

THE EFFECT OF SELF-COMPASSION ON COMPENSATORY BEHAVIOR ON SOCIAL
MEDIA

by

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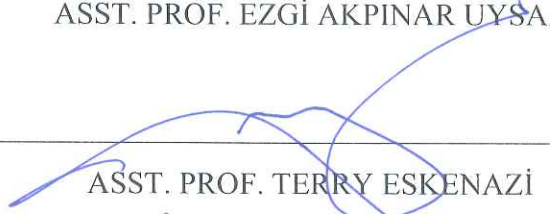
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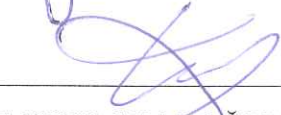
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Abstract

Social media gives its users control over how they want to present themselves to others, resulting in perfect online profiles. We end up comparing our offline selves to others' online profiles, which creates an incongruence between how we perceive ourselves, and who we idealize to be. Motivated to restore our positive sense of self and resolve the self-discrepancy, we engage in different types of compensatory behavior. This thesis investigates the role of self-compassion on the compensatory behavior type chosen to deal with a negative situation experienced online. Results indicate that after experiencing self-discrepancy online, those primed with negative self-compassion were significantly more likely to affirm themselves by engaging in fluid compensation. Furthermore, chronic self-compassion is shown to increase the acceptance of the situation, which, in turn, leads to less dissociation from the negative event. Finally, self-compassion is shown to uniquely contribute to the variance in the likelihood of the compensatory behavior chosen. Managerial and health-related implications are discussed.

Keywords: self-compassion, social media, compensatory consumer behavior, well-being, online-behavior

Özet

Sosyal medya araçları, kullanıcılara sunduğu birtakım özellikler ile dışarıdan mükemmel gözüken profil yaratılmasına imkan tanımaktadır. Bunun sonucunda da sosyal medya kullanımı, günlük hayattaki benliklerini mükemmel sosyal medya profilleri ile karşılaştıran sosyal medya kullanıcılarında benlik farklılıklarına yol açmaktadır. Pozitif benlik algılarını geri kazanma isteği oluşan sosyal medya kullanıcıları belirli davranışlar ile benlik farklılıklarını kompanse etmeye çalışırlar. Bu tez,öz-merhamet'in benlik farklılığı sonucunda tercih edilen kompensasyon davranışı üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Sonuçlar, sosyal medya üzerinde benlik farklılığına yol açacak bir durum yaşadıkdan sonra negatif öz-merhamet ile hazırlanan kullanıcıların kendilerini benlik farklılığı oluşmamış bir alanda ispatlamaya daha yatkın olduğunu göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda kronik öz-merhametin negatif durumu kabullenmeyi arttırdığı, durumu kabullenmenin de olaydan uzak durma davranışını azalttığı gözlemlenmiştir. Sonuçların sağlık ve yönetim bilimleri alanlarındaki etkileri tezde tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: öz-merhamet, sosyal medya, tüketici kompensasyon davranışı, sağlık, çevrimiçi davranış

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1. Introduction

Social media has become an important part of our lives, with young adults spending 6.5 hours per week on social media (Casey, 2017). We fulfill our basic need for social connection through our social media accounts: we express our thoughts, meet new people, manage our social network, stay in touch with our friends, like others' posts, and receive likes in return. Due to the dominant role of social media in our lives, its effect on users remains a popular topic in the literature.

Studies indicate that users benefit from social media usage through increased social capital (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007), stronger relationships (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009), and reduced feelings of loneliness (Shaw & Gant, 2002). However, social media usage can also be detrimental to well-being resulting in reduced self-esteem, reduced life satisfaction, and increased psychological distress (Chen & Lee, 2013; Kross et al., 2013; Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). In order to alleviate the detrimental effects of social media usage, social media companies have started to take measures with campaigns and product developments (Anderle, 2016; Vagianos, 2017).

A factor that accounts for the diminished well-being of social media users is the social comparisons we make on social media (Feinstein et al., 2013). Compared to face-to-face interactions, social media allows us to strategically control how we present ourselves. We post pictures taken from our best angles, we share our vacation pictures from attractive destinations, and we post about our recent personal achievements. Since most people tend to present themselves in the best way possible, the standards by which we judge ourselves increase. We end up comparing our offline selves to others' idealized selves, resulting in self-discrepancy (Chou & Edge, 2012; Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011), which is defined as the incongruence between how we currently perceive ourselves and our idealized self (Higgins, 1987).

When we experience self-discrepancy, we feel motivated to restore our positive sense of self (Tesser, 1988). As a result, we engage in compensatory behavior to resolve the incongruity (Heine et al., 2006; Mandel, Rucker, Levav & Galinsky, 2017). This study investigates how we cope with self-discrepancies on social media. Self-compassion will be explored as individual difference variable that affects which type of compensatory behavior will be chosen as the coping strategy. Additionally, the effect of self-compassion is differentiated from the effect of self-esteem in coping with self-discrepancy created on social platforms.

1.1 Self-discrepancy as a result of social media usage

We may sometimes feel like we are not who we idealize to be. For instance, we may realize that we are not as good as we would like to be at sports after losing a game. Self-discrepancy theory by Higgins (1987) names this perceived gap as “self-discrepancy” and argues that self-discrepancies result in emotional distress. Higgins identifies three basic domains of the self: actual, ideal and ought. While actual self refers to who we currently perceive ourselves to be (or how we think others perceive us); ideal-self consists of one’s aspirations, desires and hopes, and represents who we wish to become. Ought-self, on the other hand, consists of one’s beliefs about one’s duties, responsibilities, and obligations, and represents who we should become. While self-discrepancy theory argues that these self-discrepancies result in distinct emotional reactions, there has been mixed evidence in the literature (see Phillips & Silvia, 2010; Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert & Barlow 1998). In general, self-discrepancy is shown to result in anxiety, depression, shame, guilt and diminished purpose in life (Higgins, 1987; Stanley & Burrow, 2015).

Social media influences our actual and ought selves by exposing us to certain standards (or information) shaped by our social connections. According to the Social Comparison Theory, humans have a fundamental need for self-evaluation, and when objective standards are

unavailable, people base their evaluation on how they compare to others (Festinger, 1954). People engage in social comparison for two main purposes: self-enhancement and self-improvement. Self-improvement motivation leads people to compare themselves to others that are superior, seeking upward social comparison (Wheeler, 1966). On the other hand, self-enhancement motivation leads people to compare themselves with others that are inferior, seeking downward comparison (Wills, 1981). There are also instances where we engage in upward social comparison with self-enhancement motivation because we would like to highlight a common trait we share with a target that is superior to us (Wood, 1989).

