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## Self-Image Goals and Compassionate Goals: Costs and Benefits

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### Abstract

Two types of interpersonal goals—self-image goals and compassionate goals—reflect distinct motivational perspectives on the relationship between the self and others—egosystem and ecosystem perspectives, respectively. Research on the associations of self-image goals and compassionate goals with students' experiences in their first semester of college is described. Chronic self-image goals and compassionate goals predict changes in learning and achievement goals, self-regulation and goal progress, social support and friendships, emotions, and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Self-image goals have costs for belonging, and compassionate goals have benefits for belonging.

### Keywords

self-image; compassion; relationships; anxiety; depression

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Humans are social animals; belonging in dyadic relationships, families, communities, organizations, and societies helps people meet their fundamental physical, social, and psychological needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging itself involves two distinct processes: gaining inclusion, acceptance, and status (e.g., Leary & Baumeister, 2000), and creating supportive, mutually caring relationships with others and sustaining those relationships over time (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000; Uchino, 2004).

Given the importance of belonging, it is not surprising that people often have social or interpersonal goals, even for activities that seem distinctly nonsocial in nature. In this article, we describe two types of interpersonal goals—self-image goals and compassionate goals. We review a program of research on the connection between these two goals and students' experiences in their first semester of college. Students' chronic self-image goals and compassionate goals predict changes in their learning and achievement goals, self-regulation and goal progress, social support and friendships, emotions, and symptoms of anxiety and depression. We show that these two types of social goals typically reflect distinct motivational perspectives on the relationship between the self and other--egosystem and ecosystem perspectives--and hypothesize that they activate distinct physiological systems associated with self-preservation and species-preservation. We argue that self-image goals

with an ecosystem motivational perspective have many costs, including costs for belonging; compassionate goals with an ecosystem motivational perspective have many benefits, including benefits for belonging, for students confronting the challenge of adjusting to college. We conclude by considering the possibility of having self-image goals with an ecosystem motivational perspective, and compassionate goals with an ecosystem motivational perspective.

## Self-Image Goals

The initial stages of inclusion into relationships, organizations, and groups and advancement within them can depend heavily on self-presentations (Leary, 2007). Job interviews require appearing as if one has the requisite qualities for success by dressing, speaking, and acting the part. College applications require presenting oneself as academically accomplished, creative, or athletically gifted. Initial phases of romantic relationships also require attracting interest by creating the appearance of being a desirable partner. Not surprisingly, people want others to notice their positive qualities (Schlenker, 2003). Typically, people engage in self-presentation and impression management not to deceive others, but with the intent to convey an accurate, but idealized or glorified, conception of the self that the actor genuinely believes to be true (Baumeister, 1982; Greenwald & Breckler, 1985; Leary, 1995; Schlenker, 1980).

People both want others to see them as having desirable qualities, and they want to see themselves this way (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). How people view themselves and how others view them are inextricably linked (Cooley, 1956; Leary & Downs, 1995; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985).

## Ecosystem Motivational Perspective

People with self-image goals typically view the relation between the self and others with an ecosystem motivational perspective. Like a camera lens zooming in on the self, they focus on themselves and their own needs and desires. They view the relationship between the self and others as competitive or zero-sum--one person's gain is another's loss. They evaluate and judge people, including themselves, and they expect evaluation and judgment from others. They are concerned with the impressions others hold of them, leading to self-consciousness and social anxiety. They focus on proving themselves, demonstrating their desired qualities, validating their worth, and establishing their deservingness. In this framework people prioritize their own perceived needs over those of others. Constructing, inflating, maintaining, and defending desired self-images becomes a means to satisfy their needs by convincing others of their value and worth.

An ecosystem perspective captures a limited piece of reality. In this perspective, people focus on others only insofar as others give or withhold something from the self such as approval, inclusion, or validation (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), the self gains or loses from association or comparison with others (Tesser, 1988), or others reflect on the self (Tesser, 1988). They tend not to consider the needs and desires of others, or consider others' needs as equally important as their own. They view their own behavior as a necessary response to the situation in which they find themselves, and do not think about how their own behavior creates or shapes the situations they experience, particularly the unpleasant aspects of those situations.

Situations construed as personally threatening, competitive, or zero-sum (i.e., one person's gain is another's loss) should activate an ecosystem motivational perspective. In these situations, people easily confuse the self with the self-image; they interpret and respond to

threats to their desired images as their well-being or survival was at stake. People also differ in chronic activation of these beliefs across situations; individual differences such as social anxiety, rejection sensitivity, narcissism, interpersonal mistrust, and insecure attachment styles should all be associated with chronic tendencies to view situations through an egosystem lens.

