## Searching for a job

*Problem- and emotion-focused coping*

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# Chapter 4

Testing a Self-compassion Intervention among Job Seekers: Self-compassion Beneficially Impacts Affect Through Reduced Self-Criticism
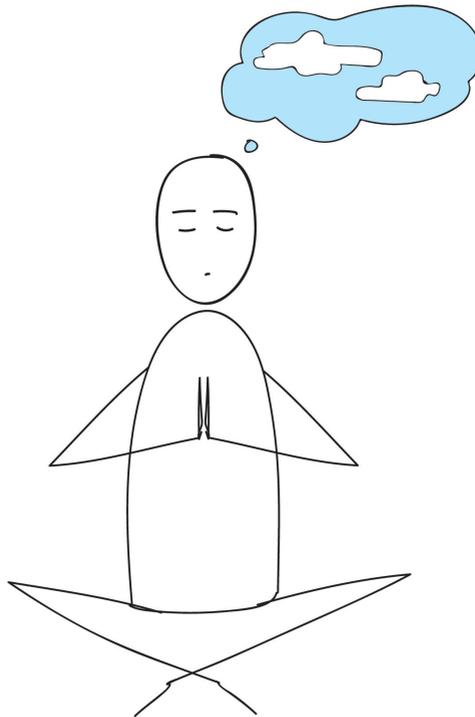
## Abstract

Searching for a job is associated with various obstacles and difficulties that can elicit negative emotions, and undermine positive emotions. Having self-compassion has been suggested to benefit job seekers' emotional responses regarding negative job search experiences. In the current field experiment ($N = 180$) we examined whether self-compassion can be increased among job seekers. Using writing exercises in which job seekers are instructed to reflect on their experiences with self-compassion, we examined whether state self-compassion was enhanced and consequently influenced job seekers' affect. Furthermore, we tested whether this positive influence on affect could be explained by reduced self-criticism. We designed a between-participants field experiment with two conditions (i.e., self-compassion vs. control) and three measurement times one week apart: A baseline questionnaire, the intervention and a second questionnaire, and a follow-up questionnaire. Results show that the self-compassion writing exercise increased job seekers' state self-compassion, which in turn related to their affective responses to job search. Specifically, their negative deactivating affect (e.g., sadness) was lower and their positive deactivating affect (e.g., calmness) was higher immediately after the self-compassion writing exercise than after reflecting freely (i.e., the control condition). The effects on job seekers' affect were mediated by reduced self-criticism.

Most people search for a job at some stage in their career, for example when entering the labor market after finishing school, when a temporary contract ends, after being laid off, or when desiring to make a career move. The chance of finding employment increases to the extent that job seekers put effort in their search and search intensively (Kanfer et al., 2001). However, job search includes activities that can be difficult and stressful, and is associated with various negative experiences such as rejections or failing to find job leads (Song et al., 2009), making job seekers prone to feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, self-criticism, and rumination (e.g., Wanberg, Basbug, et al., 2012). This makes job search an emotional experience that may harm job seekers' wellbeing (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Understandably, job seekers can become discouraged during their search and postpone or hold off searching for a job, which lengthens the duration of their unemployment, leading to adverse consequences for themselves, their families, and society as a whole (Klehe & Van Hooft, 2018).

Several scholars have called for research that investigates ways in which job seekers can deal with negative job search experiences to reduce their negative emotional impact (e.g., Song et al., 2009; Turban et al., 2013). This is important because while negative affect during job search frequently occurs, it is positive affectivity that enhances job search success (Turban et al., 2013). Self-compassion may be a promising coping mechanism for job seekers when experiencing negative job search events because self-compassioned cognitions make individuals respond to failure with kindness to the self, make them aware that failure is human, and let them acknowledge their emotions with a healthy distance (Neff, 2003a). A recent correlational study has indeed shown that job seekers higher on trait self-compassion were less affected by negative job search experiences than job seekers with less self-compassion (Kreemers et al., 2018). They felt more positive and less negative while searching for a job. Although, self-compassion is considered to be a general tendency, it can also be induced/trained (e.g., Breines & Chen, 2012;

Leary et al., 2007; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010; J. W. Zhang & Chen, 2016).

In the current study, we follow up on Kreemers et al. (2018) correlational study and test the causal effects of self-compassion on job seekers' emotions during their job search. Different from Kreemers et al. (2018) who examined trait self-compassion and it relationships with affect, we focus on state self-compassion, thus the self-compassioned cognitions that can be influenced. Specifically, in an experimental field study we examine whether an online self-compassion intervention composed of writing exercises that facilitate taking a self-compassioned perspective towards job search difficulties make job seekers feel better in comparison to a control condition composed of writing exercises in which job seekers reflect freely on their difficulties. In addition to testing whether writing exercises promote job seekers' state self-compassion and consequently positively influence their affect, we aim to increase our understanding of the process through which self-compassion influences affect. Based on theorizing and prior research, we propose that enhanced self-compassion will reduce self-criticism among job seekers, which will attenuate negative affect and elevate positive affect.

This study contributes to both research and practice in the field of job search for a number of reasons. First, although prior research by Kreemers at al. (2018) showed a relationship between self-compassion and job seekers' affect, this was correlational and we can therefore not rule out the possibility that this relationship is spurious or reversed. The experimental design of the current study allows us to draw causal conclusions regarding the impact of self-compassion on job seekers' affective responses to their job search experiences. This is relevant for designing job search interventions, because thus far meta-analyses (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014) could not identify stress management interventions as effective components of job search interventions. Self-compassion has the potential to aid job seekers in effectively dealing with stress that occurs as a consequence

of negative job search experiences. In addition, we propose and test whether reduced self-criticism is the underlying mechanism that drives the effects of the self-compassion intervention. Although previous research has shown a negative relation between self-compassion and self-criticism (Gilbert & Procter, 2006), self-criticism has not been tested as mediator between self-compassion and affect. Understanding how self-compassion makes job seekers feel better can be informative to targeting specific sensitive groups (e.g., those who suffer more from self-criticism; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010) who could benefit from a self-compassion intervention. Finally, our experimental field study does not only provide a stringent test of self-compassion theory, it also has practical relevance. Practical recommendations often rely on the notion of causality (e.g., Aguinis & Edwards, 2014; Eden, 2017). Hence, the insights gained by this study may provide tools that could be implemented in practice, such as writing exercises to facilitate taking a self-compassioned perspective on job search difficulties.

## Job Search and Mental Well-Being

Job seekers engage in a range of job search activities that contribute to job attainment such as searching for vacancies, having network conversations, contacting employment agencies, applying for jobs, and eventually asking for feedback to improve their application letter. Job search requests cyclical self-regulatory behavior that is purposive and self-organized (Kanfer et al., 2001). The amount of time and effort that job seekers spend on job search activities is positively related to job search success (Kanfer et al., 2001). However, during job search there is hardly a clear pathway towards reaching the desired employment outcome. People oftentimes receive little feedback on the steps they take along the way other than rejections, which makes it hard to perceive progress. Results of a daily diary study show that a lack of job search progress adversely relates to how job seekers feel (Wanberg et al., 2010). Furthermore, the more time job seekers spend on their job search, the

more negative job search experiences they have and the higher their distress (Song et al., 2009). Qualitative research has indicated that job seekers are especially prone to feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, self-criticism, and rumination (e.g., Wanberg et al., 2012). Job search difficulties such as rejection, failure to find suitable leads, and lack of job search progress elicit negative thoughts and feelings which in turn harm job seekers' mental well-being. In addition to eliciting negative emotions, job search difficulties also undermine positive emotions (Kreemers et al., 2018), which has consequences for job search outcomes, as especially positive feelings are related to job search success (Turban et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to identify how negative affective responses during job search can be reduced and positive affective responses can be increased.