Upward social comparisons may result in positive outcomes, such as being inspired to become like their targets (e.g. Lockwood & Kunda, 1997), however it may also lead to negative affect (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van Yperen & Dakof, 1990) and deteriorating well-being (Strohmer, Biggs & McIntyre, 1984; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). Although upward social comparisons have the risk of resulting in undesirable outcomes, studies report a tendency to choose targets that are slightly better to compare ourselves to (e.g. Nosanchuk & Erickson, 1985; Seta, 1982; Wheeler et al., 1969).

Social media contains both upward and downward social comparison. However, as people tend to present themselves in the most appealing way, and since social media offers them the opportunity to engage in strategic self-presentation (e.g. via choosing which pictures to share and which to delete), we may end up being exposed to upward social comparison more. This upward social comparison increases the standards by which we judge ourselves and make our idealized or ought selves more unattainable. Hence, compared to an offline interaction, we may end up experiencing more self-discrepancy online. When we feel threatened by the self-

discrepancy, we are motivated to restore a positive sense of self (Tesser, 1988). In order to reduce the self-discrepancy, we engage in a variety of compensatory behaviors.

1.2 Coping with self-discrepancy: Compensatory behaviors

The motivation to reduce or resolve self-discrepancy leads to a certain set of behaviors. Mandel et al. (2017) define the term *compensatory consumer behavior* as “any purchase, use, or consumption of products or services motivated by a desire to offset or reduce self-discrepancy”. Since social media is a product we use in order to satisfy our social functions, the model Mandel and his colleagues put forward can be adapted to our behavior on social media.

In their literature review, they identify five sets of compensatory behavior types that can be used to reduce or resolve-self-discrepancy: direct-resolution, symbolic self-completion, fluid consumption, dissociation, and escapism.

Direct resolution. Direct resolution entails goal-directed behavior that aims to reduce the self-discrepancy via directly addressing the source. For instance, if someone experiences a discrepancy between their current state of physical appearance and how they would like to look, they might join a gym, buy appearance-enhancing products such as make-up, or undergo plastic surgery (Park and Maner, 2009; Schouten, 1991). In terms of social media consumption, direct-resolution may translate to engaging in activities to improve physical appearance when you experience self-discrepancy in the appearance domain, such as watching videos on how to pose for pictures, posting pictures in which you look good, or using filters on pictures to make you look more attractive.

Symbolic self-completion Symbolic self-completion entails showing symbolic mastery in the domain self-discrepancy is located without addressing the source (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). For instance, MBA students who did not possess objective indicators of success such as

high GPA compensated for this discrepancy via wearing more expensive suits in order to signal their success (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Although their self-discrepancy might have been reduced, their symbolic mastery did not affect the source of their discrepancy (i.e. lack of success). Similarly, participants who experienced social exclusion coped with this self-discrepancy via indicating greater willingness to buy a product that signaled their group membership (Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn & Vohs, 2011). In terms of social media consumption, symbolic self-completion may lead to updating your education information on your profile to look smart when you experience self-discrepancy about your intelligence after receiving a bad grade from an exam. In this case, the source of the self-discrepancy would be intelligence/success, and you would compensate for the self-discrepancy in the same domain without really addressing the source (i.e. studying for the next exam) but by showing symbolic mastery in it (i.e. reminding everyone of your education status via updating it online).

Fluid compensation. Fluid compensation refers to behavior that aim to affirm the self in a domain that is different from the domain, where self-discrepancy is located. It is different from symbolic self-completion, because symbolic self-completion occurs in the domain, where self-discrepancy is located. For instance, in order to cope with self-discrepancy in the physical appearance domain, participants engaged in more economically rational choices so that they would be perceived as intelligent (Sobel & Darke, 2014). Another study by Martens, Johns, Greenberg, and Schimel (2006) showed that female students were able to cope with stereotype threat on math performance via writing about their most valued characteristic. In terms of social media consumption, fluid consumption may translate to posting a physically attractive picture of you when you receive a bad grade from an exam. In this case, the source of the self-discrepancy would

be intelligence/success, however you would compensate for this self-discrepancy by ignoring the source and affirming the self in an unthreatened domain (i.e. appearance) instead.

Dissociation. Dissociation refers to actively avoiding behaviors related to the source of the self-discrepancy. For instance, participants coped with the self-discrepancy about their identity by forgetting about advertisements linked to their identities (Dalton & Huang, 2014). Similarly, when women were shown that men to women ratio is unbalanced in engineering and math, women tended to dissociate themselves either with their gender or with engineering and math (Murphy, Steele & Gross, 2007). In terms of social media consumption, dissociation may translate to unfollowing people/groups that cause or remind us of our self-discrepancy or abandoning the social media platform altogether.

Escapism. Escapism refers to behavior that helps us cope with self-discrepancies via distraction and diverting attention to something else. For instance, binge eating and binge watching may help individuals cope with self-discrepancies (Cornil & Chandon, 2013; Polivy, Herman & McFarlane, 1994). In terms of social media consumption, escapism may refer to watching funny videos online, playing online games, or listening to music.

There are several studies that investigated potential individual differences that moderate the relationship between the self-discrepancy and the compensatory behavior chosen to deal with that self-discrepancy. For instance, Kim and Gal (2014) found that self-acceptance was needed to engage in direct-resolution. Bessenoff (2006) found that low self-esteem predicts weight-regulatory thoughts (direct resolution) when weight related self-discrepancy is experienced. However, to the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that approach social media consumption from an integrative compensatory consumer behavior perspective. Hence, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by investigating the types of compensatory behavior on social

media, and the moderation effect of self-compassion and self-esteem on the type of compensatory behavior chosen.

1.3 Self-compassion as a predictor of compensatory behavior choice

Self-compassion refers to taking a compassionate, nonjudgmental stance towards ourselves when we are faced with our own mistakes, flaws and failures (Neff, 2003a; Neff et al., 2007). It is proposed as an alternative healthy attitude toward oneself that is not contingent upon external outcomes, unlike self-esteem (Neff, 2003a).

Self-compassion may be confused with self-pity or self-indulgence. Self-pity entails feeling overwhelmed with the negative feelings one experiences and taking an egocentric approach, believing that the negative event is unique to that person (Neff, 2003a). Instead, self-compassion allows the individual to recognize that suffering is shared by all humans and to take a mindful approach, which prevents the individual from ruminating about the event. On the other hand, self-indulgence entails excessive gratification, which prevents one from self-improvement. Contrastingly, self-compassion entails the desire to improve oneself because you care (Neff, 2011).