## Compassionate Goals

Acceptance, inclusion, and status are essential but not sufficient for social animals. People also need close, supportive relationships with others who genuinely care about their well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Humans depend on supportive relationships with close others to meet their basic physical, social, and psychological needs. Human infants require attachment figures who meet their needs for safety, food, shelter, comfort, and so on (Bowlby, 1969). As adults, people often meet their needs and achieve their goals through collaboration with others, particularly others with whom they share an emotional connection or bond (Brown & Brown, 2006). Relationships with close others provide material, social, and psychological support that fosters both physical and psychological health (S. Cohen & Syme, 1985; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1996; Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997; Uchino, 2004; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Communal relationships, in which people give support because they care about the well-being of others, provide long-term physical, social, and psychological safety and security (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986).

Close and caring relationships with others satisfy the need to belong as much as inclusion and acceptance, yet these two aspects of belonging may depend on different interpersonal processes. Whereas gaining inclusion and status depend on successfully constructing desired self-images, creating close supportive relationships depends on disclosing vulnerabilities and being supportive of others and responsive to their needs (see Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004, for a review). People feel close and connected to others whom they perceive to be responsive and supportive (LeMay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007). Feelings of closeness, in turn, foster the desire to give support to others (Brown & Brown, 2006). Thus, people who give support in response to others' needs and out of concern for others' welfare build close communal relationships in which they ultimately receive support, even though obtaining support is not their goal (Clark et al., 1986, p. 333). Close, supportive relationships are important in many contexts, including with romantic partners, family members, friends, and many work relationships. These relationships involve an emotional bond or connection, in which people care about the well-being of each other, or share a common concern about the well-being of someone or something else.

## Ecosystem Motivational Perspective

We propose that when people have compassionate goals, they typically have an ecosystem motivational perspective on the relation between the self and others. In biology, an ecosystem is a community of species together with its physical environment, considered as a unit. In a healthy ecosystem, the species fulfill each others' biological needs for nutrients, oxygen, carbon dioxide, light and shade, etc., creating an often delicate balance of mutually interdependent life. Harm to one element of the ecosystem can negatively affect all species in the ecosystem.

We draw on the biological notion of an ecosystem as a metaphor for a perspective in which the self is part of a larger whole, a system of separate individuals whose actions nonetheless have consequences for others, with repercussions for the entire system, that ultimately affect the ability of everyone to satisfy their fundamental needs. Like a camera lens aimed at the self but zoomed out, people with an ecosystem motivational perspective see themselves and their own needs and desires as part of a larger system of interconnected people (and other

living things), who also have needs and desires. We propose that with an ecosystem perspective, people view the relationship between the self and others as non-zero-sum, because the well-being of the system depends on the well-being of each of its parts, and harm to one part ripples through the system, ultimately affecting the self. With an ecosystem perspective people prioritize the needs of others, not out of virtue or self-sacrifice, but because they understand these connections and consequently care about the well-being of others. They feel clear and connected to others. These feelings elevate and inspire them to improve, grow, and expand their capacities (Haidt, 2003).

Like the camera aimed at the self but zoomed out, an ecosystem motivational perspective captures a larger piece of reality. In this perspective, people take others into account because others' needs are as important to the well-being of the system as their own. They view their own behavior as a starting point for creating a healthy or unhealthy system through the positive or negative ripple effects of their own behavior. They see themselves as having responsibility for creating the relationships and environments they want.

Ecosystem motivational perspectives are activated at moments when people understand and appreciate their connectedness to others and consequently trust that it is possible to meet their own needs in ways that are good for others, even if they do not know how. Instead of protecting themselves and competing with others to get what they want, they believe they can collaborate with others to create positive outcomes, and that taking the needs of others into consideration creates their best chance for meeting their own needs. At these moments, people believe it is important that people take care of each other.

An ecosystem motivational perspective is not selfless, self-sacrificing, or self-disparaging; the self is part of the larger picture, and the needs of the self have as much importance as the needs of others. In this perspective, selfishness and self-sacrifice are opposite sides of the same coin; in both, the interests of the self and others are viewed within a zero-sum framework. For example, unmitigated communion, which involves sacrificing the self for the apparent benefit of others, represents an egosystem perspective, in which people have self-image goals to be seen as giving to gain acceptance and admiration from others and validate their own self-worth (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). Similarly, giving so that others will feel obligated to reciprocate or feel indebted reflects an egosystem perspective, not an ecosystem perspective, because it disregards others' needs.

We assume that people can take an egosystem or an ecosystem perspective on any situation, and that like a camera lens, they can shift from one perspective to the other.

## Empirical Research on Self-Image and Compassionate Goals

Crocker and her colleagues have examined the costs and benefits of self-image and compassionate goals in two longitudinal studies of students in their first semester of college. The first semester of college is challenging for a variety of reasons, including the increased difficulty and competitiveness of academic work, and the disruption of social support networks resulting from moving away from the nuclear family for the first time. Along with meeting academic challenges, creating and maintaining friendships ranks among the most important tasks of the first semester of college. Many students find the first semester of college quite stressful, and some experience symptoms of depression or anxiety during their first semester. Students' goals during this challenging time may exacerbate or attenuate the difficulties they experience.

