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Compassionate Values as a Resource During the Transition to College: Quiet Ego, Compassionate Goals, and Self-Compassion

Heidi A. Wayment, Taylor N. West, and Emily B. Craddock
Northern Arizona University

Abstract. This study examined the unique contributions of compassion-related values and skills on stress and life satisfaction in two samples of first-year college students. Quiet ego, a measure of a compassionate self-identity, was associated with using relatively more compassionate interpersonal goals relative to self-image goals. Self-compassion and, to a lesser extent, self-control showed similar patterns of relative goal use. We tested a path model of hypothesized relationships in Sample 1 and confirmed the model in Sample 2. Quiet ego characteristics were associated with greater life satisfaction. Furthermore, these relationships were at least partially mediated by the relationships between self-compassion, self-control, and perceived stress. Discussion focuses on the potential importance of student-focused interventions that cultivate compassionate goals and a compassionate self-identity as a resource during the transition to college.

The transition to college can be a particularly stressful time in a young person's life (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Paluki Blake, & Tran, 2010; Ross, Neibling, & Heckert, 1999). Between 30% and 55% of college students report greater than average levels of stress (ACHA, 2014; Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013), with depression and anxiety the most common reactions. Several individual-difference factors have been identified that positively influence appraisal and the coping processes needed to manage college-related stress (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus, 2001), including optimism, self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and hardiness as well as interpersonal resources such as social support and a sense of belonging (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Costa, Ripoll, Sanchez, & Carvalho, 2013; Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Jiang et al., 2014; Knowlden, Sharma, Kanekar, & Atri, 2012; Lian, Sun, Ji, Li, & Peng, 2014; Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Like most transitions, the transition to college is characterized by uncertainty, which is associated with increased self-evaluative activity (Wayment & Taylor, 1995). Such activity may include thoughts and feelings that could be characterized as self-focused (e.g., Am I smart enough? Am I popular enough? Do I fit in?). Maladaptive forms of self-focus are associated with negative affect and psychological distress

(Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1986; Mor & Winquist, 2002; Watkins, 2004; Wood, Saltzberg, & Goldsamt, 1990; Wood, Saltzberg, Neale, Stone, & Rachmiel, 1990). On the other hand, excessive focus on others is also associated with depressive symptoms, lower well-being and psychosocial adjustment, and more negative social interactions (Helgeson, 1994).

This study is based on the theoretical perspective that optimal functioning is achieved by having a compassionate focus—a motivation to be guided by compassionate values. The Dalai Lama defined compassion as a nonjudgmental open-heartedness to the suffering of self and others combined with the desire to alleviate suffering in all living things (Dalai Lama, & Chan, 2013). The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (2005) wrote extensively about the nature of compassion, its centrality to morality, and the critically important ability to reduce any perceived distinction between self and other. In his work on the compassionate mind, Gilbert (2009) identified awareness of needs of self and others without judgment; the motivation to care, nurture, and promote well-being of self and others; the ability to understand (empathy) and be moved (sympathy) by the distress and joys of self and others; the ability to tolerate distress experienced by self and others; and the ability to pursue these ideas with warmth, gentleness, and kindness as key features of compassion.

To the extent that the transition to college for young adults may make self-evaluation and self-protection needs salient (which may accentuate a sense of separateness), compassionate thoughts and feelings may be especially beneficial in that they may reduce self-focus or at least balance them with cares and concerns for others. The current study examined the impact of three psychosocial constructs that reflect, to some degree, an individual's ability to balance self and other concerns or temper maladaptive self-focus on perceived stress and life satisfaction among new college students.

Literature Review

Over the past decade, Crocker and colleagues have investigated how two types of interpersonal goals impact college students' self-concepts, their academic and social achievements, and their adjustment to college (Canevello & Crocker, 2010, 2011; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker, Canevello, Breines, & Flynn, 2010; Crocker, Olivier, & Nuer, 2009; Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009). Self-image goals, are primarily concerned with defending desired self-images and prioritizing one's own needs and desires. Such goals arise frequently in an academic setting. Longitudinal studies of first-year college students find that use of self-image goals is associated with multiple negative outcomes, including negative affect (i.e., fear, confusion, depression,