Self-compassion entails three main dimensions and six facets¹: 1) self-kindness versus self-judgment, 2) mindfulness versus over-identification, and 3) common humanity versus isolation. Positive self-compassion entails self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity; and negative self-compassion entails self-judgment, over-identification and isolation. Self-kindness refers to being kind and understanding to ourselves in the face of adversity, whereas self-judgment refers to criticizing our mistakes and inadequacies in an unforgiving and harsh way. Mindfulness refers

¹ There is an empirical distinction between these six subscales, with factor analysis suggesting six separate factors, and these six factors predicting different outcomes (Neff, 2003b; Van Dam, Sheppard, Forsyth & Earleywine, 2010). Furthermore, Neff (2003b) argues that even though someone may score low in negative self-compassion subscales, it may not translate to scoring high in the positive self-compassion subscales. For instance, it does not mean that someone who does not self-criticize also actively acts kind to oneself.

to being present in the moment, whereas over-identification refers to ruminating on, exaggerating or ignoring adverse conditions. Finally, common humanity refers to the understanding that suffering and imperfections are experienced by all humans, whereas isolation refers to perceiving them as personal and abnormal.

Studies indicate that self-compassion is associated with a variety of positive outcomes such as greater life satisfaction, social connectedness, reduced fear of failure, reduced perfectionism, and reduced depressive symptoms (see Neff, 2009). Furthermore, self-compassionate individuals are shown to experience lower levels of negative affect, react in more balanced ways, and make more realistic self-appraisals under adverse conditions (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen & Hancock, 2007; Neff et al., 2007).

Self-compassion implies being at peace with one's shortcomings and failures, however, it does not translate to a passive acceptance of these conditions. As emphasized above, self-compassion differs from self-pity, self-indulgence, passivity and inaction, and is associated with self-improvement motivation, because self-compassion provides the safe, nonjudgmental environment necessary to cope with the discrepancy in a more direct way (Neff et al., 2005; Terry & Leary, 2011). For instance, in four studies, Breines and Chen (2012) reported that after being primed with positive self-compassion, participants were significantly more likely to believe that their weaknesses were malleable, more motivated to make amends about their moral transgressions, more likely to study longer for a test they performed poorly at, and more likely to choose upward social comparisons. Similarly, Neff, Rude and Kirkpatrick (2007) found that chronic self-compassion had a significant positive association with personal initiative, which is defined as taking initiatives in order to live a more fulfilling life. Finally, Kim and Gal (2016)

reported that exercising self-acceptance resulted in willingness to pay more for products aimed at improving a self-deficit. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1) Direct resolution will be higher in the positive self-compassion group compared to the negative self-compassion group and the control group.

Symbolic self-completion and fluid compensation may be viewed as self-enhancement strategies, because, unlike direct-resolution, they aim to restore a positive view of the self without addressing the source of the problem. Neff (2003a) argues that positive self-compassion, unlike self-esteem, does not entail self-enhancement motivation. However, it can be argued that negative self-compassion might trigger self-enhancement motivation in order to cope with the negative affect created by the self-discrepancy. Even though both symbolic self-completion and fluid compensation can be viewed as self-enhancement techniques, they differ in terms of how risky it is to engage in given behavior. For instance, after experiencing self-discrepancy in the appearance domain, an unattractive person might post a picture of him/her wearing fancy accessories in order to look attractive (i.e. symbolic self-completion), however it may backfire as the focus would still be on the person's appearance. Contrastingly, the same person could post a picture of him/her receiving a prestigious award, which would shift people's attention from his/her looks to another domain, which is success (i.e. fluid compensation). Therefore, fluid compensation can be seen as a safer self-enhancement alternative compared to symbolic self-completion, making it a beneficial strategy to use in riskier environments (such as one created by negative self-compassion due to increased self-criticism). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2) Symbolic self-completion will be lower in the negative self-compassion group compared to the positive self-compassion group and the control group.

H3) Fluid compensation will be higher in the negative self-compassion group compared to the positive self-compassion group and the control group.

Escapism and dissociation are behavior that distract the person from the negative event. While they do not solve the problem one is experiencing, they provide temporary relief by preventing the self-discrepancy to increase. Avoidance motivation is defined by Elliot (2006) as motivation that “directs behavior away from negative stimuli”. Since escapism and dissociation are driven by a motivation to avoid a potential negative outcome (which is further negative evaluation), it can be argued that they are driven by avoidance motivation.

Since negative self-compassion creates a self-criticizing and ruminative environment where it is risky trying to restore the self, avoidance strategies might be more common for those with negative self-compassion. For instance, Neff, Hsieh and Dejitterat (2005) argue that self-compassion, due to the mindfulness component, does not entail avoiding or repressing thoughts and feelings, which is the case in escapism and dissociation. Furthermore, they report that chronic self-compassion is negatively associated with performance-avoidance goals in undergraduate students, which causes them to avoid situations in which they may be perceived as incompetent. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4) Escapism will be lower in the positive self-compassion group compared to the negative self-compassion group and the control group.

H5) Dissociation will be lower in the positive self-compassion group compared to the negative self-compassion group and the control group.

Difference of self-esteem and self-compassion on compensatory behavior choice

Self-esteem is defined as our overall evaluation of our worthiness (Weiten, 2004). Maintaining high self-esteem is viewed as an integral motivation of various human behavior (e.g.

Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Kernis & Waschull, 1995; Tesser, 1988). Furthermore, high self-esteem has been associated with various adaptive outcomes such as reduced anxiety, better physical and mental health and better grades (e.g. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 1995; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). However, recent academic research has questioned the benefits of self-esteem and suggested more adaptive alternatives, such as self-control and self-compassion (see Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Baumeister, Heatherton & Tice, 1993; Neff, 2011; Tangney, Boone & Baumeister, 2018).

Self-compassion and self-esteem both represent a positive approach to the self and are highly correlated in the literature (see Neff, 2009). However, there are fundamental differences between the two constructs. For instance, while high self-esteem causes individuals to engage in self-enhancement resulting in self-enhancement bias; self-compassion does not entail self-enhancement motivation and allows individuals to have more realistic appraisals (Leary et al., 2007). Similarly, self-esteem is dependent on particular outcomes, whereas self-compassion is unconditional and can help us cope in negative situations, where self-esteem fails us (Neff, 2011). There is also empirical evidence showing that they are different constructs, which represent unique variances in positive affect, optimism, anxiety and depression (see Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003; Neff, 2011).

Similar to self-compassion, coping strategies and motivations also change across self-esteem levels. For instance, individuals high in self-esteem (HSEs) are motivated by the need for self-enhancement and oriented toward approach goals, through which they aim to present themselves in a positive light (Heimpel, Elliot & Wood, 2006). Contrastingly, individuals low in self-esteem (LSEs) are motivated by the need for self-protection and are oriented toward avoidance

goals, through which they aim to prevent further losses to their self-esteem (Heimpel, et al., 2006). Therefore, HSEs may be more effective in goal-directed behavior and self-enhancing behavior such as direct-resolution, symbolic self-completion, and fluid compensation (Di Paula & Campbell, 2002), whereas LSEs may engage in avoidance strategies, such as escapism and dissociation (Heimpel, et al., 2006). On the other hand, LSEs may also seek self-enhancement in order to restore their self-esteem when they face failure, however only if the situation is perceived to be safe (Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela & Gaus, 1994). As self-esteem may be another moderator of the relationship between self-discrepancy and compensatory behavior, this study will control for the effects of self-esteem and will report whether or not self-compassion uniquely contributes to different compensatory behavior categories.