To measure students' goals, Crocker and Canevello (in press) asked students what they wanted or tried to do in past week (or day). Examples of items assessing self-image goals include, "get others to recognize or acknowledge your positive qualities," "avoid showing

your weaknesses,” “avoid taking risks or making mistakes,” and “convince others that you are right” ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Examples of items assessing compassionate goals include, “be supportive of others,” “have compassion for others’ mistakes and weaknesses,” “avoid doing anything that would be harmful to others,” and “avoid being selfish or self-centered,” ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Because compassionate goals are more socially acceptable than self-image goals (Crocker & Canevello, in press), the tendency to respond in socially desirable ways was assessed and controlled for in all analyses. Although men and women did not differ in their average levels of self-image goals, women on average were higher in compassionate goals, so gender was also controlled in all analyses.

The Goals and Adjustment to College Study examined the experiences of 199 first-semester college freshmen (Canevello & Crocker, 2007; Crocker & Canevello, in press; Crocker, Niiya, & Luhtanen, 2007). Students completed pretest measures at the beginning of their first semester of college and posttest measures at the end of their first semester. In between they completed a weekly web-based survey, which assessed their goals, academic experiences, and relationships in the past week. In the Goals and Adjustment to College Study, we assessed self-image and compassionate goals for academics and friendships each week. This study had three main aims: 1) to explore the personality and individual difference correlates of chronic self-image and compassionate goals (averaged across the 10 weeks); 2) to examine whether chronic goals predict changes over the semester in learning, self-regulation, well-being, and relationships; and 3) to see whether weekly fluctuations in goals are associated with fluctuations in weekly emotions, academic experiences, relationship experiences, self-regulation, and well-being.

The Roommate Goals Study examined the relationship experiences of 65 pairs of roommates for three weeks during their first semester of college (Canevello & Crocker, 2007; Crocker & Canevello, in press). Both members of the roommate pairs completed pretest and posttest measures focused on their relationship, and completed 21 daily web-based surveys about their relationship goals and experiences each day. In the Roommate Goals study, students rated their self-image and compassionate goals for their roommate relationship.

### Correlates of Self-Image and Compassionate Goals

Crocker and Canevello (in press, Study 1) examined associations between compassionate and self-image goals and individual difference variables assessed in the Goals and Adjustment to College Study. If people with chronically high compassionate goals typically have an ecosystem motivational perspective, they should have views of the self and relationships that distinguish them from people with low compassionate goals. First, people with compassionate goals should see people as interconnected, regardless of identities such as nationality or group membership. This perspective is reflected in two aspects of spiritual transcendence (Piedmont, 1999): (1) universality, which refers to the feeling that all life is interconnected and a sense of shared responsibility of one creature to another; and (2) connectedness, a sense of personal responsibility to other people that extends across generations and within a community.

Associated with this sense of inter-connectedness, people with compassionate goals should tend to view relationships with others as non-zero-sum (Messick, 1967; Swingle, 1970.); that is, they should assume that success for one person does not detract from others’ success. They should be low in psychological entitlement, not believing that they deserve more than others, (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). People with compassionate goals toward others should be high in compassion toward themselves. Neff (2003) suggested that self-compassion entails three basic components: (a) extending kindness and understanding toward oneself rather than harsh self-criticism and judgment; (b) seeing one’s

suffering as part of the larger human experience rather than separating and isolating; and (c) mindfulness, which refers to keeping events and emotions in perspective, rather than blowing them out of proportion or exaggerating their significance. These qualities of self-compassion should be revealed in private self-consciousness, i.e., self-reflective awareness of one's internal states (Fenigstein, 1987; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975).

If people with chronically high self-image goals typically have an egosystem motivational perspective, they should have views of the self and relationships that distinguish them from people low in self-image goals. First, people with high self-image goals should tend to view their social interactions as zero-sum in nature, with gains for one person coming at the expense of another. They should be preoccupied with getting what they deserve, revealed by high psychological entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004), although feeling undeserving could also reflect an egosystem perspective. Because people with self-image goals want others to recognize and acknowledge their desirable qualities, they should attend to how the self is viewed by others; that is, they should be high in public self-consciousness and social anxiety (Fenigstein, 1987; Fenigstein et al., 1975), low in self-compassion, and high in self-judgment (Neff, 2003).

Because chronic compassionate goals correlated positively with self-image goals, zero-order correlations of one goal with other measures could be explained by the other goal. Consequently, the goals were entered simultaneously in regression analyses to assess the unique correlates of each goal while controlling for the other (Crocker & Canevello, in press).