and anxiety), unrealistic academic goals and disinterest in learning from failure, and problematic behaviors, such as excessive alcohol consumption (Crocker et al., 2010; Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker et al., 2009; Moeller et al., 2009). In contrast to self-image goals, compassionate goals are more collaborative and less judgmental, placing values on the well-being of self *and* others. The use of compassionate goals appears to be especially important in successfully managing the transition to college. Several studies have found that an increase of students' compassionate goals over the course of a semester was associated with the development of more supportive relationships over time, decreases in depression and anxiety, a predicted increase in desire to learn or acquire knowledge, and greater interest in courses (Crocker & Canevello, 2008, Crocker et al., 2010; Niiya & Crocker, 2007). Crocker and colleagues have argued that college students' psychological adjustment to college is aided by the use of compassionate interpersonal goals and harmed by the use of self-image goals.

Balancing Concern for Self and Others: Key Constructs

Quiet ego. The quiet ego describes a compassionate self-identity, a perspective on the self that balances concerns for the self and others. Individuals with a quiet ego view the self and others interdependently, sustain nondefensive self-awareness and constructive self-criticism, and value personal growth in ways that promote eudemonic well-being (Wayment & Bauer, 2008). There are four quiet ego characteristics: (a) detached awareness (like mindfulness), (b) inclusive identity (sense of interconnectedness with others), (c) perspective-taking (precursor to empathy), and (d) growth (Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaska, 2014). A balanced self-identity, although correlated with a number of related characteristics (e.g., self-determination, authenticity, self-transcendence), is a unique predictor of psychological well-being (Wayment et al., 2014; Wayment, Wiist, Sullivan, & Warren, 2010). Quiet ego characteristics may be related to less perceived stress and greater life satisfaction in first-year college students.

Self-compassion. Rooted in Buddhist traditions, self-compassion is the ability to exhibit self-kindness instead of self-criticism. This ability comes from an understanding that all people suffer and of the importance of being able to be fully present without judgment. Several studies have now shown the contribution self-compassion can make to the successful adjustment to college, including lower depression and anxiety, greater self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Hagerty et al., 1996; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Raque-Bogdan, Ericson, Jackson, Martin, & Bryan, 2011). Self-compassion lowers distress by positive reframing of negative events and decreasing generalization of negative events to the self (Allen & Leary, 2010; Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). In a

longitudinal study of first-year college students, self-compassion was related to a better understanding of the process and meaning of goal pursuits (Hope, Koestner, & Milyavskaya, 2014). These authors concluded that self-compassion was a valuable protective factor during the transition to college. Thus, developing self-compassion may help students more effectively cope with college stressors and should be associated with less perceived stress and greater life satisfaction.

Self-control. Self-control has also been identified as an important psychosocial resource related to coping and well-being in students making the transition to college (Hope et al., 2014; Neely, Schaller, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011; Wei, Liao, Ku, & Shaffer, 2011). The ability to regulate one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reduces stress and improves well-being (Bandura, 1977). Students high in dispositional self-control have higher academic achievement, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, satisfying relationships, secure attachment, and positive emotions. Self-control is negatively associated with symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, binge eating, and alcohol abuse (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Although self-regulatory skills are not generally discussed in terms of self- and other-related concerns, the self-regulation process is engaged in order to restrict selfish motivations in the service of social belonging goals (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003). Most recently, self-control processes have also been identified as a key component of mindfulness in that the ability to be present with one's thoughts and feelings without judgment is a metacognitive skill involving self-regulation of attention (Terry & Leary, 2011). Mindfulness, an important aspect of both the quiet ego and self-compassion constructs, improves awareness and attention while also reducing cognitive and emotional reactivity to potentially difficult circumstances (Bowlin & Baer, 2012; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Feltman, Robinson, & Ode, 2009; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Thus, self-control should be associated with less perceived stress and greater life satisfaction.

Study Goals and Hypotheses

Our study focuses on the extent compassionate values can be useful in reducing perceived stress and life satisfaction in students making the transition to college. The initial goal was to replicate Crocker's previous finding that perceived stress and life satisfaction would be related to self-image and compassionate goals. A second goal was to examine the relationship between quiet ego characteristics, self-compassion, and self-control with use of self-image and compassionate interpersonal goals. Self-image and compassionate goals are both used by students and are positively intercorrelated (Crocker & Canevello, 2008, Crocker et al., 2010). We made no predictions regarding

how quiet ego, self-compassion, or self-control would be related to the use of self-image or compassionate goals. We did expect, however, that higher scores on quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control would be associated with a greater use of compassionate goals relative to self-image goals.