1.4 Present study

The present study explores how primed self-compassion affects the likelihood of the compensatory behavior chosen to cope with the self-discrepancy created on social media (see Figure 1 for the conceptual model). Furthermore, the effect of self-compassion is differentiated from the effect of self-esteem in explaining the likelihood of the compensatory behavior type chosen to deal with a negative event. The study aims to contribute to the literature in several ways: 1) there are a limited number of studies that study all of the compensatory behavior from Mandel and his colleagues' (2014) compensatory consumer behavior model, 2) there are a limited number of studies that reported how compensatory behavior translated to online behavior, and 3) to the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that primed negative self-compassion.

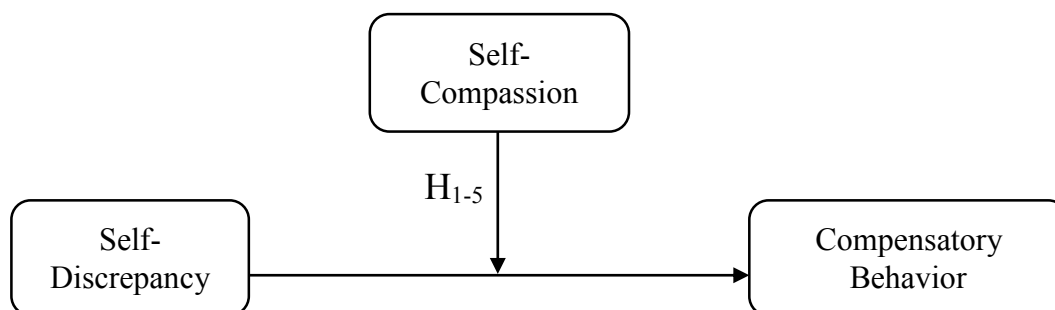


Figure 1. The conceptual model that was explored in the study.

A pretest was conducted with 68 Mechanical Turk panelists (72% female, $M_{age} = 36.88$, $SD = 13.74$) in order to test the conceptual model and the measures to be used in the main study. All panelists were social media users, who visited their accounts 5-7 times a day on average. Positive self-compassion was primed using the manipulation from Leary et al. (2007), and negative self-compassion was primed using a manipulation that was created based on the positive self-compassion prime, as no studies manipulated negative self-compassion prior to this study. Participants were first asked to remember a negative event that happened to them during their high school and college years. Then, according to their experimental group, they were asked to approach this negative event in a self-compassionate (i.e. positive self-compassion group) or a judgmental (i.e. negative self-compassion group) way. Participants were then asked how likely they were to engage in the given compensatory behavior after being exposed to a self-discrepancy inducing situation (i.e. being tagged in a photo they look unattractive in). Self-esteem, contingencies of self-worth, and acceptance of the situation presented to them were also measured.

Positive self-compassion group ($n = 40$) reported feeling significantly more compassionate towards themselves compared to the negative self-compassion group ($n = 28$, $t(44.22) = 3.042$, $p = .04$). Self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth were not different across the groups. Self-esteem was significantly correlated with dissociation ($r = -.406$, $p = .001$) and acceptance ($r = .307$, $p = .011$), and the appearance subscale of contingencies of self-worth was significantly correlated with dissociation ($r = .417$, $p < .001$). Gender, internet usage frequency, chronic self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth were not significantly correlated with any of the compensatory behavior or acceptance of the situation.

Positive self-compassion group accepted the situation significantly more compared to the negative self-compassion group ($t(46.41) = 2.319$, $p = .03$), whereas dissociation was significantly

higher in the negative self-compassion group ($t(66) = -2.390, p = .02$). Furthermore, these effects remained significant after controlling for the effect of self-esteem ($B = .583, p = .03$ for acceptance, and $B = -.541, p = .04$ for dissociation). Finally, a mediation model was tested using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Model 4, with a bootstrap approach of 1000 drawings; Hayes, 2013), wherein acceptance of the situation mediated the effect between self-compassion and dissociation. Participants in the positive self-compassion group indicated greater acceptance ($B = .661, p = .02$, 95% CI: .12, 1.20), and in turn, greater acceptance resulted in less dissociation from the negative event ($B = -.262, p = .03$, 95% CI: -.502, -.022).

The manipulation used in the pretest was not event-specific and was aimed to increase overall self-compassion by practicing self-compassion on an irrelevant negative event. Since an effect of the priming was not present on other types of compensatory behavior than dissociation, the main study comprised a different self-compassion prime that was aimed at practicing self-compassion on a negative event on social media. Furthermore, since the pretest consisted of only positive and negative self-compassion groups, it was not possible to compare the self-compassion manipulation to a reference group. Therefore, the main study comprised of three experimental groups (i.e. positive / negative self-compassion and the control group). Finally, the compensatory behavior items were refined based on further theoretical considerations.

2. Method

2.1 Participants. One hundred sixty-seven undergraduate students from Koc University participated in the study. The number of participants was determined through a power analysis for linear multiple regression using GPower 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), which yielded a result of 143 participants, where $f^2 = .10$ (small to medium effect size), $\alpha = .05$, $1 - \beta =$

.8, number of predictors = 6. All participants indicated having at least one social media account and they reported that they checked their accounts 8-10 times a day on average.

2.2 Materials.

Self-compassion manipulation. Participants were first asked to imagine that they were tagged in a photo they look unattractive in on social media. The negative event that induces self-discrepancy was selected to be in the appearance domain, as appearance plays an important role for young adolescents, especially on social media (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper & Bouvrette, 2003; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Then, participants answered three questions about the event, either priming positive self-compassion (i.e. self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness) or negative self-compassion (i.e. self-judgment, isolation, over-identification). Positive self-compassion manipulation was adapted from Leary et al. (2007), and negative self-compassion manipulation was created based on the positive self-compassion prime. Control group was asked to imagine the negative event and write about their feelings; however, they did not receive any further instructions.

Manipulation check. Participants indicated how warm and compassionate they feel towards themselves, answers ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree*, $M = 4.30$, $SD = .80$.

Compensatory behavior on social media. Following the negative event presented to the participants, they were asked to indicate how likely they are to engage in the given behavior online. 12 items were created reflecting the five categories of compensatory behavior (i.e. direct-resolution [$M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.08$], symbolic self-completion [$M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.16$], fluid compensation [$M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.10$], escapism [$M = 3.57$, $SD = .99$], and dissociation [$M = 3.06$, $SD = .97$]). Two items were used for each compensatory behavior category, except dissociation

(which was represented with four items). The source of the problem presented in the experiment is looking physically unattractive in pictures. Therefore, direct resolution items are aimed at addressing the source of the problem (e.g. “learning ways to take more attractive photos”), symbolic self-completion items are aimed at showing symbolic mastery in the threatened domain without really addressing the source (e.g. “posting photos of you wearing fancy clothes or accessories”), fluid compensation items are aimed at signaling mastery in an unthreatened domain (e.g. “making a post that shows you are someone intellectual”), escapism items² are aimed providing a distraction from the problem (e.g. “doing something else online”), and dissociation items are aimed at actively avoiding the problem (e.g. “hiding the post”).

