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**Ways to Prevent Moral Disengagement for YouTube Content Creators: The Role of
Empathy and Self-Compassion**

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the
University of Missouri–St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree Doctor of Business Administration with an emphasis in Leadership

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Abstract

This study sought to assess the role empathy and self-compassion play in lessening the impact of stress and moral disengagement for digital entrepreneurs, specifically, YouTube content creators. The desire for status and the need for venture legitimacy within the content creation economy, while considered mostly positive traits, can be taken to the extreme, leading to a lack of empathy and self-compassion and even degradation and moral disengagement. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Quantitative data within the study provides statistical evidence of correlations and trends, while qualitative data discusses the perspectives and lived experiences of YouTube content creators. This holistic approach provides a significant exploration of how empathy and self-compassion intersect with moral decision-making and stress management within the content of digital entrepreneurship. The research sought to understand the relationship between these physiological factors and their potential benefits for the mental well-being and professional success of individuals in the digital entrepreneurship sphere. The study showcases how moral disengagement and stress can impact digital entrepreneurs. Stress, often arising from the competitive nature of the digital environment along with the constant need to create engaging and interesting content, can lead to decreased creativity and burnout. By examining these factors, the research provides insight on the importance of addressing these problems proactively to sustain long-term success.

Keywords: amoral manipulation, empathy, entrepreneurial mindset, moral disengagement, self-compassion, venture legitimacy

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Ways to Prevent Moral Disengagement for YouTube Content Creators: The Role of Empathy and Self-Compassion

Ireland et al. (2003) defined the entrepreneurial mindset as a “development-oriented point of view by which people improve their position of resilience, inspiration, creativity, and improvement” (p. 968). The mindset of an entrepreneur consists of beliefs which drives them to solve a problem or need within the marketplace (Davis, 1983). According to Davis (1983), a thriving content creator needs to have an entrepreneur’s mindset to find creative ways and the means to produce engaging content for their viewership. An entrepreneur’s mindset relates to value-driven service for others. For example, someone with an entrepreneur’s mindset might determine what the pain points are for their current and potential viewers of their YouTube channels and find solutions to solve these pain points. McMullen and Kier (2016) stated that the entrepreneurial mindset is the “ability to notice and use advantages without focusing on the resources currently under . . . [ones’] ownership” (p. 664). Recent studies have described behaviors related to the entrepreneurial mindset. For example, Fisher et al. (2020) proposed that the drive to succeed as an entrepreneur can be characterized as a hustle, driven by an urgent to desire to address challenges in the absence of certainty. The literature review revealed that the entrepreneur’s mindset is not problematic, rather someone with an entrepreneurial mindset focuses on providing value, offering a service, or solving a need (Mariz-Perez et al., 2012).

Researchers have suggested that additional studies be conducted to understand the cognitive makeup of individuals with an entrepreneur’s mindset (Krueger, 2007). Having

an entrepreneurial mindset is a positive trait needed for those working in digital content creation. Neck and Corbett (2018) discussed the entrepreneurial mindset as being the foundation for nurturing emerging entrepreneurs and assisting them in succeeding. However, they explain that it is possible for the productive attributes of the entrepreneurial mindset to become detrimental. For example, when the desire to succeed by way of venture legitimacy moves from a desire to serve customers' needs to more egotistical motives, it can lead to heightened levels of stress and burnout. Further, when an entrepreneur participates in obsessive risk-taking, it can lead to their having a lack of focus, short-term thinking, poor time management, and unrealistic expectations (Neck & Corbett, 2018).

