



# Self-Compassion in Undergraduate Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Statement of Purpose

COVID-19 has caused significant disruption in everyone's lives, particularly college students who transitioned to online classes in Spring 2020. Examining self-compassion strategies used by students in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic can identify the resources and supports that are most helpful to students and inform best practices for HSIs during recovery.

## Background

- Self-kindness and positive self-talk contribute to well-being (Beck, 2008)
- Self-compassion has been used as an emotional-regulation strategy for youths experiencing stress (Lathern et al., 2019)
- Self-compassion strategies can lessen the impact of stress on depression, anxiety, and negative affect (Stutts et al., 2018)
- Strong correlations have been found between stress and self-compassion components (Hall et al., 2012)
- Additionally, there is a strong association between self-compassion and students' psychological and physical well-being (Hall et al., 2012)

### Study Aim

To examine the nature of self-compassion strategies used by undergraduate students in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Research Questions

Based on students' responses, are the positive and negative sets of self-compassion variables correlated? If so, what is the nature of the correlations?

## Methods

### Sample & Data Collection

- 151 undergraduate students at the University of Arizona
- Survey administered in Summer 2020
- Diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (45% Hispanic/Latinx, 19% Asian and 3% Asian American, 15% White/Caucasian, 7% Black or African American, 4% two or more races, 1% Native American, 1% Middle Eastern, 3% Other)

### Measures

Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003)

- Divided it into six positive and negative paired sub-scales
- The scores ranged from 1 ("Almost Never") to 5 ("Almost Always")

| Sub-scale Item      | Example Item   |
|---------------------|--|
| Common Humanity     | When I felt inadequate in some way, I tried to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people |
| Isolation           | When I thought about my inadequacies it tended to make   |
| Self-Kindness       | I was kind to myself when experiencing suffering   |
| Self-Judgment       | When times were very difficult, I tended to be tough on myself   |
| Mindfulness         | When I was feeling down, I tried to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness                               |
| Over-Identification | When I was feeling down I tended to obsess and fixate on everything that was wrong                                 |

## Findings

The first weighted sum was statistically significant ( $R=.61$ ; Wilks'  $\lambda=.60$ ,  $p<.001$ )

- 61% of the generalized non-redundant variance in the positive set of Self-Compassion variables was not explained by the negative set of Self-Compassion variables, across all weighted sums
- The correlation between the positive and negative sets in the first weighted sum of Self-Compassion variables showed a positive correlation ( $R= .61$ )

### Medium effect size

- 37% of the variance in the first positive set of Self-Compassion weighted sums is explained by the first negative set of Self-Compassion weighted sums

### Canonical Correlation Results

|   | CanR | Wilk's Lambda | approx F | numDF | denDF  | Pr(> F)       |
|---|------|---------------|----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| 1 | 0.61 | 0.61          | 8.94     | 9     | 353.04 | 3.554e-12 *** |
| 2 | 0.17 | 0.96          | 1.66     | 4     | 292    | 0.1588        |
| 3 | 0.13 | 0.98          | 2.51     | 1     | 147    | 0.1153        |

### Effect Size

|   | CanR | CanRSQ | Eigen | percent | cum        | scree |
|---|------|--------|-------|---------|------------|-------|
| 1 | 0.60 | 0.37   | 0.58  | 92.67   | 92.67***** |       |
| 2 | 0.17 | 0.03   | 0.03  | 4.59    | 97.25 **   |       |
| 3 | 0.13 | 0.02   | 0.02  | 2.75    | 100.00 *   |       |

### Raw canonical coefficients

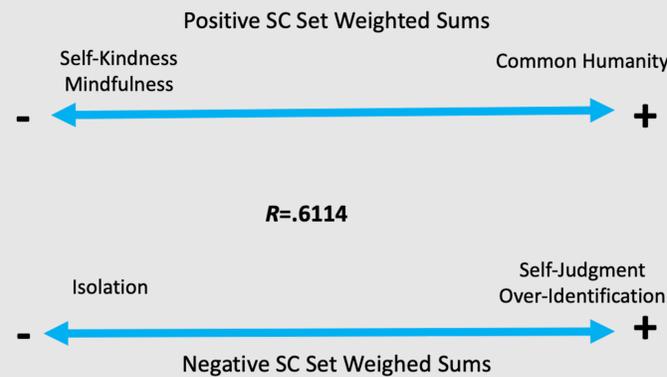
X variables:

|                 | Xcan1 | Xcan2 | Xcan3 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Self-Kindness   | -1.07 | -0.39 | -0.78 |
| Common Humanity | 0.38  | -1.04 | 0.59  |
| Mindfulness     | -0.25 | 1.00  | 1.05  |

Y variables:

|                     | Ycan1 | Ycan2 | Ycan3 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Self-Judgment       | 0.90  | 0.94  | 0.58  |
| Isolation           | -0.13 | -0.90 | 0.72  |
| Over-Identification | 0.12  | -0.65 | -1.28 |

Note: All variables are means of each sub-scale



People with high scores in the positive Self-Compassion composite set display low Self-Kindness and Mindfulness but higher Common Humanity while experiencing more Self-Judgment and Over-Identification and low Isolation.

\*It is interesting to note that Common Humanity (positive subscale) had a positive relationship with Over-Identification and Self-Judgment (negative subscales), which was not expected. Additionally, Self-Kindness and Self-Judgment scales had higher weights compared to the rest of the sub-scales.

## Discussion & Implications

Universities can initiate support groups for students that focus on self-compassion strategies tailored to address students' needs.

This can help inform intervention strategies by examining how students experience the six self-compassion components to cope with stress.

If students scored high on Self-Kindness and Self-Judgment, intervention strategies can focus on addressing Self-Judgment while also ensuring that students are kind to themselves.

Future research can explore the potential explanations for why students who experience, (1) more Self-Kindness and Mindfulness also felt more Isolated, and (2) more Common Humanity also felt more Self-Judgment and Over-Identification, but less Isolated.

The Self-Compassion scale (Neff, 2003) is an important tool to investigate self-compassion strategies and potentially look at its effects on other constructs such as perceived stress.

## Acknowledgments

A special thank you to Dr. Monica K. Erbacher, Dr. Elizabeth J. Pope, Dr. Marla A. Franco, and the Department of Educational Psychology for all their expertise and guidance.

This project is a part of a larger ongoing NSF study investigating student and instructor perceptions around online spaces and institutional supports during the pandemic in 2020 Award #: 2033389