The hedonic tone of affective responses (positive vs. negative) can be further specified in activation level (Yik et al., 2011), that is, the extent to which an affective response is activating or deactivating. This results in four types of affect: activating negative (e.g., nervous) and positive affect (e.g., enthusiastic) and deactivating negative affect (e.g., disappointed) and positive affect (e.g., at ease). Given that job search is such an emotional experience in which job seekers experience a wide range of emotions (Kreemers et al., 2018; Wanberg, Basbug, et al., 2012) and previous research has shown that emotions with different hedonic tone and activation level originate from different sources and elicit different outcomes (e.g., Baas et al., 2008; Carver, 2004; Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998; Russell, 2003; Taylor, 1991; Watson & Tellegen, 1985; Wrzus et al., 2015; Yik et al., 2011) it seems fitting to examine how self-compassion may contribute to changes in these four types of affect.

## Self-Compassion

A healthy way to respond to negative experiences such as setbacks, humiliation, and failure is reflecting on them with self-compassion. Self-compassion emanated from Buddhist philosophy, and is an emotion-focused coping strategy. It is different from

traditional emotion regulation strategies in that it does not aim to alter people's emotional state, but rather allows for emotions to exist in kind awareness (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion entails three basic components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. People who are self-compassioned respond to their failures with self-kindness and understanding (self-kindness) rather than with harsh self-judgement, they are understanding of the shared nature of their experiences (common humanity) rather than feeling isolated, and they acknowledge their emotions with mindful acceptance (mindfulness) rather than ignoring or exaggerating them (Neff, 2003b). While these components are conceptually distinct, they also interact so as to mutually enhance and engender one another (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion should not be confused with self-pity because people who pity themselves feel isolated in their misery and fail to recognize the shared nature of their experience (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion also differs from self-esteem, in that it constitutes more stable feelings of self-worth enabling people to see themselves and their flaws with more clarity than self-esteem, which is more contingent on positive ego-focused outcomes (Neff & Vonk, 2009).

Self-compassionate individuals are better at withstanding experiences of pain and failure, because these experiences are not met with harsh self-condemnation, feelings of isolation, or over-identification with thoughts and emotions. Therefore, there are lower incidences of anxiety and depression among self-compassionate individuals and better mental health outcomes such as more connectedness and subjective well-being (Neff, 2003a, 2003b, Neff et al., 2005, 2007). Previous research shows that people who are able to reflect on their experiences with self-compassion generally feel better and have more moderate responses to unpleasant and self-relevant experiences than people who are not able to reflect on their experiences with self-compassion (e.g., Leary et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2005, 2007). For example, previous research showed that students who were instructed to be more self-compassioned experienced less negative affect in response to unfavorable feedback (Leary et al.,

2007). Other research showed that students dealt more adaptively with academic failure when they had more self-compassion (Neff et al., 2005). The beneficial role of self-compassion is also apparent in studies with clinical samples with participants suffering from shame or trauma (e.g., Raes, 2010; Thompson & Waltz, 2008).

We propose that self-compassion can be helpful during the job search process which is usually full of self-relevant negative experiences. A recent correlational study indeed showed that job seekers higher on trait self-compassion experienced more positive and less negative emotions during their job search than job seekers lower on trait self-compassion (Kreemers et al., 2018). Given the above theorizing and empirical support for the beneficial psychological effect of self-compassion in times of perceived failure and setback, we expect that stimulating job seekers to reflect on their job search experiences with self-compassion will decrease negative affect (both activating and deactivating) and increase positive affect (both activating and deactivating) in comparison to job seekers who reflect on their experiences freely.

## Enhancing State Self-Compassion

Given that self-compassion relates to an array of beneficial psychological outcomes, there have been various attempts to develop methods aimed at stimulating self-compassion (e.g., Adams & Leary, 2007; Au et al., 2017; Breines & Chen, 2012; Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2011; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007; Smeets et al., 2014; J. W. Zhang & Chen, 2016). The most simple example is letting participants know that they were not alone in their experience and encouraging them to not be hard on themselves (cf. Adams & Leary, 2007; Breines & Chen, 2012, Experiment 3). More elaborate forms of stimulating self-compassion are continuous practice with a multitude of exercises intended to move towards a kinder, more mindful mindset that acknowledges the shared nature of negative experiences (see Neff, 2011; Smeets et al., 2014). There are also various therapy forms that

have incorporated self-compassion (e.g., Compassion-Based Therapy, Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Kabat-Zinn, 1982) and have been shown to successfully increase self-compassion (e.g., Au et al., 2017; Shapiro et al., 2007). A thorough but more accessible option than weekly meetings and therapy is having participants engage in self-compassion writing exercises (cf. Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007, Experiment 5; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010; J. W. Zhang & Chen, 2016). Participants who were instructed to reflect on a personal weakness and take a self-compassioned and understanding perspective have been shown to have more state self-compassion than participants who were instructed to contrast their weakness with things they were proud of or describe their hobby after reflecting on a weakness (Breines & Chen, 2012).

Based on these positive effects in previous studies (e.g., Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007, Experiment 5; J. W. Zhang & Chen, 2016), in the current study we adopt the self-compassion writing exercise method and adapt it to the job search setting. Specifically, we instruct job seekers to reflect on their worst job search experience and then ask them to reflect on this experience with self-compassion (i.e., self-compassion condition) or freely (i.e., control condition). Based on previous research using a comparable design (cf. Leary et al., 2007, Experiment 5), we expect that after the writing exercise job seekers in the self-compassion condition will have more state self-compassion than job seekers in the control condition which in turn will result in less negative affect and more positive affect. Previous research by Shapira and Mongrain (2010), who also made use of writing exercises, has shown that the effects of self-compassion interventions can have lasting effects. Therefore, we measure job seekers' affect immediately after the exercises and we measure affect in a follow-up measurement one week later. Hereby we extend previous research by Leary et al. (2007), who only measured affect directly after the exercises, and explore whether the effects of the self-compassion exercise lasts over time.

## The Mediating Role of Self-Criticism

Furthermore, we expect that the beneficial influence of state self-compassion on affect can be attributed to reduced self-criticism. Negative experiences in personally relevant areas of life, such as job search, can make people more self-critical (Pinto-Gouveia, Castilho, Matos, & Xavier, 2013; Wanberg, Basbug, et al., 2012). When people perceive personal failure or inadequacies (e.g., during job search), they tend to have an exaggerated focus on the implications of this experience for their self-worth, leading to feelings of isolation and overly severe judgments and criticism of the self (Neff, 2003a). Indeed negative job search experiences, such as rejections or lack of progress are shown to make job seekers prone to feelings of self-criticism (Wanberg, Basbug, et al., 2012). Neff (2003a) emphasizes that self-compassion is most relevant in situations that elicit feelings of shame and self-criticism, because self-compassion counteracts these feelings by means of its three mutually enhancing components. Self-kindness softens the self-consciousness that is strengthened though harsh self-judgement. Common humanity, that is, realizing that failure and personal suffering is shared, lessens the blame placed on oneself, further reducing self-criticism (Neff, 2003a). Finally, mindfulness contributes to reducing self-criticism by increasing the other two components of self-compassion. The nonjudgmental, detached stance of mindfulness increases self-understanding and self-kindness (Jopling, 2000), whereas the balanced perspective-taking of mindfulness directly counters the egocentrism that causes feelings of isolation and separateness from the rest of humanity and thus increases feelings of interconnectedness (Elkind, 1967).