The primary research question for this study was, what leads to moral disengagement for digital entrepreneurs, such as YouTubers? Moral disengagement is defined as a psychological process by which people justify or rationalize their actions that would typically be characterized as morally wrong (Bandura, 1999). A secondary question for this study was, how does a content creators desire for status and success and the pressure for venture legitimacy lead to their experiencing increased stress and moral disengagement? Two remedial psychological constructs were explored in this study: self-compassion and empathy. Other questions that arose during the research was how the need for status (which can be conceptualized as a positive drive, or a negative characteristic related to the dark triad of Machiavellianism) yields stress and how the need for venture legitimacy impacts the relationship between status and stress. Machiavellianism is a personality trait named after the political philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli that is characterized by nonexistent moral principles and manipulative and

cunning actions (Ináncsi et al., 2018). Individuals with higher Machiavellian levels are typically deliberate and illusive in their interactions with other people, seeking to achieve their aspirations regardless of the costs (Christie & Geuss, 1970). Additionally, in the study, I examined if stress heightened the susceptibility of moral disengagement. More specifically, I examined how empathy and self-compassion may serve to weaken the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. In this study, I examined how digital entrepreneurs, specifically YouTube content creators, can grow and enhance their entrepreneurial mindset while decreasing the likelihood that they fall prey to the pressures of venture legitimacy and the desire for status that is sometimes gained by any means necessary, regardless of the consequences (i.e., moral disengagement). To this end, empathy and self-compassion were explored as intervening variables. The findings of this research offer interventions based on these corrective traits.

The Problem

The entrepreneurial mindset consists of three, generally thought of, positive, traits—a desire for status, independence, and nonconformity—which have been observed in individuals who succeed in business endeavors (Daspit et al., 2021). Being successful with online content creation depends on innovation (Kuratko, 2020). Innovation utilizes the entrepreneurial mindset (Kuratko, 2020; Naumann, 2017). According to Kang (2022), YouTubers are online content creators who serve multiple roles (e.g., influencer, producer, editor, collaborator, mentor, guide, or teacher). The most successful YouTubers are inspirational, humorous, and informative, and they create videos that answer questions people have. The overarching goal of YouTubers is to create content that solves a need in the online content economy and serves to entertain viewers. However, as a

group of workers, little is known about YouTube content creators (Kang, 2022). It would certainly seem, based on the time many content creators spend building their brand and their desire for attending to their customers wants and needs, that they have an entrepreneur's mindset and a desire for status that propels them to be successful. Having a desire for status is often seen as a positive trait, however, in extreme and desperate situations, such as when an individual experiences a heightened need for venture legitimacy, it can degrade into a negative trait (Kang, 2022). As such, it could become problematic and even detrimental for a content creator to overly focus on their desire for status, attention, fast results, and subscriber counts (Beaver & Jennings, 2005; Wright & Zahra, 2011).

With YouTube channels that are growing and an increasingly saturated online market, YouTube creators, who face considerable pressure to constantly develop new and interesting content, are at risk for experiencing moral disengagement as they seek to increase their viewership, popularity, and influence, and they may do so by any means necessary (Fusato, 2023). Examples of such negative types of decision-making include stealing content without proper authorization, using misleading thumbnails and titles for videos (i.e., clickbait), and purchasing fake subscribers to look more authoritative (West, 2023). In short, when YouTubers do not see their channels growing as successfully as they would like, they may make unethical decisions. According to Yurieff (2019), what researchers have not yet figured out is how YouTubers might mitigate these potential derailments and how they could remain committed in the face of failure and burnout.

Content Creators

Online content creators seek to create thought-provoking, entertaining, and helpful information that is disseminated by way of digital distribution (Yuan & Constine, 2020). They develop their content through various formats such as blogs and podcasts and disseminate it through social media outlets (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook). There are currently over 50 million online content creators (e.g., bloggers, podcasters, and video creators) who add value in the creator economy (Yuan & Constine, 2020). The creator economy is defined by Yuan and Constine (2022) as a class of small to large online businesses made up of independent digital entrepreneurs, online custodians, and groups of builders, including social media personalities, influencers, bloggers, and video editing professionals. Of these 50 million content creators, 2 million are YouTube content creators, and of these, 46.7 million are amateurs (31 million on YouTube) and over 2 million (1 million on YouTube) are professionals, full-time content creators earning more than \$100,000 per year. There are currently 31 million channels created on YouTube with just over 1 million content creators who have more than 10,000 subscribers (Yuan & Constine, 2020), and the average viewer spends 40 minutes per session on the platform (Lindner, 2023). Thus, it is critical for online content creators to conduct research to create optimized keywords to keep viewers on their channels, who can then be prompted to watch their other videos, increasing the creator's metrics (e.g., views, watch time, retention rate) and helping them grow their channel (Lindner, 2023).