Our third goal was to examine the independent effects of quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control on perceived stress and life satisfaction. One study has shown quiet ego and self-compassion to be independent predictors of college student life satisfaction (Wayment et al., 2014), and another has shown self-compassion and self-control to be unique predictors of college student adjustment (Hope et al., 2014). Thus, we ventured the following predictions (see Figure 1). First, we expected that quiet ego would be positively related to self-control (A) and self-compassion (B). In turn, self-control and self-compassion were expected to be related to less perceived stress (C and D, respectively). We also anticipated greater levels of perceived stress to be related to lower life satisfaction (E). The four dashed paths in the figure represent relationships that we expected could be both direct and indirect. For example, we predicted that quiet ego would be negatively related to perceived stress (F), which could be direct and/or via the relationship between quiet ego, self-control, and self-compassion. Similarly, life satisfaction was predicted to be positively related to self-control (G) and self-compassion (H) directly and/or indirectly via the relationships between these variables and perceived stress. Finally, we expected quiet ego would be positively related to life satisfaction (I) either directly and/or indirectly via the multiple pathways depicted in the model.

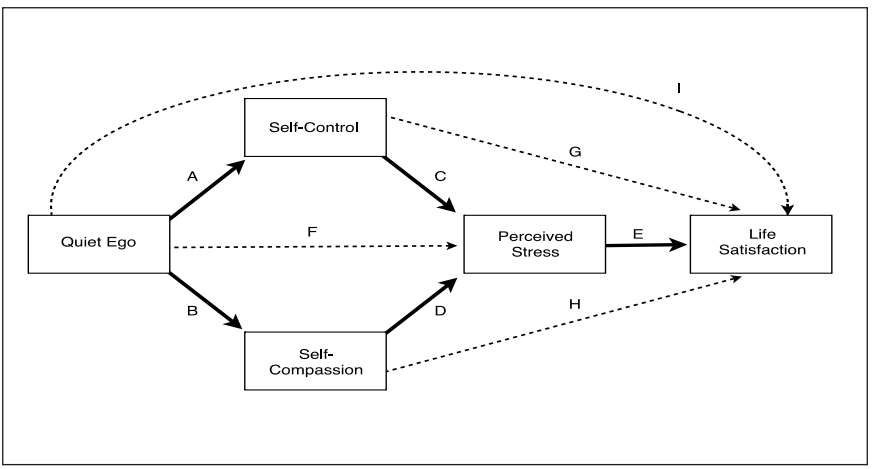

Figure 1. Hypothesized path model. Solid lines represent hypothesized direct effects. Dashed lines represent hypothesized indirect effects.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In order to examine our hypotheses in students making the transition to college, we collected data from two samples during their first year of college at a midsized university in the southwestern United States (Sample 1 N = 372; 79% female, 21% male; mean age = 18.00; Sample 2 N = 239, 69% female, 31% male; mean age = 18.49). Introductory psychology students are required to participate in three hours of research and can select from multiple studies available via a cloud-based participant management software system. All participants provided their informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire and were debriefed upon study completion. The gender makeup of Sample 1 was statistically equivalent to the gender distribution of all PSY 101 students (N > 1,800; 74% female, 26% male), $\chi^2(1) = .695$, $p = .40$, but not the gender distribution in the general university population, $\chi^2(1) = 6.49$, $p < .01$. The second sample was statistically similar to all PSY 101 students, $\chi^2(1) = .613$, $p = .43$ and the larger university student population, $\chi^2(1) = 2.61$, $p < .10$. For both samples, about 75% of students reported being White/Caucasian, 21% Hispanic, 8% Black/African American, 4% Native American, 2-3 % Pacific Islander, and 1-2% listed other (totals can add up to over 100% if participant selected more than one category).

Measures

Below is a brief description of the self-report questionnaires used in this study. Detailed information about these scales is provided in Appendix A.

Quiet ego. The Quiet Ego Scale (QES; Wayment et al., 2014) measures a compassionate self-identity, conceptualized as the theoretical intersection of four well-known psychological characteristics: (a) detached awareness, (b) inclusive identity, (c) perspective taking, and (d) growth. Fourteen items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate greater quiet ego characteristics.