Empirical evidence further support the notion that self-compassion is negatively related to self-criticism (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Neff, 2003b; Neff et al., 2007) and that self-criticism is related to maladaptive outcomes such as depression (Blatt, Quinlan, Chevron, McDonald, & Zuroff, 1982; Dunkley & Blankstein, 2000; Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2003) and higher negative affect and lower positive affect (Zuroff, Moskowitz, & Cote, 1999). Therefore,

we expect that reducing job seekers' self-critical thoughts through self-compassioned cognitions when reflecting on a negative job search experience will promote their positive affect and reduce their negative affect. In other words, we expect that job seekers in the self-compassion condition report lower negative affect and higher positive affect than job seekers in the control condition as mediated by state self-compassion and self-criticism.

## Method
### Participants and Design

We designed a between-participants field experimental study with two conditions and three measurement times. More specifically, we administered a baseline questionnaire before the intervention at Time 0, conducted the intervention (i.e., a self-compassion or control writing exercise) six days[8] later, immediately followed by the Time 1 questionnaire, and a Time 2 questionnaire five to seven days later.

We recruited job seekers who were searching for a paid job (of at least 20 hours) via the alumni department of a Dutch university, employment agencies, and social media, to participate in a study about job search. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be currently searching for a job and had to have searched in the last month. This ensured that participants had job search experiences to reflect on during the self-compassion/control writing exercise. Participants received €10 for completing all three questionnaires and the self-compassion/control writing exercise.

A total of 354 participants started the Time 0 questionnaire. Of these, 288 participants met the eligibility criteria (currently searching for a job and having searched in the last month) and 205 finished the self-compassion/control writing exercise and subsequent Time 1

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[8] Due to logistic reasons the time between the baseline questionnaire and the intervention varied. The average time was 6.81 days ($SD$ = 2.71). Theoretically these varying times are not a problem as the average time between T0 and T1 did not differ between conditions, $t(178)$ = 1.22, $p$ = .23, and our research questions focus on differences between the conditions.

questionnaire. We excluded 18 participants from the analyses because they indicated to have found a job at Time 1. Another 7 participants were excluded from the analyses because their responses to the writing exercise were absent or unrelated to job search. The final sample consisted of 180 participants, with complete data on both Time 0 and Time 1. Of these, 173 participants also completed the Time 2 questionnaire.

The average age in the final sample of 180 participants was 29 years ($SD$ = 9.17) and 75.6% were women ($n$ = 136). Most participants (59.4%) had a paid (student) job ($n$ = 107), in which they worked an average of 26.08 hours a week ($SD$ = 11.78), and 9.4% had an unpaid job ($n$ = 17), with an average of 11.53 hours a week ($SD$ = 8.64). Of the employed participants 32.2% worked under temporary employment, 13.9% had a permanent position, 11.1% was volunteer or intern, and 4.4% worked as freelancer. The sample was generally highly educated (74.4% university degree, 9.4% higher vocational education). Some participants (16.7%) were still studying, but would graduate within 6 months (within 3.37 months on average). Mean job search duration at Time 0 was 5.71 months ($SD$ = 6.06).

## Procedure

At Time 0 participants received an e-mail with a link to the baseline questionnaire. After having filled out the informed consent, participants had 14 days to finish the baseline questionnaire. Participants received reminders three, five, and seven days after receiving a questionnaire if they had not finished the questionnaire. The Time 0 questionnaire contained questions about job search history, demographics, trait self-compassion, self-criticism, and affect.[9]

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[9] In addition to the variables mentioned in the method section, the Time 0 questionnaire also contained various other personality traits (i.e., perfectionism, self-esteem, learning goal orientation, openness to change, incremental beliefs regarding emotions, neuroticism), potential mediators (i.e., fear of failure, job search self-efficacy, rumination), and dependent variables (i.e., exhaustion,

One day after finishing Time 0, participants received a link to the writing exercise and Time 1 questionnaire. Participants were first asked to describe their worst job search experience in the past period. After having provided a description of the event, participants were randomly assigned to the self-compassion condition or the control condition. In the self-compassion condition participants were asked to reflect on their negative job search experience with self-compassion and to report these reflections in writing. In the control condition participants were asked to reflect on their negative job search experience by freely describing their naturally occurring thoughts and feelings. The writing exercise was followed by the Time 1 questionnaire, which included measures of state self-compassion, self-criticism, and affect. Five days after filling out the Time 1 questionnaire participants received the link to the Time 2 questionnaire which included the same measures as at Time 1. Participants had three days to finish the Time 2 questionnaire and received reminders at day two and three if they had not finished the questionnaire.

## Self-Compassion and Control Assignments

The self-compassion intervention was based on the lab experiment with psychology students of Leary et al. (2007) who showed that self-compassion can be manipulated with a writing exercise. Original materials were translated into Dutch and adjusted to the job search context and pilot tested to ensure that the instructions were clear. First, participants in both conditions were asked to describe a negative job search event in detail, how many weeks ago it occurred, what happened, who was present, and what had led to the event. Then, participants in the self-compassion

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vitality, job search intention, job search time). At Time 1, participants were first asked whether they had negative job search experiences and to what extent they perceived job search progress in the last month before proceeding with the writing task. After the intervention the same mediator and dependent variables were measured as in the Time 0 questionnaire and these were also measured at Time 2.

condition answered three questions regarding the negative event tailored to the three dimensions of self-compassion (cf. Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003a). Specifically, they were asked to (a) indicate in what ways other people experience similar events (*common humanity*), (b) write a paragraph directed to themselves in a tone they would use for a friend (*self-kindness*), and (c) picture the emotions that they associated with the event as temporary states and describe them objectively and with mindfulness (*mindful acceptance*).

In the control condition, participants were asked to freely reflect on the negative job search event and describe their naturally occurring thoughts and feelings. We deliberately chose an active writing control condition as opposed to a passive control condition in which no task was assigned to the participants to ensure that we can attribute any effect of the self-compassion condition to self-compassion rather than to the mere process of reflecting on and writing about a certain event (cf. Leary et al., 2007). This because writing about an emotional event is an intervention by itself, which has been shown to positively influence people's affective state (Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990).

## Measures

**Trait self-compassion** was measured at Time 0 with the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b; Neff & Vonk, 2009) which consists of 26 statements (e.g., "I'm tolerant to my own flaws and inadequacies" and "I try to see my failings as part of the human condition"). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with these statements on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Cronbach's alpha was .94.

**State self-compassion.** At Time 1 after the intervention, participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale to what extent they agreed with three statements regarding their current self-compassion regarding their job search. We selected three[10] statements

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[10] We originally selected the same four items as Breines and Chen (2012). In adjusting the items to the job search context one item became conceptually illogical

from the Self-Compassion Scale of Neff (2003b) that each reflected one component of self-compassion (cf. Breines & Chen, 2012; Experiment 4) and adjusted the items to make them specific to job search (i.e., "When I look back at my job search experiences of the past month: I now treat myself kindly, I try to have a balanced stance towards my experiences, I see my weaknesses as part of being human"; α = .71).

**Self-criticism** was measured at Time 0 and 1 with the extended and adapted Self- Criticism Questionnaire (Brewin, Firth-Cozens, Furnham, & McManus, 1992) which consists of six items selected from the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (e.g., "I tend to be very critical of myself."; Blatt, D'Afflitti, & Quinlan, 1976) and four items from the Responsibility for Negative Outcome (e.g., "I usually blame myself when things go wrong"; Brewin & Shapiro, 1984). We adjusted the formulation such that the items apply to how critical participants feel considering their job search at the moment of measurement rather than generally (e.g., "I blame myself for things that go wrong during job search"). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements on a 5-point scale ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (5). Cronbach's alpha was .87 at both measurement times.