Controlling for self-image goals, compassionate goals were associated with spiritual transcendence, i.e., the belief that all life is interconnected (Piedmont, 1999), lower zero-sum beliefs, higher self-compassion, high private self-consciousness, low avoidant attachment style, low psychological entitlement, and high agreeableness and extraversion. Self-image goals, on the other hand, were associated with higher zero-sum beliefs, lower self-compassion, higher public self-consciousness and social anxiety, increased attachment insecurity (both anxiety and avoidance), and greater psychological entitlement.

These findings indicate that people with chronic self-image goals typically have an egosystem motivational perspective on the self in relation to others, in which they must compete with others for resources and control how others view them to get what they want. People with chronic compassionate goals, on the other hand, typically have an ecosystem perspective, viewing people and other living things as interconnected, success for one not threatening others, and mistakes and failures as part of the human experience, warranting compassion.

### Consequences for Goal-Related Affect

Self-image goals and compassionate goals are associated with distinct emotional experiences. In the Goals and Adjustment to College Study (Crocker & Canevello, in press, Study 1), participants responded to open-ended questions about their most important goals for academics and friendships in the past week; they then rated how much those goals made them feel a number of affective states. Factor analysis of these items using principal factors extraction and oblimin rotation yielded two factors, which we called *clear and connected* (comprising peaceful, connected to others, cooperative, loving, clear, present, empathic, and engaged;  $\alpha = .91$ ), and *afraid and confused* (comprising fearful, ambivalent/conflicted, pressured, distracted, confused, critical, isolated, and competitive;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

Averaging across the 10 weekly reports, students with high chronic compassionate goals reported that their most important academic and friendship goals made them feel clear and

connected, especially if they were low in self-image goals. Students with high chronic self-image goals reported that their most important academic and friendship goals made them feel afraid and confused, especially if they were low in compassionate goals. Analyses using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) showed that these effects replicated within-participants, as their goals changed from week to week; regardless of students' chronic levels, weekly increases in compassionate goals predicted weekly increases in feeling clear and connected, especially on weeks participants were low in self-image goals. Weekly increases in compassionate goals predicted decreases in feeling afraid and confused on weeks when participants were high in self-image goals, but not on weeks when they were low in self-image goals (and therefore already low in afraid and confused feelings). The associations between goals and feelings may be bidirectional. Self-image goals may cause people to feel afraid and confused, and feeling afraid and confused may cause people to have self-image goals. Similarly, compassionate goals may cause people to feel clear and connected, and feeling clear and connected may cause people to have compassionate goals.

Data from the Roommate Goals Study explained why the goals are associated with distinct affective experiences (Crocker & Canevello, in press). In this study, students' chronic compassionate goals for their relationship with their roommate predicted increases from pretest to posttest (22 days later) in clear and connected feelings and decreases in afraid and confused feelings about their roommate relationship. Chronic self-image goals predicted increases in afraid and confused feelings and decreases in clear and connected feelings about roommates. Furthermore, chronic compassionate goals predicted decreases in zero-sum beliefs, whereas chronic self-image goals predicted increases in zero-sum beliefs, and change in zero-sum beliefs fully or partially accounted for the effect of goals on feelings about the roommate. Similar relationships between goals, zero-sum thinking (feeling competitive) and feelings were observed within days, and also in lagged analyses from day to day. Specifically, self-image goals one day predicted increases in feeling competitive from that day to the next, which predicted increases in feeling afraid and confused from the second day to the third day; compassionate goals one day predicted increases in feeling cooperative from that day to the next, which predicted increases in feeling clear and connected from the second to the third day.

In sum, self-image goals are associated with feeling afraid and confused, apparently because they foster zero-sum beliefs about the relationship between the self and others. Compassionate goals are associated with feeling clear and connected, in part because they foster non-zero-sum beliefs about the relationship between the self and others.

### **Consequences for Anxiety and Depression**

The affective consequences of self-image and compassionate goals extend to symptoms of affective disorders, specifically anxiety and depression (Crocker, Breines, & Flynn, 2007). Participants in the Goals and Adjustment to College Study completed the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977) and the Trait Anxiety Scale (Spielberger, Vagg, Barker, Donham, & Westberry, 1980) at pretest and again at posttest (10-12 weeks later). Chronic self-image goals (averaged across the 10 weekly reports) predicted increases in symptoms of depression and anxiety, whereas chronic compassionate goals predicted decreases in symptoms of depression and anxiety over the first semester of college.

### **Consequences for Achievement Goals**

Students' goals to construct desired images of themselves as smart and competent can affect how they approach academic tasks, their experience while doing so, and their academic achievement (Covington, 2000). Covington's (1984) self-worth theory of achievement

motivation assumes that the achievement goals adopted by students reflect an effort to establish and maintain a sense of self-worth by constructing a self-image as smart. This type of goal has variously been called ego-involved goals (Nicholls, 1984), status goals (Skaalvik, 1997), performance goals (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997), or ability-validation goals (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Self-image goals to appear smart and competent negatively affect motivation and achievement (see Covington, 2000, for a review).