Self-control. The Self-Control Scale (SCS; Tangney et al., 2004) is a 13-item measure that represents the tendency to be disciplined and abrogate impulses. For this study, we used the unidimensional scale with all 13 items, each rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all like me*; 5 = *very much like me*). Higher scores indicate greater self-control and less impulsivity.

Self-compassion. The short form of the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011) was used to assess one's kind and understanding view toward the self and experiences. Twelve items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never*; 5 = *almost always*). Higher scores indicate greater self-compassion.

Self-image and compassionate goals. Goal orientation was assessed using Crocker and Canevello's (2008) measure of self-image and compassionate goals. Thirteen items were rated on a 6-point scale (1 = *almost never*; 6 = *almost always*). Higher scores on each subscale indicate greater use of the interpersonal goals. We also computed the relative use of self-image to compassionate goals by dividing the reported use of self-image goals by reported use of compassionate goals. A ratio higher than 1 indicates relative higher use of self-image goals compared to compassionate goals, and a ratio of less than 1 indicates relative greater use of compassionate goals compared to self-image goals.

Perceived stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) is a 10-item measure that is widely used to assess subjectively experienced stress and known predictors of health and health-related outcomes. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*). Higher scores indicated greater perceived stress.

Life satisfaction. The Brief Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BSLSS) was used to assess life satisfaction and well-being (Huebner, 1991). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *terrible*; 7 = *delighted*). Higher scores represent a meaningful overall picture of adolescents' life satisfaction.

Results

All study variables were examined and determined to be normal. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all study variables by gender. To examine whether systematic gender differences were present, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on all study variables. In our first sample, the omnibus test statistic was significant, $F(7, 351) = 3.14$, $p = .003$. Female and male participants reported similar scores on quiet ego, self-control, self-compassion, and life satisfaction. Female participants reported higher levels of perceived stress ($M = 2.94$, $SD = .65$) than did male participants ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .67$), $F(1, 357) = 13.11$, $p < .02$. Female participants also reported using self-image goals more often ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .75$) than male participants ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .92$), $F(1, 357) = 3.91$, $p < .01$, and compassionate goals more often ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .66$) than male participants ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .77$), $F(1, 357) = 2.98$, $p < .02$. In our second sample, the omnibus test statistic was significant, $F(7, 221) = 2.65$, $p = .012$. Female and male participants reported similar scores on quiet ego, self-control, self-compassion, and life satisfaction. As in our first sample, female students reported higher levels of perceived stress ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .64$) than male students ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .66$), $F(1, 227) = 12.98$, $p < .0001$. In the second sample, there were no gender differences on goal use. In order to determine whether we should combine female and male participants for our analyses, we compared the covariance matrices of male and female participants on these five variables (for each sample) and found

them to be equivalent, Sample 1 Box's M test = 36.70, $F(15, 73136) = 6.44$, $p = .975$; Sample 2 Box's M test = 19.55, $F(15, 78489) = 1.27$, $p = .214$. Therefore, we computed all analyses on the total samples. Analyses were performed using SPSS for Windows 21.0 (SPSS Science, Chicago, IL, USA). Missing data were minimal, and casewise deletions were used in all analyses.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables by Gender and Study Sample

	Sample 1				**Sample 2**			
	Male (*n* = 77)		**Female (*n* = 294)**		**Male (*n* = 74)**		**Female (*n* = 165)**	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Quiet ego	3.54	.44	3.58	.40	3.51	.41	3.52	.47
Self-control	3.11	.63	3.23	.65	3.20	.64	3.14	.60
Self-compassion	3.05	.56	2.98	.62	3.14	.56	2.98	.65
Perceived stress	2.71	.67	2.94	.65	2.65	.66	2.99	.64
Life satisfaction	5.44	1.0	5.52	.99	5.54	.92	5.31	.92
Self-image goals	3.58	.92	3.82	.75	3.81	.80	3.79	.96
Compassionate goals	4.47	.77	4.70	.66	4.57	.73	4.69	.68

Goal Use, Perceived Stress, and Life Satisfaction

To examine the relationships between self-image and compassionate goals and perceived stress and life satisfaction, we computed correlations in both samples. Perceived stress was related to using more self-image goals, and more self-image goals relative to compassionate goals. Use of compassionate goals was unrelated to perceived stress but consistently related to greater life satisfaction in both samples. Using more compassionate values relative to self-image values was also related to greater life satisfaction and less perceived stress, although the strength of the association differed across samples. Correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
*Correlations Between Study Variables With Self-image Goals, Compassionate Goals, and Goal Ratio**