**Affect** was measured at Time 0, 1, and 2 using a selection of 16 emotions from the PANAS (Crawford & Henry, 2004) that clearly fell into the four affect categories of the emotion circumplex (Yik et al., 2011). Each affect category was measured with four emotions, that is, negative activating affect with nervous, stressed, frustrated, and jittery (α = .84 - .87), negative deactivating affect with sad, disappointed, down, and downcast (α = .89 - .91), positive activating affect with enthusiastic, cheerful, lively, and energetic (α = .94 - .96),

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as part of a state self-compassion measure right after the writing exercise, because it addressed job seekers' self-compassioned attitudes during job search, while there had been no time to search since the exercise. Therefore, we decided to run the analyses with the remaining three items which each represented one of the three components of self-compassion.

and positive deactivating with at ease, calm, relaxed, and laid back ($\alpha$ = .94 at all times). Participants indicated the extent to which they felt the emotions when they considered their job search experiences of the last month on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

**Demographics** were measured at Time 0. Specifically, age, gender, education (primary school, high school level 1, 2 or 3, intermediate vocational education, higher vocational education, or university degree), employment position (employed or unemployed), and job search duration (in months) were measured as control variables, as meta-analyses has shown their importance to the job search process (Kanfer et al., 2001).

With confirmatory factor analyses in Mplus 7.11 we tested a 6-factor model with all Time 1 variables (i.e., state self-compassion, self-criticism, and the four affect variables) against theoretical plausible alternative models (i.e., collapsing state self-compassion and self-criticism, collapsing the two negative and the two positive affect variables, collapsing all affect variables). The 6-factor model fit the data significantly better than all alternative models (all $\Delta\chi^2$ larger than 101.39; all $p$'s < .05; all $\Delta$CFI > .03).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

To assess whether the participants in the self-compassion ($n$ = 82) and control condition ($n$ = 98) differed before the intervention, we compared participants' demographics, trait self-compassion, self-criticism, and affect at Time 0 between both conditions. Supporting the successfulness of the random assignment, there were no significant differences between conditions for age, $t(174.38) = 1.70$, $p = .09$, gender, $\chi^2(1) = 1.32$, $p = .72$, education, $\chi^2(1) = 0.53$, $p = .47$, employment status, $\chi^2(1) = 1.68$, $p = .20$, job search duration, $t(178) = 0.65$, $p = .52$, trait self-compassion, $t(178) = -1.57$, $p = .12$, self-criticism, $t(156.50) = 0.67$, $p = .51$, negative activating affect, $t(178) = -0.54$, $p = .59$, negative deactivating affect, $t(178) = -0.38$, $p = .70$,

positive activating affect, $t(178) = -0.66$, $p = .51$, and positive deactivating affect, $t(178) = -0.08$, $p = .94$. Given the absence of significant a priori differences between the conditions there is no need to control for these Time 0 variables when testing the effectiveness of the intervention. Table 4.1 shows the correlations between all study variables.

**Effects of the Intervention**

First, we tested the effects of the intervention on state self-compassion, measured directly after the writing exercises (Time 1). An independent $t$-test showed that participants in the self-compassion condition ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.00$) scored significantly higher on Time 1 state self-compassion than participants in the control condition ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(178) = 2.11$, $p = .036$. In other words, the self-compassion writing exercises led job seekers to reflect on their job search experiences with more self-compassion than the control writing exercises.

Second, we tested the effects of the intervention on job seekers' affect, as mediated by state self-compassion and self-criticism. We examined these indirect effects using the PROCESS bootstrapping method Model 6 (Hayes, 2012) in SPSS with the variables measured at Time 1. We ran four analyses, one for each type of affect as dependent variable, in which we entered condition as independent variable and state self-compassion and self-criticism as mediators. The pattern of results was roughly similar across different types of affect and is shown in Figure 4.1. For each type of affect there was no direct effect of condition on affect, $b$ ranged from -.23 to .28, $t(176)$ ranged from -1.36 to 1.59, $p > .05$, and no direct relation between condition and self-criticism, $b = .03$, $p = .79$. However, results did show two significant indirect effects: from condition through state self-compassion to affect (indirect effect A), and from condition to state self-compassion to self-criticism to affect (indirect effect B).

# Table 4.1

*Mean, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables.*

| | M | SD | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Time 0** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Age | 29.13 | 9.17 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender[a] | 1.76 | 0.43 | -.03 | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Education[b] | 0.84 | 0.37 | -.31** | -.04 | | | | | | | |
| 4. Employment status[c] | 0.59 | 0.49 | -.24** | .11 | .07 | | | | | | |
| 5. Job search duration | 5.71 | 6.06 | .63** | -.03 | -.19* | .01 | | | | | |
| 6. Trait self-compassion | 3.08 | 0.64 | .20** | -.20** | -.04 | -.13 | .07 | | | | |
| 7. Self-criticism | 2.81 | 0.86 | -.23** | .01 | .21** | .07 | .00 | -.58** | | | |
| 8. Negative activating[e] | 4.38 | 1.41 | -.29** | .18* | .20** | -.02 | -.10 | -.38** | .45** | | |
| 9. Negative deactivating[e] | 3.79 | 1.57 | -.17* | .18* | .05 | -.10 | -.04 | -.47** | .50** | .69** | |
| 10. Positive activating[e] | 3.89 | 1.49 | -.08 | -.10 | .03 | .05 | -.20** | .31** | -.32** | -.32** | -.43** |
| 11. Positive deactivating[e] | 3.63 | 1.41 | .08 | -.21** | -.11 | -.04 | -.11 | .47** | -.46** | -.53** | -.47** |
| **Time 1** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. Condition[d] | 0.46 | 0.50 | -.12 | .03 | -.05 | .10 | -.05 | .12 | -.05 | .04 | .03 |
| 13. State self-compassion | 4.92 | 1.00 | .03 | -.01 | .02 | .00 | .05 | .37** | -.34** | -.29** | -.30** |
| 14. Self-criticism | 2.87 | 0.85 | -.30** | .09 | .17* | .08 | -.06 | -.56** | .78** | .52** | .55** |
| 15. Negative activating[e] | 4.03 | 1.47 | -.26** | .10 | .25** | .02 | -.14 | -.35** | .48** | .71** | .53** |
| 16. Negative deactivating[e] | 3.81 | 1.47 | -.10 | .18* | .07 | -.02 | -.06 | -.39** | .45** | .47** | .64** |
| 17. Positive activating[e] | 3.96 | 1.39 | .05 | -.10 | -.08 | -.05 | -.06 | .33** | -.35** | -.34** | -.42** |
| 18. Positive deactivating[e] | 4.06 | 1.37 | .08 | -.18* | -.15* | -.04 | .04 | .38** | -.40** | -.52** | -.48** |
| **Time 2** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Negative activating[e] | 3.64 | 1.39 | -.27** | .13 | .16* | .00 | -.10 | -.37** | .50** | .70** | .56** |
| 20. Negative deactivating[e] | 3.18 | 1.46 | -.07 | .09 | .08 | -.05 | .06 | -.37** | .40** | .52** | .61** |
| 21. Positive activating[e] | 4.22 | 1.44 | .08 | -.08 | -.04 | -.08 | -.08 | .23** | -.30** | -.27** | -.27** |
| 22. Positive deactivating[e] | 4.29 | 1.40 | .24** | -.17* | -.12 | .00 | .09 | .39** | -.47** | -.48** | -.43** |