Items were provided on a 5-point scale, answers ranging from 1 = *extremely unlikely*, to 5 = *extremely likely*. Average scores of the compensatory behavior categories were used in the study.

Acceptance of the situation. Acceptance was included in the study for exploratory purposes as previous research shows that it may be a precondition to engage in certain compensatory behavior (Kim & Gal, 2014). Participants were asked how likely they were to accept the situation as it is. Responses ranged from 1 = *extremely unlikely*, to 5 = *extremely likely*; $M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.07$).

Self-esteem. Chronic self-esteem was measured with the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965) on a 5-point scale, answers ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*. Items formed a one-dimensional scale (explained variance of 46.27%), higher scores representing higher self-esteem, Cronbach’s alpha of .86 ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .67$).

² One item for escapism captures offline behavior (i.e. “Do something else offline (doing household chores, taking a walk, etc.), which is the only exception in the study that asks the likelihood of an offline behavior. This item was included in the study, because one might choose to do something offline in order to escape the online world.

Contingencies of self-worth. Contingencies of self-worth was measured with 5 items from the appearance subscale of the Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale (Crocker et al., 2013). Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, higher scores representing greater contingency of self-worth on appearance. The items formed a one-dimensional scale (explained variance 46.69%), Cronbach's alpha of .70 ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .64$).

Studies indicate that people seek self-improvement and self-enhancement in the self-threatened domains if that domain is central to their evaluation of self-worth (Crocker et al., 2003). Therefore, contingencies of self-worth scale was included in the study as a control variable.

Self-compassion scale. Self-compassion was measured with the 12-item short scale developed by Raes, Pommier, Neff and Van Gucht (2011) on a 5-point scale, answers ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*. Self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness items formed the positive self-compassion score ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .70$, explained variance of 54.68%, Cronbach' alpha of .83); whereas self-judgment, isolation, and overidentification items formed the negative self-compassion score ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .69$, explained variance of 46.24%, Cronbach' alpha of .76).

Self-compassion scale was included to explore the relationship between chronic self-compassion (in addition to primed self-compassion) and the compensatory reactions engaged on social media.

Social media usage. Social media usage patterns were asked with 8 items. Participants were asked to indicate which social media accounts they are using; the frequency of them posting pictures, commenting under posts, liking posts, sharing status updates, looking at others' profiles and content; and their frequency of visiting their social media accounts, and the time they spend daily on their social media.

The study explores online coping behavior, which might be affected by the frequency of social media usage of the participants. More frequent or active users might be more likely to engage in sharing posts (i.e. direct-resolution, symbolic self-completion, fluid compensation) compared to being inactive (i.e. escapism, dissociation). Therefore, social media usage frequency was included as a control variable.

Gender. Literature show that females, in general, have lower self-esteem levels, and are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction (Groez, Levine & Murnen, 2011; Joinson, 2008; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). Furthermore, they tend to be more self-critical and ruminative (Leadbeater, Kuperminc, Blatt, & Hertzog, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999). Therefore, gender was included as a control variable.

2.3 Procedure.

Participants were randomly allocated to the three experimental groups (i.e. positive self-compassion, negative self-compassion, control group). They were presented with a negative event on social media (being tagged in a photo they looked unattractive in) and were asked to write 2-3 paragraphs answering questions depending on their experimental condition. Then, they were asked to indicate how likely they were to engage in certain online behavior and how much they accepted the negative situation as it is. Then, participants were presented the self-esteem, contingencies of self-worth, social media usage and gender questions. Participants then completed another study that lasted approximately 20 minutes and were finally presented the chronic self-compassion measure. Self-compassion measure was presented after another study in order to prevent the manipulation to affect the chronic measure.

3. Results

Positive self-compassion group reported feeling significantly warmer towards themselves after the manipulation compared to the control group ($t(109) = 2.167, p = .032$) and the negative self-compassion group ($t(109) = 2.719, p = .008$). However, negative self-compassion and control groups did not significantly differ from one another.

Participants in the experimental and control groups did not differ from each other in terms of their internet usage frequency ($F(2, 164) = 1.878, p > .05$), their gender ($\chi^2 = 1.923, p > .05$), how much their self-worth is contingent on their appearance ($F(2, 164) = .216, p > .05$) or in the negative self-compassion subscale ($F(2, 164) = .523, p > .05$). However, positive self-compassion group scored significantly higher in self-esteem both compared to the control group, and to the negative self-compassion group ($t(109) = 2.075, p = .04$, and $t(109) = 2.357, p = .02$, respectively). Finally, positive self-compassion group also scored higher in the positive self-compassion subscale compared to the control group, $t(106) = 2.680, p = .009$.

First, the main effect of the experimental manipulation on different compensatory behavior types was tested without controlling for the effects of other variables. Table 1 summarizes how experimental and control groups differed from one another for each of the compensatory behavior categories. A significant difference was observed across the conditions for fluid compensation ($F(2,164) = 2.967, p = .05$). The post-hoc test (Tukey HSD) indicated that the negative self-compassion group was significantly more likely to engage in fluid compensation compared to the control group ($p = .048$). Other compensatory behavior did not significantly differ across the conditions.

Table 1

Compensatory behavior likelihood comparisons across experimental and control groups.

| | Positive Self-Compassion | Negative Self-Compassion | Control Group | F-score | p-value |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------|---------|
| Direct Resolution | 3.25 (.93) | 3.38 (1.10) | 2.98 (1.18) | 2.028 | .14 |
| Symbolic Self-Completion | 3.05 (.97) | 3.08 (1.22) | 2.69 (1.26) | 1.971 | .14 |
| Fluid Compensation | 2.81 (.94) | 3.14 (1.15) | 2.65 (1.16) | 2.967 | .05 |
| Escapism | 3.54 (.96) | 3.56 (1.06) | 3.60 (.97) | .054 | .95 |
| Dissociation | 2.96 (.97) | 3.05 (1.03) | 3.17 (.93) | .656 | .52 |

Control variables' relationship with compensatory behavior categories were tested (see Table 2). Self-esteem was positively correlated with escapism ($r = .156, p = .04$) and negatively correlated with dissociation ($r = -.251, p = .001$). Contingencies of self-worth was positively correlated with direct resolution ($r = .188, p = .02$), symbolic self-completion ($r = .163, p = .04$), and dissociation ($r = .292, p < .001$), however was negatively correlated with escapism ($r = -.206, p = .008$). Internet usage frequency was positively correlated with direct resolution ($r = .313, p < .001$), symbolic self-completion ($r = .299, p < .001$), and fluid compensation ($r = .229, p = .003$). Women were significantly more likely to engage in direct resolution ($t(164) = 2.341, p = .02$), symbolic self-completion ($t(164) = 2.385, p = .02$) and dissociation ($t(164) = 2.063, p = .04$) compared to men.