	Self-image goals		Compassionate goals		Goal ratio*	
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2
Perceived stress	.24***	.18**	–.12*	–.05	.29***	.12+
Life satisfaction	–.14**	.00	.24***	.34***	–.31***	–.23***
Quiet ego	.10+	.11+	.45***	.46***	–.40***	–.39***
Self-control	–.14**	–.07	.16**	.16**	–.22***	–.12+
Self-compassion	–.33***	–.21***	.10+	.16*	–.35***	–.27***

Note. Ratio computed by dividing self-image goal score by compassionate goal score.
S1 = Sample 1, $N = 359$; S2 = Sample 2, $N = 230$
+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Quiet Ego, Self-Compassion, and Self-Control and Goal Use

In order to examine whether measures of quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control were associated with a greater reliance on compassionate goals relative to self-image goals, we computed correlations (see Table 2). Self-image goals and compassionate goals were positively correlated in both samples ($r(359) = .22$, $p < .001$; $r(230) = .22$, $p < .001$). As expected, higher scores on quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control were associated with a relatively greater use of compassionate goals compared to self-image goals. The correlations with individual goal use varied across the three constructs. Quiet ego was marginally and positively related to use of self-image goals and strongly associated with use of compassionate goals. Self-compassion was negatively related to use of self-image goals and was moderately associated with the reported use of compassionate goals. Self-control was modestly correlated with compassionate goals. As predicted, quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control were associated with relatively higher use of compassionate goals relative to self-image goals.

Predictors of Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction

Before testing our hypothesized path model, we computed the zero-order correlations among all of the study variables in both samples (see Table 3). All correlations were found to be significant at the $p < .001$ level and in expected directions. For both samples, quiet ego was positively correlated with self-control and self-compassion, negatively correlated with perceived stress, and positively correlated with life satisfaction. Both self-control and self-compassion were correlated with less

perceived stress and greater life satisfaction. Perceived stress was related to lower life satisfaction. In both samples, the intercorrelations among quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control were all positive and moderate in strength: The range of correlations in Sample 1 was .27 - .36; the range in Sample 2 was .30 - .34.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

	M **(*SD*)**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. Quiet ego	3.54 (.41)		.28	.36	–.23	.33
2. Self-control	3.02 (.49)	.34		.27	–.29	.20
3. Self-compassion	2.99 (.58)	.30	.31		–.57	.48
4. Perceived stress	2.89 (.66)	–.16	-.36	–.48		–.53
5. Life satisfaction	5.55 (.99)	.21	.23	.48	–.42	

Note. Sample 1 (N = 359) in upper right-hand corner. Sample 2 (N = 230) in lower left-hand corner. All *ps* < .001.

In order to examine the unique effects of quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control on perceived stress and life satisfaction, we tested a set of simultaneous regressions using EQS with maximum likelihood estimation (Bentler, 2006). Our model included the paths found in Figure 1 and a correlation between the error terms of self-control and self-compassion. The goal was to test and fit the model in Sample 1 and confirm in Sample 2. In Sample 1, the model provided a marginal fit, $\chi^2(4)$ = 38.41, p < .0001, CFI = .92, NNFI = .80, SRMR = .08, RMSEA = .16. LaGrange Multiplier tests suggested that model fit could be improved by adding two direct paths: quiet ego to life satisfaction and self-compassion to life satisfaction. These additions resulted in a well-fitting final model, $\chi^2(2)$ = .003, p = .998, CFI = 1.0, NNFI = 1.0, SRMR = .00, RMSEA = .00. All beta coefficients were significant, p < .01, and are presented in Figure 2. The model fit extremely well, $\chi^2(2)$ = .607, p = .73, CFI = 1.0, NNFI = 1.0, SRMR = .004, RMSEA = .00. As predicted, quiet ego was positively associated with self-control (Hypothesis A) and with self-compassion (B). In turn, self-control and self-compassion were associated with less perceived stress (C, D) and a higher level of perceived stress was related to lower life satisfaction (E). In line with our hypotheses for indirect effects, quiet ego was indirectly related to perceived stress (Sample 1: –.26, p < .001, Sample 2: –.22, p < .001) via its relationships with self-control and self-compassion (F); self-control was indirectly related to life satisfaction (Sample 1: .06, p < .01; Sample 2: .05, p < .01) via its relationship with