Prosocial goals, on the other hand, contribute to academic motivation. According to a review by Covington (2000), three conclusions can be drawn from research: (1) children of all ages value social goals such as making friends and being responsible to others, sometimes valuing social goals more than academic goals; (2) children with prosocial goals are liked and respected by their peers; and (3) prosocial behavior is positively associated with academic success. As Covington (2000, p. 179) notes, however, the reasons for the association between prosocial goals and academic achievement “are not entirely clear, except to say that, motivationally speaking, both prosocial goals and academic achievement are inextricably linked.”

We propose that caring about something larger than the self motivates people to grow and expand their capacities, and encourages learning under difficult or challenging circumstances. Although people are typically defensive about information suggesting that their behavior is harmful, writing about important values or close relationships induces feelings of love and connection, which reduces defensiveness to self-threatening health information (Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, in press). Similarly, compassionate goals may foster students’ desire to grow and expand their capacities, which may in turn foster learning orientations in school (Wentzel, 1999). When students care about others and want to support them to learn, they have a reason to persevere through their own academic difficulties. Consequently, students with compassionate goals may feel more interested in their classes, seek help more, and self-regulate better, and their learning goals may increase.

In the Goals and Adjustment to College Study, Crocker, Niiya, and Luhtanen (2007), examined whether chronic self-image and compassionate goals for academics predict change in learning- and performance-oriented achievement goals over the first semester of college, and academic experiences during the semester. Each week, participants rated their interest in their courses, how often they asked questions in class, and growth goals (e.g., desire to expand their capacities or avoid staying stuck in their usual way of thinking). Participants who averaged high compassionate goals across the 10 weekly reports also reported more growth goals, interest in their courses, asking more questions, and better self-regulation. Furthermore, on weeks compassionate goals increased, participants were more interested in their courses, asked more questions in class, and had more growth goals. Self-image goals were unrelated to any of the learning orientation measures in these analyses.

Self-image and compassionate goals also predicted changes in students’ achievement goals over the semester. Students completed three measures of learning goals and three measures of performance goals at pretest and posttest. Chronic self-image goals across the 10 weekly reports predicted decreases over the semester in the desire to learn from failure (Niiya & Crocker, 2007), and increases in performance goals, particularly the goal to demonstrate intelligence (ability-validation goals, Grant & Dweck, 2003). Chronic compassionate goals predicted increases in the goals to acquire knowledge and learn from failure over the semester (Niiya & Crocker, 2007).

In sum, both between- and within-person analyses of learning-oriented outcomes and analyses of changes in achievement goals across the first semester of college indicate that



compassionate goals are associated with increased learning orientations. Self-image goals, on the other hand, predicted increases in performance-focused achievement goals.

### Consequences for Self-Regulation and Goal Progress

In the Goals and Adjustment to College Study, students rated their progress toward their most important academic and friendship goals each week. Students with high average compassionate goals reported making more progress toward their goals averaged across the 10 weekly reports (Moeller, Crocker, & Canevello, 2008). Furthermore, on weeks students' compassionate goals increased, their goal progress also increased. Path analyses showed that compassionate goals predict feeling clear and connected, whereas self-image goals predict feeling afraid and confused (as previously described); feeling clear and connected predict better self-regulation (e.g., focusing on important goals, resisting distractions, giving one's best effort) whereas feeling afraid and confused negatively predicted self-regulation, controlling for goals; and self-regulation strongly predicted progress toward goals, controlling for goals and feelings.

These analyses show that compassionate goals predict self-reports of progress toward important academic and friendship goals. However, the Goals and Adjustment to College Study did not include an objective measure of goal progress, so it is not possible to determine whether students with compassionate goals really did make greater progress. In a subsequent study, students planning to take the Graduate Record Exam were recruited for a study of progress toward their goals to learn vocabulary words (Moeller et al., 2008, Study 2). The first week of the study, students indicated how many vocabulary words they wanted to learn each week, and how much having that goal made them feel clear and connected, and how much it made them feel afraid and confused. They took an initial test to assess their current vocabulary skills, and Students logged onto a web page the following week to take another vocabulary test. The more students' goals made them feel clear and connected, the more their vocabulary test score increased from the previous week's score. Thus, feeling clear and connected predicts not only subjective experiences of goal progress, but also actual improvement on vocabulary test scores.

### Consequences for Relationships

When people have compassionate goals, they should give more support to others. Consequently, others should feel supported and want to give support back, not out of obligation but out of a sense of caring. In other words, people with compassionate goals may create a supportive interpersonal environment for others and themselves. As a result, people with chronic compassionate goals may increase in trust, building confidence that others can be depended on and faith that others will be "responsive and caring despite the vicissitudes of an uncertain future" (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985, p. 97) and develop more incremental theories of relationships, strengthening their belief that relationships can improve (Knee, 1998).