*Note.* $N = 180$; [a] $1$ = man, $2$ = woman; [b] $0$ = low or intermediately educated, $1$ = highly educated; [c] $0$ = no paid employment, $1$ = paid employment; [d] measured in months; [e] Affect; [d] $0$ = control condition, $1$ = self-compassion condition. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

# Table 4.1 (Continued)

*Mean, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables.*

| | 10. | 11. | 12. | 13. | 14. | 15. | 16. | 17. | 18. | 19. | 20. | 21. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Time 0** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Age | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender[a] | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Education[b] | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Employment status[c] | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Job search duration | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Trait self-compassion | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Self-criticism | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Negative activating[e] | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Negative deactivating[e] | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Positive activating[e] | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. Positive deactivating[e] | .67** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Time 1** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. Condition[d] | .05 | .01 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13. State self-compassion | .33** | .36** | .16* | | | | | | | | | |
| 14. Self-criticism | -.26** | -.44** | -.05 | -.44** | | | | | | | | |
| 15. Negative activating[e] | -.36** | -.51** | -.14 | -.44** | .58** | | | | | | | |
| 16. Negative deactivating[e] | -.44** | -.44** | -.15 | -.52** | .60** | .73** | | | | | | |
| 17. Positive activating[e] | .57** | .48** | .09 | .48** | -.35** | -.47** | -.59** | | | | | |
| 18. Positive deactivating[e] | .42** | .57** | .17* | .48** | -.45** | -.69** | -.64** | .66** | | | | |
| **Time 2** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Negative activating[e] | -.41** | -.48** | -.09 | -.39** | .53** | .78** | .61** | -.50** | -.64** | | | |
| 20. Negative deactivating[e] | -.40** | -.43** | -.09 | -.44** | .44** | .57** | .66** | -.50** | -.50** | .73** | | |
| 21. Positive activating[e] | .60** | .45** | .01 | .34** | -.28** | -.38** | -.41** | .68** | .43** | -.51** | -.48** | |
| 22. Positive deactivating[e] | .51** | .55** | .06 | .37** | -.44** | -.62** | -.53** | .54** | .65** | -.72** | -.52** | .64** |

*Note.* $N = 180$; [a]1 = man, 2 = woman; [b]0 = low or intermediately educated, 1 = highly educated; [c]0 = no paid employment, 1 = paid employment; [d]measured in months; [e]Affect; [d]0 = control condition, 1 = self-compassion condition. $^* p < .05$, $^{**} p < .01$.
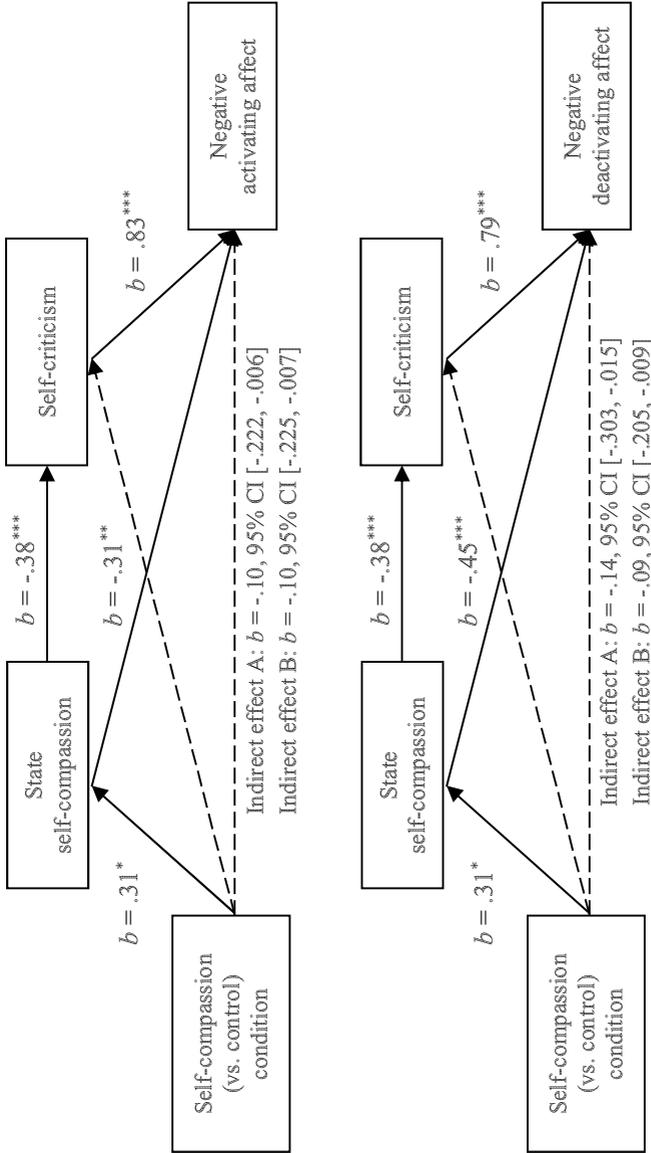
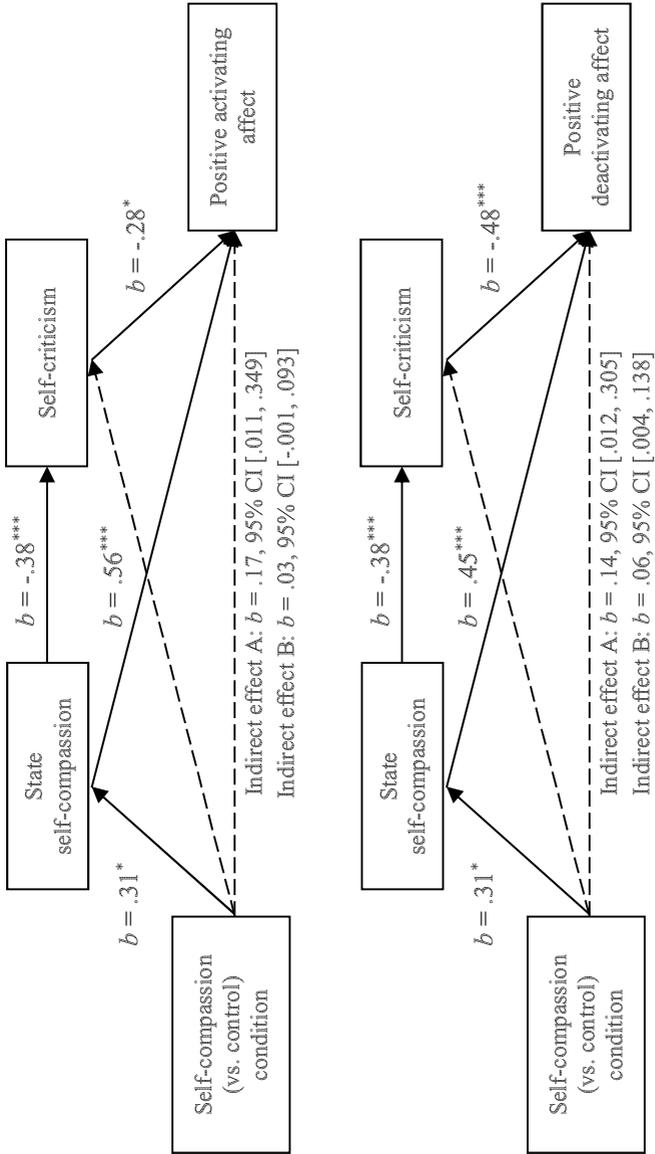*Figure 4.1.* Results of the effects of condition on the four affect variables, as mediated by state self-compassion and self-criticism. Indirect effect A: condition through state self-compassion to affect. Indirect effect B: condition through state self-compassion and self-criticism to affect. The dashed lines are not significant.
$^{*} p < .05,\ ^{**} p < .01,\ ^{***} p < .001.$

*Figure 4.1.* (Continued) Results of the effects of condition on the four affect variables, as mediated by state self-compassion and self-criticism. Indirect effect A: condition through state self-compassion to affect. Indirect effect B: condition through state self-compassion and self-criticism to affect. The dashed lines are not significant.
$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

This means that all effects of condition on affect run through state self-compassion and some also through self-criticism. As shown in Figure 4.1, the indirect effects are composed of the following relations. Regarding effect A, there was a positive relation between condition and state self-compassion. Further, state self-compassion had a negative relation with both types of negative affect and a positive relation with both types of positive affect. Regarding effect B, there was a negative relation between state self-compassion and self-criticism. Further, self-criticism had a positive relation with both types of negative affect and a negative relation with both types of positive affect.