Content Economy

CB Insights (2021) defined the creator economy as a group of self-sustaining businesses run by individual creators who generate hustles and create revenue based on

their expertise, skills, and knowledge. From a survey done by The Tilt (2022), fifty-seven percent of respondents stated that their biggest concern regarding building their YouTube channel was that the content they create gets found, while 49% stated that how to monetize their content was a major focus of their online business. Furthermore, over 90% of the online content creators surveyed stated that their motivation stems from their desire to achieve financial independence and retire early. The survey also found that it takes online content creators a minimum of six months to make their first dollar and an additional 10 months of hard work to be able to self-support themselves. Thus, a drive to be successful and the desire for fast results appear to be inherent in content creators' endeavors. This drive to be successful, in turn, can be especially detrimental in the creator economy as online entrepreneurs feel pressure to consistently publish content that meets the expectations of their viewership (Yurieff, 2019). For example, a common fear for many YouTubers is that if they do not consistently upload content, their brand will suffer and they will lose viewers. In addition to experiencing burnout, another concern for content creators is an increased risk of forming a win-at-all-cost mentality that is often accompanied by unethical decision-making (Oladipo, 2022).

Seventy-eight percent of the American population are living paycheck to paycheck (Friedman, 2019) and a growing number of people are choosing to create new revenue streams to supplement their income using YouTube as a catalyst for financial assistance (Stokel-Walker, 2022). To make this shift, they must successfully transition from creating content as a hobby to growing their presence online with an entrepreneurial mindset (Hall, 2022).

Online content creators, specifically YouTubers, serve many roles such as editor, writer, innovator, and negotiator (Gomez, 2023). Research conducted by The Tilt (2020) found that YouTube is the fastest growing small business in existence today. YouTubers are seen as catalysts for influencing the purchasing decisions of their followers (Su et al., 2023). These online content creators work with major commercial brands and feature their products in the videos that they produce. Thus, YouTubers are selected as advocates for brands based on their social media marketing tactics (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Segreto explained five components of the entrepreneur mindset: opportunity recognition, risk-taking and risk management, innovative thinking, resourcefulness, and adaptability. An entrepreneur who has a need for achievement, has a vision, and believes in delayed gratification, relates most to the fourth component of the entrepreneurial mindset—resourcefulness (Steinhoff & Burgess, 1993). Visionaries find opportunities in the most challenging economic situations (Cuellar, 2018). Content creators must have extreme confidence and patience in what they are trying to accomplish.

Financials for Online Content Creators

Payouts for YouTubers from 2020 to 2021 increased by 88.3% (Thorpe, 2023). Brown and Freeman (2022) stated that Mr. Beast, a YouTuber who has over 207 million subscribers, was the highest paid YouTuber, generating over \$54 million dollars in 2021, and YouTuber Jake Paul was the second highest at \$45 million dollars. Mr. Beast stated his overall goal was to become a full-time YouTuber and that he gained popularity by uploading gaming videos and making other videos, such as one in which he counted to 100,000 (Brown & Freeman, 2022). Dencheva (2023) found that the creator economy is valued at over \$13.8 billion U.S. dollars and has more than doubled its total market value