Self-image goals may undermine these beneficial consequences of compassionate goals for relationships (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000; Crocker & Park, 2004; Feeney & Collins, 2001). In romantic relationships, egoistic motivations for caregiving negatively predict responsiveness of caregiving, and positively predict controlling and compulsive caregiving (Feeney & Collins, 2001, 2003). When people give support to obtain something in return, the needs of the recipient are secondary, if they are considered at all. Support providers' self-image goals signal that they care more about obtaining something for the self than about the well-being of the recipient. Consequently, when support providers have compassionate goals and give support, but are also high in self-image goals, the support they provide may not be experienced as caring and supportive by recipients. Because recipients do not feel

supported, they should be less likely to care for and respond to the support provider's needs. As a result, providers' support and trust will not increase.

Results of the Goals and Adjustment to College Study support the hypothesis that compassionate goals foster social support and trust, whereas self-image goals foster decreased social support (Crocker & Canevello, in press, Study 1). Chronic compassionate goals averaged over the 10 weekly reports predicted increases in perceived available social support from friends and significant others, and increased interpersonal trust, but only for participants who were low in self-image goals.

Each week, participants in the Goals and Adjustment to College Study rated their feelings of closeness and loneliness, and interpersonal conflict. Chronic compassionate goals were associated with greater closeness; especially for students with low self-image goals. Chronic self-image goals were associated with greater loneliness and conflict, especially for students with low compassionate goals.

Finally, students with chronic compassionate goals endorsed the belief that people should take care of each other, whereas students with chronic self-image goals endorsed the belief that people should take care of themselves, even at the expense of others. HLM analyses showed that on weeks students' self-image goals increased, they reported more loneliness and conflict, and increased belief that people should take care of themselves even at the expense of others. On weeks their compassionate goals increased, they reported more closeness, less conflict, and increased belief that people should take care of each other.

Chronic goals predicted changes in students' entity and incremental theories of friendship (Canevello & Crocker, 2007, Study 1). Chronic self-image goals predicted increased entity friendship theory (e.g., "A successful friendship is mostly a matter of finding a compatible person right from the start"), whereas chronic compassionate goals predicted increased incremental friendship theory (e.g., "A successful friendship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities").

Although the goals are clearly associated with different relationship experiences, both on average across the semester and as goals change from week to week, data from the Goals and Adjustment to College Study cannot distinguish between intrapersonal and interpersonal accounts of these effects. Do students high in compassionate goals and low in self-image goals simply *perceive* increased available support and trust independent of the reality of their relationships, or do they actually *receive* more support from others?

The Roommate Goals Study, in which 65 roommate pairs completed pretest and posttest measures and 21 daily diary reports, supported the view that compassionate and self-image goals affect the experiences of relationship partners, which in turn affects the support people receive from their partners. Crocker and Canevello (in press, Study 2) used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (L. Campbell & Kashy; Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) to examine whether actors' average goals across the 21 daily reports predict changes in actors' own reports of social support given and received from pretest to posttest, and whether actors' goals predict changes in their roommates' (partners') reports of social support received and given. Results showed that roommates of students high in compassionate and low in self-image goals reported increases in support received and support given. Path models indicated that participants' goals interacted to predict increases in the support their roommates received, which in turn predicted increases in the support their roommates gave, which in turn predicted increases in the support participants received from their roommates.

In sum, students with compassionate goals create a caring and supportive environment for themselves and others. Self-image goals undermine the supportive effects of compassionate goals for both the self and others.

## Costs and Benefits

The research described here indicates many benefits of compassionate goals associated with an ecosystem perspective on the relationship between the self and others, and many costs of self-image goals associated with an egosystem perspective. People with compassionate goals feel clear and connected, cooperative, close, and have less conflict. They experience increased social support, trust, learning-oriented achievement goals, self-regulation, and goal progress, and decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Compassionate goals help people see the resources that are already available to them, and create more resources. People with self-image goals feel afraid, confused, and competitive, lonely, and have more conflict. Self-image goals undermine the positive effects of compassionate goals on social support and trust, and predict increased performance-oriented achievement goals, and increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Self-image goals make people isolated and separated from the interpersonal resources available to them. Ultimately, people with compassionate goals in an ecosystem perspective create a virtuous cycle for themselves and others, whereas people with self-image goals either make less progress or create vicious cycles for themselves and others.

Based on this pattern of results, it would be easy to conclude that compassionate goals are good or morally superior, and self-image goals are bad or morally inferior. However, we believe this conclusion is both unhelpful and incorrect. Framing the costs and benefits of compassionate and self-image goals as a moral issue inevitably activates self-image concerns about how one's goals reflect on the self. Judging one's goals for their morality may create confusion between what one wants and what one *should* want, and anxiety about how others judge the self. Instead, we view it as a pragmatic issue: what goals help or interfere with getting people's needs met both in the short term and sustainably over time?