Even though the indirect effects were significant for all four affect type, the total effects of condition on affect was only significant for positive deactivating affect, $b = .46$, $t(178) = 2.28$, $p < .001$, and approached significance for negative deactivating affect, $b = -.43$, $t(178) = -1.96$, $p = .052$. These results indicate that at Time 1 the total effects of the intervention on affect (i.e., the direct effect and the indirect effects combined), were only (marginally) supported for deactivating affect and not for activating affect.

Third, we examined the extent to which the effects of the intervention on job seeker affect hold over time from Time 1 to Time 2. Table 4.2 presents the raw means over time for the two conditions. We conducted four repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) with the different types of affect at each measurement point (Time 0, 1, and 2) as within-participant variables and condition as between-participant variable. The repeated measures ANOVA assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were met. However, Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for positive activating affect. Therefore, we corrected the degrees of freedom for positive activating affect using Huynh-Feldt estimates of sphericity ($\varepsilon = .97$). With contrast analyses we examined the changes in affect in the two conditions in more detail.

Table 4.2

*Values of different kinds of affect at the Time 0, Time 1, and Time 2 measurement for the control and the self-compassion condition*

| Affect | Condition | Baseline (T0) | | Post intervention (T1) | | Follow-up (T2) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Negative activating | *Control* | 4.31 | 1.40 | 4.19 | 1.42 | 3.75 | 1.33 |
| | *Self-compassion* | 4.40 | 1.44 | 3.76 | 1.50 | 3.51 | 1.44 |
| Negative deactivating | *Control* | 3.78 | 1.56 | 4.02 | 1.46 | 3.30 | 1.44 |
| | *Self-compassion* | 3.80 | 1.60 | 3.55 | 1.48 | 3.03 | 1.47 |
| Positive activating | *Control* | 3.82 | 1.48 | 3.85 | 1.39 | 4.21 | 1.40 |
| | *Self-compassion* | 4.00 | 1.51 | 4.13 | 1.35 | 4.23 | 1.51 |
| Positive deactivating | *Control* | 3.63 | 1.44 | 3.84 | 1.32 | 4.21 | 1.35 |
| | *Self-compassion* | 3.68 | 1.37 | 4.36 | 1.33 | 4.38 | 1.45 |

*Note.* $N_{\text{control}} = 95$, $N_{\text{self-compassion}} = 80$.

Results for negative activating affect showed a significant main effect of time, $F(2,346) = 42.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .20$, and a significant interaction between time and condition, $F(2,346) = 5.68$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2_p = .03$ (see Figure 4.2). Contrast analyses showed a significant decrease in negative activating affect between Time 0 and Time 1 in the self-compassion condition ($M_{diff}= -0.64$, $p < .001$), but not in the control condition. At Time 1, participants' mean negative activating affect was lower in the self-compassion condition than in the control condition, but this difference was only approaching significance ($M_{diff} = -0.43$, $p = .055$). Negative activating affect significantly decreased between Time 1 and Time 2 in both the self-compassion ($M_{diff}= -0.25$, $p = .018$) and the control condition ($M_{diff} = -0.44$, $p < .001$). The difference in activating negative affect between conditions was not significant at Time 2.
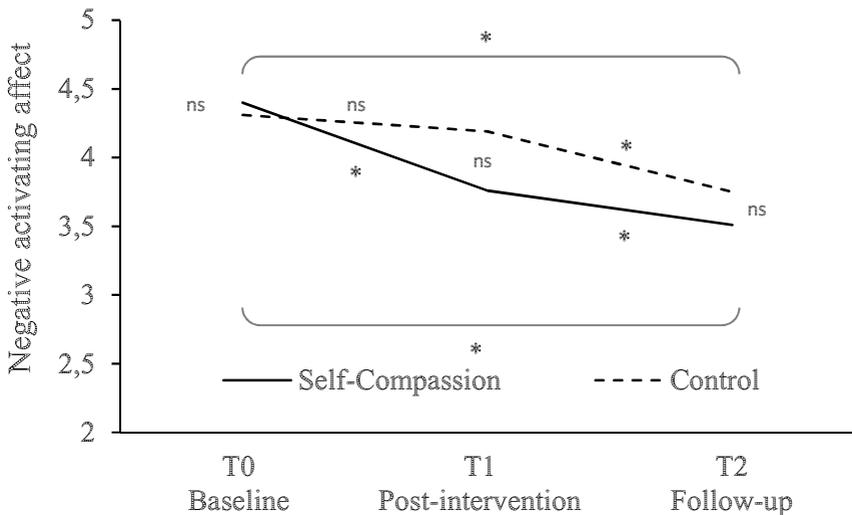


*Figure 4.2.* Graphical representation of negative activating affect at the baseline, post-intervention and follow-up measurement for the self-compassion and control condition. Significant difference in affect between times and conditions is indicated with an asterisk, nonsignificant differences is indicated with 'ns'.

Similarly, for negative deactivating affect we found a significant main effect of time, $F(2,346) = 27.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .14$, and a significant interaction between time and condition, $F(2,346) = 3.24$, $p = .040$, $\eta^2_p = .02$ (see Figure 4.3). Contrast analyses showed no significant change between Time 0 and Time 1 for negative deactivating affect, but a significant difference between conditions at Time 1, with less negative activating affect in the self-compassion condition in comparison to the control condition ($M_{diff} = -0.47$, $p = .031$). There was a significant decrease in negative deactivating affect between Time 1 and Time 2 for both control and self-compassion conditions ($M_{diff} = -0.72$, $p < .001$; $M_{diff} = -0.52$, $p < .001$, respectively). The difference in negative affect between conditions was not significant at Time 2.
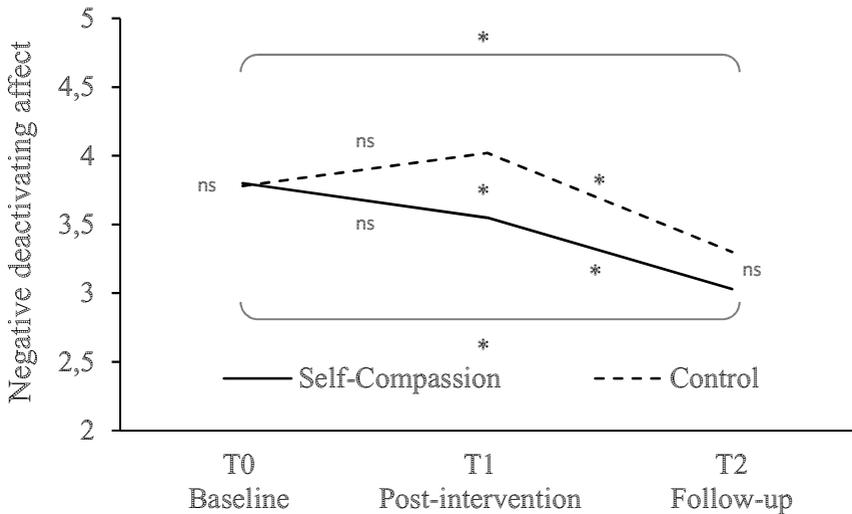


*Figure 4.3.* Graphical representation of negative deactivating affect at the baseline, post-intervention and follow-up measurement for the self-compassion and control condition. Significant difference in affect between times and conditions is indicated with an asterisk, nonsignificant differences is indicated with 'ns'.

