!

Questions?

Comments?

# Self-Compassion as a Protective Resource When Working Under Time Pressure

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