Compassionate goals can help people get their needs met over time through their effects on learning, self-regulation, and the development of supportive relationships. Learning, self-regulation, and developing supportive relationships require time and can be costly in the short-term because they require forgoing immediate gratification and investing resources to increase the likelihood of obtaining desired outcomes in the future, but they increase the long-term probability of survival of individuals, their families, and social groups by fostering the development of skills, cooperative relationships, and social bonds.

Self-image goals are costly because they lead people to perceive situations as zero-sum and feel fear and confusion when they could respond more effectively, and obtain better results for themselves and others, if they felt clear and connected. Self-image goals appear to get in the way of creating mutually supportive relationships, and therefore undermine belonging.

As we noted at the outset, however, self-image goals can help people get their needs met when others' impressions determine inclusion, acceptance, advancement, or status. Because others form impressions automatically and almost instantaneously and those impressions can affect a wide range of judgments and outcomes, the images others have of the self matter. It would be reckless to go to a job interview or sales meeting without considering the appropriateness of one's attire and demeanor, and the competencies one wants to convey. People who never consider the impressions others form of them will likely be socially inept and professionally unsuccessful.

## Disentangling the Goals and the Perspectives

How can we reconcile the obvious importance of self-images with the costs of self-image goals? We believe that the costs of self-image goals stem from having these goals with an ecosystem perspective. Within this framework, with its zero-sum view of relationships and lack of self-compassion, people feel at the mercy of the images others have of them. Ironically, self-image goals may actually create the opposite of what people want; instead of garnering acceptance, inclusion, admiration, or friendship, they may appear insecure, self-centered, inauthentic, or a blow-hard, driving others away.

We believe it is possible to have self-image goals within an ecosystem perspective. Going to a job interview with clear goals for what they can contribute to the organization and with awareness of the impact of their behavior on others, people with an ecosystem perspective will try not to undermine their compassionate goals by creating a negative impression. Instead, they may dress appropriately, prepare so they appear knowledgeable and competent, and yet not feel at the mercy of whether others “get” their competence because they have a larger purpose beyond the self in mind.

By the same token, people can have compassionate goals with an ecosystem perspective. Indeed, after learning about research on the benefits of compassionate goals, the reader might decide to adopt compassionate goals to gain their benefits. It probably would not work if the main goal is to get benefits for the self, because the focus on the self to the exclusion of others reflects an ecosystem perspective. In other words, compassionate and self-image goals are only symptoms, or indicators, of the more powerful variable: whether one has an ecosystem or an ecosystem perspective on the relation between the self and others. Changing from self-image goals to compassionate goals without shifting the perspective is unlikely to change the results.

## Self-Image Goals and the Self-Preservation System

Accumulating evidence suggests that self-image goals and compassionate goals implicate distinct physiological processes. Specifically, self-image goals may activate the self-preservation, fight-or-flight system focused on individual survival, regulated by stress hormones such as cortisol (Henry & Wang, 1998). The fight-or-flight response involves evolutionarily old parts of the brain and is found in many species, including reptiles. Short-term activation of the fight-or-flight response mobilizes individual resources and facilitates adaptive responses to immediate survival threats. Because responses to life-or-death threats must be fast, this system does not foster thoughtful, analytical, planful, or empathic responses, which require time that could cost lives. Activation of this system benefits individual survival in the short-term; prolonged activation is costly for physical and mental health (Sapolsky, 1998).

Psychological threats can activate the self-preservation system (see Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004, for a review). Specifically, self-image threats elicit cortisol responses in laboratory experiments. This response does not appear to be adaptive; research shows that self-image threats of various sorts diminish people’s capacity for rational thought (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), reduce their ability to self-regulate (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002), decrease prosocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), and can instigate aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001).

We think self-image threats activate the fight-or-flight response because people confuse the self-image with the self, and confuse self-image threats with threats to their survival. When people deal with a self-image threat by either fleeing or fighting, they use parts of the brain

that evolved to deal with life-or-death threats. Effective responses to self-image threats require understanding the intention of the other, considering the effect of one's response on the other person and the consequences for achieving long-term goals, and refraining from responses that undermine those goals, however good they might feel in the moment, all of which require recently evolved capacities.

## Compassionate Goals and the Species Preservation System

We propose that compassionate goals involve the species-preservation, tend-and-befriend system, which increases others' chances of survival by fostering protective and caregiving behaviors. This system is regulated by reproductive hormones such as oxytocin, vasopressin, and progesterone (Henry & Wang, 1998; Taylor et al., 2000). The species-preservation motivational system down-regulates cortisol and the fight-or-flight response, enabling people to attend to others' needs in stressful circumstances (Henry & Wang, 1998).