Table 2

Correlations between the control variables and compensatory behavior categories

| | Direct Resolution | Symbolic Self-Completion | Fluid Compensation | Escapism | Dissociation |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------|
| Self-esteem | -.065 | .027 | -.041 | .156* | -.251*** |
| Contingencies of self-worth | .188* | .163* | -.042 | -.206** | .292*** |
| Internet usage frequency | .313*** | .299*** | .229** | -.102 | .071 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Next, the effect of the experimental manipulation on compensatory behavior categories were tested controlling for self-esteem, contingencies of self-worth, internet usage frequency and gender. Table 3 summarizes the results of the UNIANOVA tests, where the experimental groups are treated as fixed factors and the control variables are treated as covariates. Fluid compensation was marginally significant across groups ($F(2, 159) = 2.453, p = .09$). LSD post-hoc comparisons revealed that negative self-compassion group engaged in significantly more fluid compensation compared to the control group ($p = .04$). Furthermore, self-esteem did not have an effect on fluid compensation, controlling for the self-compassion manipulation ($F(2, 159) = .547, p > .10$). However, higher self-esteem predicted less dissociation controlling for self-compassion manipulation and other covariates ($F(2, 159) = 4.493, p = .04$).

Table 3

Compensatory behavior likelihood comparisons across experimental and control groups.

| | Positive Self- Compassion | Negative Self- Compassion | Control Group | F-score | p-value |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------|---------|
| Direct Resolution | 3.25 (.93) | 3.38 (1.10) | 2.98 (1.18) | 1.308 | .27 |
| Symbolic Self- Completion | 3.05 (.97) | 3.08 (1.22) | 2.69 (1.26) | 1.210 | .30 |
| Fluid Compensation | 2.81 (.94) | 3.14 (1.15) | 2.65 (1.16) | 2.453 | .09 |
| Escapism | 3.54 (.96) | 3.56 (1.06) | 3.60 (.97) | .077 | .93 |
| Dissociation | 2.96 (.97) | 3.05 (1.03) | 3.17 (.93) | .524 | .60 |

Finally, the effect of the manipulation on acceptance of the situation was tested. Acceptance was negatively correlated with all compensatory behavior categories except escapism ($r = -.276, p < .001$ for direct resolution, $r = -.240, p = .002$ for symbolic self-completion, $r = -.188, p = .015$ for fluid compensation, $r = .330, p < .001$ for escapism, and $r = -.270, p < .001$ for

dissociation). However, acceptance of the situation was not significantly different across the experimental and the control groups ($F(2,164) = .181, p > .05$). Therefore, a mediation similar to the model tested in the pretest was not tested. Acceptance was, however, positively correlated to self-esteem ($r = .162, p = .036$).

3.1 Ancillary results

First, the relationship of chronic self-compassion with compensatory behavior, acceptance of the situation and self-esteem were investigated. However, as reported in the previous section, chronic positive self-compassion was significantly higher in the positive self-compassion group compared to the negative and the control groups. Hence, the effect of chronic positive self-compassion may be confounded.

Positive self-compassion and negative self-compassion were negatively correlated with each other ($r = -.487, p < .001$). Furthermore, positive self-compassion was positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = .506, p < .001$) and negative self-compassion was negatively correlated with self-esteem ($r = -.482, p < .001$).

Table 4 summarizes the correlations between positive and negative self-compassion and compensatory behavior categories. Direct resolution was positively correlated with negative self-compassion ($r = .18, p = .02$). Dissociation was negatively correlated with positive self-compassion ($r = -.219, p = .005$) and positively correlated with negative self-compassion ($r = .211, p = .007$), supporting the results from the pretest. A partial correlation analysis was conducted in order to control for the effect of self-esteem. The correlation between negative self-compassion and direct resolution remained significant, however the correlation between both self-compassion subscales and dissociation became non-significant.

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4

Correlations between self-compassion and compensatory behavior types

| | Direct Resolution | Symbolic Self- Completion | Fluid Compensation | Escapism | Dissociation |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------|
| Chronic positive self-compassion | -.086 | .028 | -.063 | .088 | -.219** |
| Chronic negative self-compassion | .184* | .09 | .063 | -.049 | .211** |

Acceptance of the situation was also positively correlated with positive self-compassion ($r = .240, p = .002$) and negatively correlated with negative self-compassion ($r = -.156, p = .05$). A mediation model was tested using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Model 4, with a bootstrap approach of 1000 drawings; Hayes, 2013), wherein acceptance of the situation mediated the effect between positive self-compassion and dissociation. Positive self-compassion predicted greater acceptance ($B = .360, p = .002, 95\% \text{ CI: } .134, .585$), and in turn, greater acceptance resulted in less dissociation from the negative event ($B = -.178, p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI: } -.319, -.036$). Similarly, negative self-compassion predicted less acceptance ($B = -.237, p = .05, 95\% \text{ CI: } -.470, -.003$), and in turn, less acceptance resulted in more dissociation from the negative event ($B = -.190, p = .01, 95\% \text{ CI: } -.329, -.051$).

Since both chronic self-compassion and self-esteem predicted dissociation, a multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to see whether chronic self-compassion and chronic self-esteem accounted for unique variances in dissociation. Self-compassion was entered in the regression as a unidimensional construct. Self-compassion, but not self-esteem, was a marginally significant predictor of dissociation ($B = -.283, p = .06$).

Positive self-compassion prime might have allowed participants to resolve the self-discrepancy by prompting them to evaluate the negative event from an objective and warm perspective. Therefore, participants in this condition might have not felt a need to compensate for

the event and instead felt satisfied with themselves after the prime. Hence, negative self-compassion and control groups were compared in terms of compensatory behavior, without including positive self-compassion in the analysis. Negative self-compassion group was significantly more likely to engage in fluid compensation compared to the control group ($t(110) = 2.245, p = .027$), and their likelihood of engaging in direct resolution and symbolic self-completion was marginally significant ($t(110) = 1.862, p = .065$, and $t(110) = 1.676, p = .097$, respectively).

Finally, chronic self-compassion scores were tested as a covariate in order to identify whether chronic or primed self-compassion accounted for the observed effects. Chronic negative self-compassion was a marginally significant predictor of direct resolution, controlling for experimental conditions and positive chronic self-compassion ($F(1,158) = 3.216, p = .075$). Similarly, there was a marginally significant difference across experimental and control conditions in terms of fluid compensation, controlling for chronic positive and negative self-compassion ($F(2,158) = 2.777, p = .065$). Negative self-compassion group was significantly more likely to engage in fluid compensation compared to the control group ($p = .023$).