perceived stress (G); self-compassion was indirectly related to life satisfaction (Sample 1: .20, $p < .001$; Sample 2: .07, $p < .01$) via its relationship with perceived stress (H); quiet ego was indirectly related to life satisfaction (Sample 1: .17, $p < .001$; Sample 2: .18, $p < .001$) via its relationship with self-control, self-compassion, and perceived stress (I). In addition to the indirect effects (Hypothesis I), quiet ego added predictive variance to life satisfaction (Sample 1: .20, $p < .001$; Sample 2: .07, $p < .10$). Similarly, self-compassion provided additional predictive variance to life satisfaction (Hypothesis H) beyond its indirect influence on life satisfaction (Sample 1: .17, $p < .01$; Sample 2: .38, $p < .001$). In Sample 1, the model accounted for 35% of the variance in perceived stress and 36% in life satisfaction. In Sample 2, the model accounted for 27% of the variance in perceived stress and 29% in life satisfaction. See Figure 2 for the model results.

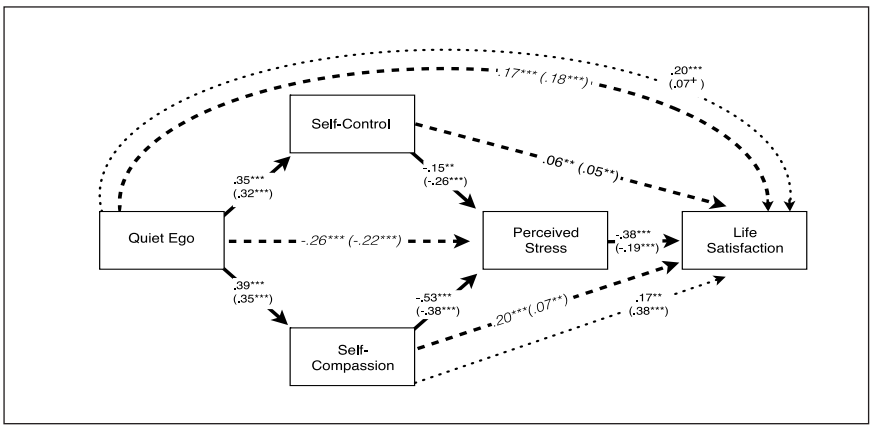

Figure 2. Path model results. Solid lines represent hypothesized direct effects. Dashed lines represent hypothesized indirect paths. Dotted lines represent direct effect paths that were added to improve the model fit in Sample 1 for a final model. The final model was then confirmed (i.e., tested once with no alterations) in Sample 2. Results from Sample 1 are listed first, with results from Sample 2 listed in parentheses.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Empirical research suggests that compassion can strengthen positive emotional states and diminish the negative psychological and biological effects of stress (Jazaieri et al., 2013; Smeets, Neff, Alberts, & Peters, 2014). Our study focused on psychosocial constructs that reflect, to varying degrees, a compassionate stance toward the self and others and their relationships to stress and life satisfaction during students' first year in college. We found that college students higher in quiet ego characteristics

reported using compassionate goals more often relative to self-image goals and having greater self-control and greater self-compassion. These multiple forms of compassion were related to less perceived stress, and lower levels of stress were associated with life satisfaction, accounting for 29-36% of the variance in life satisfaction. Although our finding that quiet ego is positively related to increased life satisfaction has been found in other samples of college students (Wayment et al., 2014), this is the first study to demonstrate that this relationship is partially mediated by both self-control and self-compassion through their positive impact on perceived stress. A strength of the current study is that it tested a hypothesized path model in one sample of first-year college students and confirmed the results in a second sample of students. Quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control were unique predictors of perceived stress and life satisfaction in students making the transition to college. Taken together, the results suggest that compassion may be an important resource for first-year college students.