Results for positive activating affect showed a significant main effect of time, $F(1.94, 335.70) = 5.60$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2_p = .03$, whereas the interaction between time and condition was not significant, $F(1.94, 335.70) = 0.90$, $p = .41$, $\eta^2_p = .01$ (see Figure 4.4). Positive activating affect did not increase between Time 0 and Time 1 in both conditions. In the control condition there was a significant increase between Time 0 and Time 2 ($M_{diff} = 0.39$, $p = .005$) and between Time 1 and Time 2 ($M_{diff} = 0.36$, $p = .002$). There was no significant difference in positive activating affect between the conditions at any of the time points.
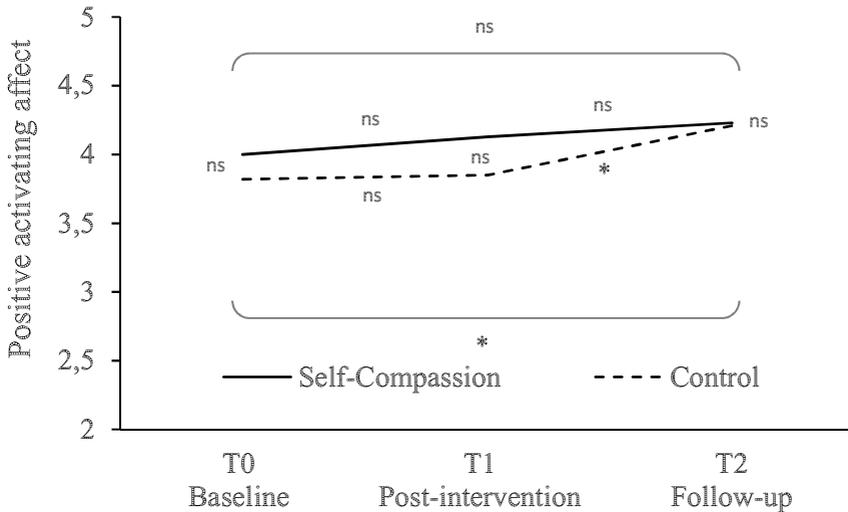


*Figure 4.4.* Graphical representation of positive activating affect at the baseline, post-intervention and follow-up measurement for the self-compassion and control condition. Significant difference in affect between times and conditions is indicated with an asterisk, nonsignificant differences is indicated with 'ns'.

For positive deactivating affect we found a significant main effect of time, $F(2,346) = 23.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .12$, and a significant interaction between time and condition, $F(2,346) = 3.33$, $p = .037$, $\eta^2_p = .02$ (see Figure 4.5). Contract analyses show that there was a significant increase between the Time 0 and Time 1 measure in the self-compassion condition ($M_{diff} = 0.68$, $p < .001$), but not in the control condition. At Time 1 participants mean positive deactivating affect was higher in the self-compassion condition than in the control condition ($M_{diff} = 0.52$, $p = .011$). Subsequently, positive deactivating affect increased significantly between Time 1 and Time 2 in the control condition ($M_{diff} = 0.37$, $p = .002$), but not in the self-compassion condition. Therefore, the difference in positive deactivating affect between the conditions was no longer significant at Time 2.
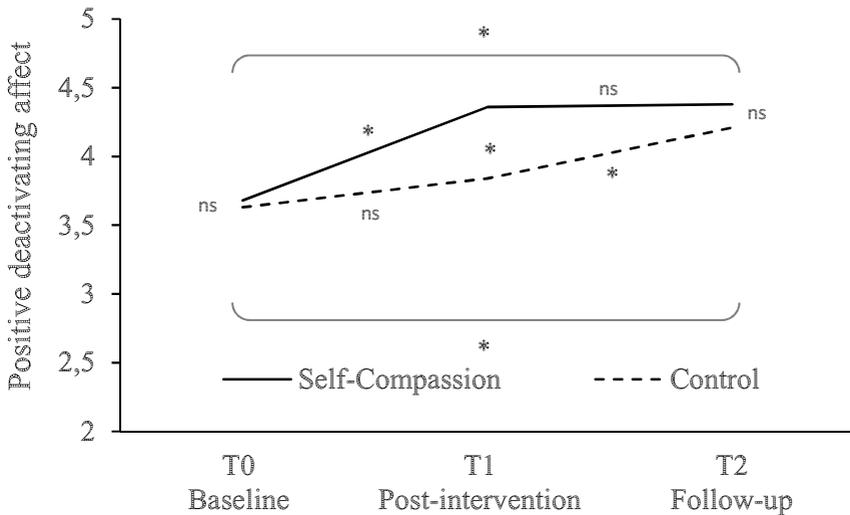


*Figure 4.5.* Graphical representation of positive deactivating affect at the baseline, post-intervention and follow-up measurement for the self-compassion and control condition. Significant difference in affect between times and conditions is indicated with an asterisk, nonsignificant differences is indicated with 'ns'.

## Discussion

Job search is necessary to find a job but also negatively impacts how job seekers feel due to an abundance of negative job search experiences. This is problematic because research shows that especially positive affectivity relates to job search outcomes. In the current study we tested whether reflecting on negative job search experiences with self-compassion through a writing exercise can reduce negative affect and increase positive affect in comparison to reflecting on negative job search experiences freely.

Results showed that the self-compassion writing exercise increased job seekers' state self-compassion in comparison to reflecting freely, which in turn related to their affective responses to job search. This corresponds with previous research showing that self-compassion writing exercises effectively induce state self-compassion (Breines & Chen, 2012), and with research showing that these exercises beneficially relate to participants' affect (Leary et al., 2007). We found no significant direct effects of the intervention on affect, but the intervention impacted job seekers' affect through increased state self-compassion and partly through reduced self-criticism. More specifically, the intervention positively impacted state self-compassion, which related positively to positive affect and negatively to negative affect. In addition, state self-compassion related negatively to self-criticism, which related positively to negative affect and negatively to positive affect. Our findings are in line with self-compassion theorizing, which states that self-compassioned individuals are better able to withstand negative experiences as these are not amplified by harsh self-judgement (Neff, 2003a). Previous research has shown a negative relation between self-compassion and self-criticism (Gilbert & Procter, 2006). Our study extends these findings by showing that reduced self-criticism in part explains the relation between self-compassion and affect.

Even though the indirect effects of the intervention on each of the four types of affect was significant, the total effect of the intervention on affect was only significant for positive deactivating

affect and approached significance for negative deactivating affect. For activating affect we did not find significant total effects of the intervention. This can be understood when focusing on the differences in affect between the conditions immediately after the intervention. Specifically, after the intervention job seekers reported significantly less negative deactivating affect (e.g., sadness) and more positive deactivating affect (e.g., calmness) than after reflecting freely, while there were no significant differences between the two conditions in activating positive (e.g., cheerfulness) and negative affect (e.g., frustration). Job seekers who reflected with self-compassion on their negative job search experiences generally felt less sad and more calm, but felt equally cheerful and frustrated as job seekers who had reflected freely. We might therefore tentatively conclude that deactivating emotions are somewhat more affected by the self-compassion intervention than activating emotions. Differences between conditions were no longer apparent in the follow-up measurement one week after the exercise. In both conditions job seekers felt better: they reported more deactivating positive affect and less deactivating negative affect in the follow-up measurement in comparison to the baseline measure. However, job seekers in the self-compassion condition felt better sooner (i.e., immediately after the intervention), while job seekers in the control condition caught up feeling equally well one week later.