4. Discussion

In this thesis, I report the effect of self-compassion on compensatory behavior on social media with experimental studies from a pretest and the main study. Additionally, I report the effect of self-esteem on compensatory behavior in order to investigate the differences between self-esteem and both primed and chronic self-compassion in terms of compensatory behavior.

In sum, self-compassion manipulation only predicted the likelihood of engaging in fluid compensation. Results suggest that those primed with negative self-compassion were significantly more likely to engage in fluid compensation compared to the control group. Furthermore, the effect holds true controlling for chronic self-compassion, indicating that the effect comes from the

priming. Positive self-compassion group did not significantly differ from the negative self-compassion or the control group. Therefore, the hypothesis put forward in the thesis for fluid compensation was only partially supported. Even though positive self-compassion does not motivate people to self-enhance (Neff, 2003a), negative self-compassion leaves individuals in a dissonant state following a negative event, which they feel motivated to alleviate in order to restore a positive sense of self. Fluid compensation is a relatively safe way to affirm the self because it involves affirming the self in an unthreatened domain. Therefore, it may be the reason why it was preferred more by those primed with negative self-compassion. Self-compassion manipulation did not have an effect on other forms of compensatory behavior, contrary to the hypothesis.

When self-esteem, contingencies of self-worth, internet usage frequency and gender was added into the model as covariates, the effect of negative self-compassion on fluid compensation became marginally significant. Similar to the effect without the covariates, negative self-compassion condition engaged in more fluid compensation only compared to the control group. One reason that accounts for the effect becoming marginally significant may be reduced power with the inclusion of control variables, of which only internet usage was a significant predictor.

Although the mean differences were not significant, positive self-compassion group scored in between the negative self-compassion and the control groups for direct-resolution, symbolic self-completion and fluid compensation, and was in fact closer to the negative self-compassion group. One explanation for this could be that both positive and negative self-compassion conditions are likely to engage in self-improving and self-enhancing compensatory behavior, however through different motivations. As reported in the literature, positive self-compassion entails self-improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012; Neff et al., 2007). However, as argued in this thesis, negative self-compassion may entail self-enhancement motivation to restore a positive

sense of self. Hence, both conditions may trigger the same behavior. But the reason that negative self-compassion, and not positive self-compassion, was significant for fluid compensation may be that the need for self-enhancement may be stronger and more urgent compared to the motivation for self-improvement. Future studies may explore different motivations linked to positive and negative self-compassion in terms of compensatory behavior.

Positive self-compassion group scored significantly higher in chronic self-esteem and positive self-compassion compared to the negative self-compassion and the control groups. Even though chronic self-compassion was presented to the participants after an irrelevant study lasting 20 minutes, it seems that the effects of the manipulation carried over. Therefore, both self-esteem and positive self-compassion scores may be potentially confounded and should be interpreted cautiously. Future studies may give these measures prior to the priming. Furthermore, this may indicate that a brief intervention of positive self-compassion may have longer than anticipated effects.

High self-esteem resulted in a greater likelihood of engaging with another task online and offline. Escapism might be viewed from two perspectives: 1) one might engage in these activities to really escape the negative situation, or 2) one might not feel the need to try to improve the situation and do something else instead. From the latter perspective, it makes more sense that individuals with high self-esteem would not be bothered by this negative event and continue with their daily life instead. Second, low self-esteem resulted in more dissociation. Indeed, studies indicate individuals low in self-esteem aim to prevent further losses to their self-esteem, and therefore are more likely to pursue avoidance goals, leading them to dissociate (Heimpel, et al., 2006). Contingencies of self-worth was positively correlated with direct resolution, symbolic self-completion and dissociation, and negatively correlated with escapism. This indicates that the more

someone bases their worth on a given domain, the more they will try to restore a positive sense of self, and the less they will ignore the situation after a self-discrepancy threatens that domain. Finally, women engaged in significantly more direct resolution, symbolic self-completion, and dissociation. This extends the findings in the literature which suggests that women are more likely to experience body image dissatisfaction, have lower self-esteem, and are more self-critical (Joinson, 2008; Groeys, Levine & Murnen, 2012; Larson, & Grayson, 1999), and further claims that they try to cope with negative situations regarding their appearance with either addressing the source of the problem, signaling symbolic mastery, or dissociating them from the event.

Chronic negative self-compassion predicted engaging in more direct resolution and dissociation, and chronic positive self-compassion predicted less dissociation. Pretest findings also showed that negative self-compassion group was significantly more likely to dissociate themselves compared to the positive self-compassion group. Furthermore, acceptance mediates the relationship of chronic self-compassion and dissociation in the main study, and primed self-compassion and dissociation in the pretest. Taken together, these results suggest that as people are kinder to themselves and more mindful, they accept the negative situation significantly more, and this acceptance, in turn, results in significantly less dissociation.

In support of previous findings, chronic self-compassion was significantly correlated with chronic self-esteem. However, self-compassion and self-esteem are shown to uniquely contribute to different categories of compensatory behavior, supporting the evidence in the literature about the two constructs (see Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003; Neff, 2011). Furthermore, whereas chronic self-compassion and self-esteem both predicted dissociation separately, the effect of self-esteem disappeared when controlled for self-compassion. This indicates that compared to self-esteem,

greater self-compassion is more protective against self-discrepancy when dissociative behavior is concerned.

Another finding was that acceptance was negatively associated with all of the compensatory behavior except escapism. Since acceptance was asked in the same question block with other compensatory behavior, it is possible that participants viewed acceptance as an alternative reaction to the self-discrepancy rather than a precondition as intended in the study. Another alternative explanation could be that all five categories of compensatory behavior are compensatory in nature. Those who accept the situation as it is might not feel a need to compensate for the negative situation to start with because they accept the situation as it is. Similarly, those in the positive self-compassion group might also not have a need to compensate for the negative event. Acceptance was higher in the positive self-compassion group; however, the difference was not significant across conditions.

Even though the positive self-compassion group scored significantly higher compared to the negative and control groups in the manipulation check, no difference was observed between the negative self-compassion and the control groups. The question for the manipulation check asked how warm participants currently feel to themselves, which may not be suitable to capture the difference between the negative self-compassion and the control group. Additionally, the results can also mean that positive self-compassion is more easily primed compared to negative self-compassion.

Finally, two different primes were tested for the pretest and the main study. The prime used in the pretest aimed to prime general self-compassion, whereas the prime in the main study aimed to prime situation specific self-compassion. The results of the pretest indicate that general self-

compassion interventions may also prove useful because they translate to specific behavior afterwards.

4.1 Implications

Indirect resolutions that do not address the source of the problem may reduce the self-discrepancy in the short run, however studies indicate that they may have detrimental effects in the long run (Elliot, Thrash & Murayama, 2011; Murberg, Furze, & Bru, 2004). Greater chronic self-compassion is shown to lead people to accept the negative situation as it is and in turn, dissociate themselves less. This indicates that self-compassion trainings that aim to increase chronic self-compassion could help individuals accept negative situations as they are and dissociate themselves less. Perhaps this could form the first step towards forming healthier attitudes towards oneself and engaging in more adaptive and healthy coping behavior.

