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PERSONALITY AND COGNITION

The following information is related to a study you may have participated in during September 2021 – March 2022, via the University of Manitoba's PSYC 1200 Introduction to Psychology Participant Pool. If you participated in this study, you met with the researcher at the Action and Identity Lab in the Duff Roblin Building on campus, completed an online survey, and then played a memory game (called Déjà vu) in which you had to correctly identify images you had seen previously on printed cards.

The main personality trait of interest to this research was self-compassion, or how kindly we treat ourselves during times of struggle. One of the questions this study tried to answer was, how does self-compassion affect our willingness to take risks?

In previous research, being more self-compassionate has already shown the potential for promoting happiness and life satisfaction (Gunnell et al., 2017). Some of the previously studied reasons are more effective coping with negative social pressures or life events, reduced fear of negative social evaluation, and increased self-improvement motivation (Kelly & Tasca, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019).

The goal of this study was to examine another possible factor, which could be related to promoting life satisfaction, and which we are calling *loss-insensitivity*. The idea here is that when highly self-compassionate individuals have to make decisions involving risk or uncertainty, given their history of dealing well with adverse outcomes they have experienced in the past, they might be relatively unconcerned about a loss if it occurs in the future. This idea led to the prediction we tested here, that participants higher in self-compassion (as measured in the online survey) would show higher willingness to take risks when playing the memory game.

KEY FINDINGS

A total of 205 students completed the survey assessing self-compassion and other personality traits, and then played two rounds of a paced memory game in randomized high-risk or low-risk conditions. Participants received points for correctly identifying game-pieces as previously seen; however, those in the low-risk condition lost only a single point for any misidentified pieces while those in the high-risk condition lost all their points for a single mistake.

As hypothesized, we found that higher self-compassion predicted greater risk-taking (i.e., collecting more pieces), especially in the second round of the game and in the high-risk condition. This signifies that those higher in self-compassion were more willing to take the chance of identifying a card as previously seen, when there was both a higher chance of making a mistake and higher loss associated with a single mistake.

In addition to examining how many pieces participants collected, we also examined their performance in terms of net scores (i.e., correct identifications minus errors). We found that although those higher in self-compassion did "play with fire," they did not get "burned," as their performance increased along with taking greater risks.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although participants completed the self-compassion scale before playing the memory game, and there is no way their game performance could have influenced their self-compassion scores, this study still used a correlational design. Therefore, we cannot infer if higher self-compassion directly caused the increase in risk-taking that we observed. In future studies, we can use randomized experimental and control groups to raise or maintain participants' self-compassion (e.g., utilizing an interactive mental health app within a virtual setting) prior to making risky decisions.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

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Thank you again for your participation!