Previous self-compassion intervention studies have looked at various outcomes, such as depressive symptoms and happiness (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010), general negative affect (Leary et al., 2007), improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012), and psychopathological outcomes in clinical setting such as trauma recovery (Zeller, Yuval, Nitzan-Assayag, & Bernstein, 2015) or chronic self-loathing (Krawitz, 2012), but did not include all four types of affect as outcome variables. This study therefore contributes to self-compassion research by generating insight into the impact of self-compassion interventions on affect of different activation levels, that is, by showing differential effects for different types of affect.

Our results are thus partly in line with previous research, in that existing research suggests that self-compassion is beneficial for both deactivating and activating affect. For example, Kreemers et al. (2018) showed that trait self-compassion related similarly to affect with different activation levels: negative to negative (de)activating affect and positive to positive (de)activating affect. This pattern of findings is also apparent in our study between trait self-compassion and affect as measured at Time 0 (see Table 4.1) and between state self-compassion measured at Time 1 and Time 2 (see Table 4.1).

The fact that we do not seem to find the same effects of the intervention on affect may be attributed to the modesty of the intervention. A relatively short writing exercise filled out once can be expected to have less impact on state self-compassion than a week of daily exercises such as in the study of Shapira and Mongrain (2010). They conducted an intervention study with Canadian adults (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010) with seven daily repeated self-compassion writing exercises. Their intervention reduced depressive symptoms and increased participants' experience of happiness. The decrease in depressive symptoms after a self-compassion intervention is in line with our results as these symptoms could be categorized as negative deactivating affect. The increase in happiness, however, is not in line with our results, as happiness is a form of positive activating affect and we did not find an increase in activating affect after our intervention. The beneficial effects of the self-compassion intervention with repeated self-compassion exercises did only became apparent three months after the exercises, and not one week after the exercise (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010). Combining our results with those of Shapira and Mongrain (2010) we conclude that the effect of a self-compassion intervention on how people feel depends on the frequency with which people are stimulated to be self-compassioned. To have a lasting effect on people's general sense of happiness or dejection self-compassion likely needs some time to be learned and routinized. These results emphasize the importance of taking time into account when

researching the dynamics of emotion regulation through self-compassion by having multiple follow-up measurements.

**Implications**

Our findings have implications for both research and practice in the context of job search. Although previous correlational research (Kreemers et al., 2018) demonstrated that trait-self-compassion beneficially relates to job seekers' affect, it could not reveal directional causal relationships. In the current study, we address the call that various scholars (e.g., Aguinis & Edwards, 2014; Eden, 2017) made to adopt experimental field designs to provide more rigorous tests of our theories. By adopting an experimental design our results support the causal effect of state self-compassion on job seekers' emotional responses, which provides evidence for self-compassion theory in the context of job seeking. In addition, we contribute to our understanding of how self-compassion makes job seekers feel better by identifying self-criticism as mediator of the relation between self-compassion and affect. Hereby we add weight to the notion that self-compassion may help to reduce self-criticism and that interventions could be tailored to specific sensitive groups (e.g., those who suffer more from self-criticism; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010).

Furthermore, by showing that self-compassion has the potential to aid job seekers in effectively dealing with negative job search experiences, we gained insights that can be implemented in practice (e.g., unemployment counseling; career counseling; job search interventions). The writing exercises can function as a starting point to further develop or extend interventions aimed at job seekers taking a self-compassioned perspective toward their difficulties, which can help them to retain or increase the positive emotions that benefit their job search. Thus far, stress management interventions have not been found effective in the context of job search (see Liu, Huang, et al., 2014 for meta analyses). Self-compassion may not only benefit job seekers' emotional well-being but may also improve their motivation

as was shown in prior research on people's responses to negative feedback (Breines & Chen, 2012). Considering that job seekers have to continue to search for a job also after negative feedback, self-compassion could encourage them to do so. In future research job search success should therefore also be taken into account as an outcome of a self-compassion intervention.

Our results add to the increasing amount of literature that distinguishes different activation levels of affect (e.g., Baas et al., 2008; Carver, 2004; Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998; Russell, 2003; Taylor, 1991; Watson & Tellegen, 1985; Wrzus et al., 2015; Yik et al., 2011) by showing that our self-compassion intervention was effective for positive and negative deactivating affect but not for activating affect. In other words, reflecting on negative job search experiences generally made job seekers more calm and less sad but not more cheerful or less frustrated than reflecting freely. These outcomes are perhaps explainable by self-compassion's self-soothing properties. According to the social mentality theory (Gilbert, 1989), which draws on principles of evolutionary biology, neurobiology, and attachment theory, self-compassion deactivates the threat system (associated with feelings of insecurity, defensiveness and the limbic system) and activates the self-soothing system (associated with feelings of secure attachment, safeness, and the oxytocin–opiate system). This self-soothing system speaks more to deactivating affect and might therefore explain why a self-compassion intervention influences these emotions more strongly.

**Limitations and Future Research**

To put our results into perspective we have to take the limitations of our research into account. Firstly, our intervention was small and its effects were modest. Our results show that a self-compassion exercise can have a beneficial impact on state self-compassion, self-criticism, and affective responses to negative job search experiences immediately after the intervention. Our results also show that the impact of the exercises on affect were matched by

the control condition within a week time. Given that our intervention was small and performed in a field setting, which carries more noise than a lab setting, having a modest effect is understandable and even promising (Prentice & Miller, 1992). In recent years there has been a development towards briefer and more precise psychological interventions, called wise interventions (Walton, 2014). These interventions aim to "alter a specific way in which people think or feel in the normal course of their lives to help them flourish" (Walton, 2014, p.73) and they are furthermore characterized by lasting effects over time. Inducing self-compassion fits that description of a wise intervention. However, wise interventions will affect long-term outcomes only if they alter critical recursive processes. Future research could therefore focus on ways to make a self-compassion intervention more recursive.

Second, the aim of our study was to help job seekers deal with negative job search experiences and reduce their negative affect and increase their positive affect because previous research (Turban et al., 2013) has shown that especially positive affectivity beneficially relates to job search outcomes. Our research was the first step to testing the effectiveness of a self-compassion intervention for job seekers. Although we showed that the intervention impacted job seekers' affective responses beneficially, we need additional data to test whether the improved affective responses can be replicated and translate to better job search behaviors and outcomes. Future research could therefore include more outcome measures that could tap into job search behavior (e.g., job search strategies, Crossley & Highhouse, 2005), job search systematicity (Chapter 2 in this dissertation;) and job search success (e.g., interview invitations, job offers, cf. Saks, 2006).

All participants were asked to reflect on their worse negative job search experience. This reflection constitutes a wide range of experiences which happened to the job seekers longer or less long ago. We did not control for the intensity of the experience or the time that had been passed since the event had happened, since we were

mostly interested in the difference between the conditions. Moreover, job seekers were randomly divided over the conditions. Still, future research could explore how different experiences can contribute to different emotional responses.

## Conclusion

Our results show that a self-compassion intervention consisting of a writing exercise promotes state self-compassion and has a beneficial short term effect on job seekers' deactivating emotions. Moreover, state self-compassion reduces self-criticism among job seekers which is beneficial for their affective responses to negative job search experiences. These results can inspire the development of self-compassion interventions and can be implemented in practice (e.g., unemployment counseling; career counseling; job search interventions).