These findings add to the literature on the benefits of quiet ego characteristics. The quiet ego reflects a self-identity that balances concern for self and others; self-compassion is an ability to extend to the self compassionate understanding that comes from understanding human suffering; self-control arises from an ability to consider both self and other in the context of goal pursuit. In previous research, individuals with higher quiet ego scores reported being more mindful; being motivated by humanistic, organismic, and eudemonic growth goals; having an inclusive identity that recognizes mutual interdependence with others and the natural world; and being motivated to understand the perspective of others (Wayment et al., 2014).

The Importance of Compassionate Interpersonal Goals

Quiet ego, self-compassion, and self-control were each associated with using compassionate goals relatively more often than self-image goals. The use of self-image goals may exacerbate the stressors associated with the transition to college. The results of this study replicate Crocker and colleagues' finding that self-image goals were associated with greater stress while compassionate goals were associated with greater life satisfaction. In a study of college students, Crocker and Canevello (2008) also found a significant interaction such that relationships became more supportive over time for those using compassionate goals, but only when self-image goal use was low. The current study contributes to this literature by examining the relative use of these two types of interpersonal goals and finding that the relative use of compassionate goals to self-image goals was associated with less stress and greater life satisfaction. Since college students appear to be motivated by both self-image and compassionate goals, considering the ratio of self-image to compassionate goals rather than absolute

levels of information use may have implications for practical intervention strategies. For example, rather than simply advising students against the use of self-image goals (which may be difficult during this life transition), encouraging them to bolster the use of compassionate goals may offset the negative effects of self-image goals. The current approach is reminiscent of the work on the balanced states of mind model (BSOM), which has found that mental health outcomes in response to stress are better when negative thoughts are balanced by positive thoughts (Wong, 2010).

Self-Control and Self-Compassion

Results from two path models revealed that self-control and self-compassion were related to life satisfaction via their independent relationships with perceived stress. This finding is similar to a study by Hope and associates (2014) showing the impact of self-compassion, controlling for self-control. However, the current results also show the relative importance of these two constructs on life satisfaction. In addition to its indirect effect on life satisfaction (mediated by perceived stress), self-compassion had a direct effect on life satisfaction. Thus, self-compassion had a stronger relationship to life satisfaction than self-control. Students higher in self-compassion reported using self-image goals less often, and greater use of self-image goals was related to greater perceived stress. Self-compassion may be beneficial to students by helping them avoid goals that increase risk for distress. This finding may provide additional support to the conclusion reached by Hope and colleagues (2014) that self-compassion is a potentially very important resource for first-year college students and may have important implications for identity development and maturation. Self-control was modestly associated with using more compassionate goals. The greater use of compassionate goals may be related to the argument made by Baumeister and Vohs (2003) that social belonging goals give rise to self-regulatory behavior. The present results suggest that researchers interested in factors contributing to self-regulation might include measures of compassionate interpersonal goals or other indicators of the impact of considering others' needs on self-regulatory behavior. Finally, the positive correlations found between self-control, self-compassion, and quiet ego suggest important commonalities among these three constructs. Candidates include the ability to self-regulate one's attention (Terry & Leary, 2011) and the consideration of self in the context of others or some other common feature. Future studies could not only seek to replicate these findings but also examine unique associations to better understand their contribution to reducing perceived stress during the transition to college.

Limitations

We tested our hypothesized model in two samples of first-year college students and found strikingly similar results in both samples, strengthening confidence in the results. The path models accounted for more than 30% of the variance in measures of perceived stress and life satisfaction in college students. Of course, the results should be interpreted tentatively; further studies are needed to provide additional information about the strength of the benefits of compassionate values in coping with the stressors associated with the first year of college. Limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, relying on self-reported estimates of key constructs, and that the samples were not generalizable to the larger university population from which they came. Although the gender distribution in the two samples did not differ from the larger PSY 101 pool, the pool itself is not statistically equivalent to the gender breakdown for the university as a whole. Future studies would benefit by examining these issues using more objective measures of stress and well-being (e.g., physiological or biological indicators) in nontraditional college students or nonresidential students (Gefen & Fish, 2013) or noncollege student samples, with age, gender, and ethnic variability.