The species-preservation motivational system evolved more recently than the self-preservation system; it is found in all mammals, for whom reproduction requires not only giving birth but also caring for young (Henry and Wang, 1998). Activation of the species-preservation system motivates giving (Brown & Brown, 2006). Oxytocin, in particular, increases trust and generosity toward strangers (Zak, Kurzban, & Matzner, 2004, 2005), and is associated with positive, other-directed emotions such as love (Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, & Altemus, 2006). Activation of this system benefits long-term survival of individuals, their offspring, and their social groups by fostering learning, supportive relationships, and self-regulation.

## Final Reflections

Is it ever advantageous to have self-image goals and respond to self-image threats with an egosystem perspective, energized by the self-preservation system and prepared to fight or flee? We think not. We believe that self-image threats reflect a misunderstanding or an incomplete understanding of the situation. Feeling a self-image threat is a sign that one has a limited view of reality, and therefore cannot respond effectively. The optimal response is not to fight or flee, because neither creates safety in the long term. Rather, the optimal response is to reframe the situation in a nonthreatening way, shifting to an ecosystem perspectives that takes others' needs into account.

At this point in evolution, humans have both the ancient self-preservation system that keeps us fighting for survival in apparent zero-sum situations, and the recently evolved, cognitive, self-reflective capacities that allow us to shift perspectives and see apparent zero-sum situations through the lens of the ecosystem as non-zero-sum. Just as people are no longer at the mercy of volcanic eruptions because we have scientific tools to understand and predict them, we do not have to be at the mercy of self-images and self-image threats if we have tools to understand them. At least, we can prevent situations from becoming worse if we understand that a zero-sum perspective does not reflect the full reality, but most likely reflects a lack of information or comprehension that prevents us from seeing how it could be framed as nonzero-sum. We can zoom out from the self, expand our perspective, and look for the missing pieces of reality.

Nearly every religious and spiritual tradition advocates such a shift. Of course, shifting is not always easy; it may be more difficult for some people (e.g., narcissists) and in some situations (e.g., when others' impressions affect important outcomes). Enduring shifts require training and practice; Buddhist monks spend many years practicing loving kindness meditation to make this shift. Other practices can also produce long-lasting shifts. For example, two of the authors train leaders in a set of tools and practices to help them shift

from egosystem to ecosystem motivational perspectives, and consequently become more effective leaders. People can sometimes quickly and simply shift from egosystem to ecosystem motivational perspectives for brief periods of time. For example, writing a paragraph about one's most important value induces loving and connected feelings consistent with an ecosystem motivational perspective (Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008). People who have tools and practices can shift from egosystem to ecosystem motivational perspectives if and when they want to.

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Table 1

Zero-Order Correlations and Regression Coefficients Predicting Individual Differences from Compassionate and Self-Image Goals.

	Compassionate Goals <i>r</i>	Self-Image Goals <i>r</i>	Compassionate Goals $\beta$	Self-Image Goals $\beta$
Spiritual Transcendence				
Universality	.48 ***	.33 ***	.38 ***	.13
Connectedness	.38 ***	.21 **	.36 ***	.00
Zero sum Beliefs	-.14+	.19 **	-.18 **	.26 **
Self-Compassion				
Total Score	.12	-.22 **	.38 ***	-.39 ***
Low Isolation	-.09	-.31 ***	.11	-.33 ***
Low Self-judgment	-.13	-.39 ***	.13	-.42 ***
Mindfulness	.35 ***	.02	.54 ***	-.26 **
Low Over-identified	-.11	-.33 ***	.11	-.34 ***
Self-kindness	.24 **	-.02	.42 ***	-.22 *
Common Humanity	.35 ***	.13+	.45 ***	-.15
Self-Consciousness				
Public	.27 ***	.59 ***	-.06	.60 ***
Private	.28 ***	.10	.40 ***	-.14
Social Anxiety	.04	.19 **	-.09	.22 *
Attachment Style				
Anxious	.05	.30 ***	.03	.23 ***
Avoidant	-.06	.15 *	-.22 *	.25 ***
Narcissism (NPI)				
Total	-.13+	.05	-.15	.13
Arrogance	-.13+	-.05	-.18+	.06
Entitlement	-.23 **	.05	-.14	.09
Leadership	-.04	.04	-.05	.06
Self-Admiration	-.05	.10	-.11	.15
Psychological Entitlement	-.22 **	.07	-.28 **	.20 *
Big 5				
Agreeableness	.40 ***	.09	.30 ***	-.02
Extraversion	.30 ***	.19 **	.29 **	.02
Openness	.17 *	-.00	.15	-.06
Conscientiousness	.06	.08	-.06	.11
Emotional Stability	.10	-.11	.10	-.10

Note: betas with both goals entered simultaneously, controlling for gender and social desirability.

\* =  $p < .05$ ,

\*\*  
=  $p < .01$ ,

\*\*\*  
=  $p < .001$ .