Another implication may come from the fact that null results were obtained for the positive self-compassion condition. It may be possible that the positive self-compassion prime was successful in resolving the self-discrepancy by itself, so that no compensatory behavior was needed to deal with the self-discrepancy. For instance, Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley and Orzech (2009) found that mindfulness training reduced self-discrepancies and enhanced well-being. This would indicate that self-compassion interventions could also help individuals deal with the negative situations they experience without needing to resort to compensatory behavior.

Finally, self-compassion trainings may reverse the negative effect of self-esteem on dissociative behavior. As results suggest, the effect of self-esteem on dissociative compensatory behavior disappears when controlling for chronic self-compassion. Hence, self-compassion trainings might be especially helpful for those with low self-esteem in promoting adaptive and healthy attitudes and behavior towards oneself.

4.2 Managerial Implications

According to the report by Pew Research Center (2018), use of Facebook by U.S. teens plummeted from 71% in 2015 to 51% in 2018. Approximately one fifth of the participants reported a mostly negative effect of social media, some of the major causes reported to be bullying, unrealistic views of others' lives and peer pressure. Social media companies have started to take measures in order to alleviate the mental and physical well-being of social media users. For instance, Instagram launched the #PerfectlyMe campaign to combat body image, racism, eating disorder, and mental health issues. Similarly, Facebook formed a "compassion team" consisting of researchers from University of California, Yale, and Berkeley to provide users with easier ways of controlling their threads in order to avoid negative content. The findings from this thesis suggest that self-compassion trainings might be another way to help users accept negative situations, deal with them in more adaptive ways and hence, alleviate their mental well-being on social media.

4.3 Limitations

The study has several limitations. Since priming was embedded in the self-discrepancy inducing situations, a single situation was used to induce self-discrepancy because multiple situations would have required larger sample sizes. However, individuals experience various negative situations online, and a single situation was not enough to capture other potential domains of self-discrepancy. For instance, future studies could look at success or social belonging domains. Second, the items representing different compensatory behavior were generated for this thesis. Future studies can add more items that reflect different compensatory behavior categories in order to capture the range of those behavior better. Third, sample size could be another limitation of the study, as there were a lot of marginally significant results forming a similar pattern (e.g. negative self-compassion group performing in more direct resolution, more symbolic self-completion and more fluid compensation compared to the

control group). Finally, the chronic positive self-compassion and self-esteem scores were significantly different across the experimental group, which may have confounded the results including these scores. Therefore, future studies can measure these first and apply the manipulation later.



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Appendices

1- **Self-compassion manipulation** (Adapted from Leary et al., 2007)

Imagine you experience the following situation in one of the social media networks such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter.

You are tagged in a photo you look unattractive in. Now everyone will be able to see your photo. You feel embarrassed, you wish you looked more attractive.

a. **Positive self-compassion**

- 1- (**Self-kindness**) Considering the situation described above, think of ways how you would show understand, show kindness, care and concern to "yourself" just in a way you would show to a friend that would undergo a similar experience. List ways in which you would be tolerant to your own flaws regarding your appearance.
- 2- (**Common humanity**) Considering the situation described above, list ways in which other people also experience similar situations. Think how everyone goes through such difficult situations that are part of life.
- 3- (**Mindfulness**) Considering the situation described above, think of ways how you take a balanced view of the situation. Describe your feelings about the situation in an objective and unemotional fashion.

b. **Negative self-compassion**

- 1- (**Self-judgment**) Considering the situation described above, think of ways you would criticize your physical appearance. List ways in which you would be harsh about your flaws.

- 2- (Isolation)** Considering the situation described above, think about how other people must be having an easier time and having better looking pictures than you.
- 3- (Over-identification)** Considering the situation described above, list the ways how you would fixate on the parts of your appearance that make you look unattractive and this negative situation will continue to affect you in the future.

c. Control group

- 1-** Now, please describe in your own words how you feel about this situation.

2- Manipulation check

| <i>Please indicate how much you agree with the statements below.</i> | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| I currently feel warm and compassionate towards myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3- Compensatory behavior on social media.

| <i>Considering the situation you wrote about in the previous section, how likely are you to do the following?</i> | | Extremely Unlikely | Unlikely | Neither Unlikely Nor Likely | Likely | Extremely Likely |
|---|--|--------------------|----------|-----------------------------|--------|------------------|
| Direct resolution | Post another picture you where you look attractive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Direct resolution | Learn ways to take more attractive photos (i.e., use filters, new posing ways) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Symbolic self-completion | Post a photo of you wearing fancy clothes, accessories or using desirable items | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Symbolic self-completion | Post a photo of you in an attractive place (i.e., classy restaurant, nice view) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fluid compensation | Make a post that shows you are someone social, popular | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fluid compensation | Make a post that shows you are someone intellectual, rational | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Escapism | Do something else online (i.e. watching videos, reading news) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Escapism | Do something else offline (i.e., doing household chores, taking a walk) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Dissociation | Untag yourself from the photos | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Dissociation | Hide the post | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Dissociation | Turn off the notifications received for this post | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Dissociation | Ask the person to untag you from the photo | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Acceptance | Accept it for what it is. We all have our bad moments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4- Self-compassion scale (Raes et al., 2011)

| <i>Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.</i> | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy. (Over-Identification) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like. (Self-Kindness) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation. (Mindfulness) | 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. (Isolation) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition. (Common Humanity) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need. (Self-Kindness) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance. (Mindfulness) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure. (Isolation) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong. (Over-Identification) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people. (Common Humanity) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies. (Self-Judgment) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like. (Self-Judgment) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5- Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

| <i>Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.</i> | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. At times I think I am no good at all (R). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of (R). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I certainly feel useless at times (R). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure (R). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6- Social media usage

- 1) Please indicate the social media accounts you own.
- 2) Please indicate how many hours you spent on your social media accounts per week.

3) Please indicate how frequently you engage in the following activities on social media.

| | More than once a day | Once a day | Not daily, but more than once a week | Once a week | Less than once a week |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Post a new picture | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Comment under posts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Like others posts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Share status updates | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Put stories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Look at others' profiles | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Log in to your account | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7- Contingencies of self-worth (Crocker et al., 2013)

| <i>Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.</i> | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| My self-esteem does not depend on whether or not I feel attractive. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My self-esteem is influenced by how attractive I think my face or facial features are. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My sense of self-worth suffers whenever I think I don't look good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My self-esteem is unrelated to how I feel about the way my body looks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| When I think I look attractive, I feel good about myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8- Demographics

- 1) Please indicate your gender.
- 2) Please indicate your age.
- 3) Please indicate your monthly household income.