Implications and Future Directions

The most common recommendations students receive about how to cope with college stressors include many self-help skills, such as making healthy lifestyle choices (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep), developing supportive social networks, and improving time-management and academic skills (Conley, Travers, & Bryant, 2013; Maher, Doerksen, Elavsky, & Conroy, 2014; Pilcher, Ginter, & Sadowsky, 1997; Von Ah, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park, & Kang, 2004). A recent meta-analysis concluded that cognitive, behavioral, and mindfulness-based interventions are all effective in reducing the effects of stress on college students. And, although there are a number of stress interventions that are effective in reducing anxiety and depression in college students, few seek treatment (Regehr et al., 2013). Results from the current study contribute to the literature on the transition experiences of first-year college students by demonstrating that developing compassionate values, using compassionate goals, and strengthening a compassionate self-identity may be useful stress management tools, as well. Short-term compassion and self-compassion interventions have been shown to lead to greater altruistic behavior, greater understanding of the suffering of other people, improved executive and emotional control, and reduced negative affect (Weng et al., 2013). Further, given the findings regarding self-image and compassionate interpersonal goals, we recommend developing an intervention that

helps students understand the goals that drive their self-evaluations (Wayment & Taylor, 1995). For example, Crocker and colleagues have written about the potential benefit of an intervention that reduces reliance on self-image goals and increases the use of compassionate goals. Results from the present study suggest that strengthening quiet ego characteristics may be helpful for raising student awareness about the importance of balancing self- and other-focused concerns and the importance of their compassionate values and ideals.

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Reader May Respond:

Heidi A. Wayment
Professor, Psychological Sciences
Northern Arizona University
E-mail: Heidi.Wayment@nau.edu
Phone: (928) 273-1043

Appendix A

Detailed Information About Self-Report Measures

Measure	Scale items	Sample 1 α	Sample 2 α
Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment et al., 2014)	I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.	.70	.76
	I find myself doing things without paying much attention.*		
	I feel a connection to all living things.		
	Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.		
	For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.		
	I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.*		
	I feel a connection with strangers.		
	When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while.		
	I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.		
	I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.*		
	I sometimes find it difficult to see things from another person's point of view.		
	I feel a connection to people of other races.		
	I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.		
	When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.*		
Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004)	I am good at resisting temptation.	.79	.81
	I have a hard time breaking bad habits.*		
	I am lazy.*		
	I say inappropriate things.*		
	I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun.*		
	I refuse things that are bad for me.		
	I wish I had more self-discipline.*		
	People would say that I have iron self-discipline.		
	Pleasure and fun sometimes keep me from getting work done.*		

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Measure	Scale items	Sample 1 α	Sample 2 α
Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004)	I have trouble concentrating.*		
	I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals.		
	Sometimes I can't stop myself from doing something, even if I know it's wrong.*		
	I often act without thinking through all the alternatives.*		
Self-Compassion (Raes et al., 2011)	When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.*	.80	.80
	I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.		
	When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.		
	When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.*		
	I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.		
	When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.		
	When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.		
	When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.*		
	When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.*		
	When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.		
	I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.*		
	I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.*		
Self-Image & Compassionate Goals (Crocker & Canevello, 2008)	*During the past two weeks, how much did you WANT to or TRY to:*		
	Self-Image Goals	.73	.77
	convince others that you are right.		
	avoid the possibility of being wrong.		
	get others to recognize or acknowledge your positive qualities.		
	avoid being rejected by others.		
	avoid taking risks or making mistakes.		
	avoid showing your weaknesses.		

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Measure	Scale items	Sample 1 α	Sample 2 α
Self-Image & Compassionate Goals (Crocker & Canevello, 2008	*During the past two weeks, how much did you WANT to or TRY to:*		
	Compassionate Goals	.72	.80
	be supportive of others.		
	be constructive in your comments to others.		
	avoid doing things that aren't helpful to me or others.		
	avoid being selfish or self-centered.		
	have compassion for others' mistakes and weaknesses.		
	avoid doing anything that would be harmful to others.		
	make a positive difference in someone else's life.		
Perceived Stress (Author)	*During the past two weeks, how often have you:*	.91	.85
	been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?		
	felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?		
	felt nervous and "stressed"?		
	felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?		
	felt that things were going your way?		
	found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?		
	been able to control irritations in your life?		
	felt that you were on top of things?		
	been angered because of things that were outside of your control?		
	felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?		
Brief Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991)	*I would describe my satisfaction with:*	.86	.77
	my family life		
	my friendships		
	my school experiences		
	myself		
	where I live		
	my overall life		

* item needs to be reverse-coded before computing mean
S1 = Sample 1; S2 = Sample 2