since 2019. Individuals tired of living paycheck to paycheck are seeking new and alternate ways to generate income online by creating side hustles, whether by blogging, creating courses, making videos, or starting podcasts (Wade, 2024). Interest in the creator economy is drastically increasing as evidenced by the term “influencer marketing” growing 5,000 percent since 2020 based on Google Trends (Thorpe, 2023). In addition, seeking financial independence and aiming to retire early are increasingly popular aims. There are more than 500 hours of video content uploaded to the YouTube platform every 60 seconds (Sharma, 2020). According to recent research by ANA, 92% of consumers trust solopreneurs and other small entrepreneurs (micro-influencers) over larger corporations or even over major household brand names (Vos, 2020). The ANA defined micro-influencers as any content creator with 10,000 to 50,000 followers on their social media accounts. They also found that over 82% of consumers are likely to purchase a product or service that a content creator recommends (Vos, 2020).

Entrepreneurial Mindset and Online Entrepreneurs

An entrepreneurial mindset relates to someone who seeks to be independent (Wooll, 2022). Independence drives YouTube content creators to achieve goals, create value, and be profitable with their channels. Eighty percent of the online content creators surveyed by The Tilt (2020) stated that independence was their main driver for success and for building their online business. Exhibiting competency, focus, innovation, dedication, and creativity are indicators of a highly independent individual (Djafri, 2018). Trust matters and online content creators who strive for venture legitimacy are noticed by viewers (Bulbul, 2023). Content creators possess the traits of remaining composed under pressure, being positive and persistent despite failures, having no fear, and holding a

strong self-belief in themselves. Further, they are extremely creative, have a strong desire to find solutions to problems, and possess immense drive and determination (The Tilt, 2022). YouTubers are seen as catalysts for influencing the purchasing decisions of their followers. Online content creators work with major, commercial brands and mention their products in the videos that they produce. Thus, YouTubers are selected as advocates for brands based on their social media marketing tactics (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018).

Gaps in Research

The focus of content creators' drive can become diverted from solving the needs of customers to placing all their attention on what they can get, even if it is to the detriment of themselves and others (BetterHelp Editorial Team, 2023). For example, too much focus on the desire for status and legitimacy can lead to the development of toxic characteristics such as being excessively competitive, and it can lead to burnout. Thus, their morale becomes significantly decreased (Spreier et al., 2006).

Based on the literature review, it was unclear what impact the desire for status, legitimacy, and success, and its associated stress, have on the behaviors of digital entrepreneurs and, specifically, YouTube content creators. It is not yet fully understood what elements and conditions serve as precursors or heighten the likelihood for entrepreneurs to engage in behaviors associated with moral disengagement (e.g., purchasing likes, views, and fake subscribers). Further, limited research has been conducted on YouTube content creators, most likely due to the platform being recently founded in 2005.

The extent to which empathy and self-compassion could lessen moral disengagement or its impact was also not apparent in the literature review. Thus, the main

goal of this study was to find out how empathy and self-compassion could prevent or lessen the likelihood of the entrepreneurial mindset changing from being a primarily positive trait (offering value creation and seeking to serve others) to a negative trait (unethical decision-making). Though it is not fully known how the rush for venture legitimacy drives content creators to participate in moral disengagement, the literature offered some clues. For example, controversial topics present opportunities for YouTubers to create videos that their viewership will be interested in, which in turn helps the creators attract views, likes, and revenue from Google AdSense that runs on their content sites (Chang, 2017), simply focusing on controversial topics to those ends can be viewed as an illegitimate practice.

Higher levels of anxiety brought on by stress can lessen YouTuber's ability to be empathetic (Smith, 2015). The psychological constructs of empathy and self-compassion can be used to prevent moral disengagement (Tabares & Palacio, 2021). Instead of trying to explain unethical and improper behaviors, people that are self-compassionate tend to take accountability for their actions. There is compelling research that has shown self-compassion can significantly intercede in the relationship between stress and ones' willingness to morally disengage (Pereira et al., 2022). Thus, the fewer demands YouTubers place on themselves and the less harsh they are on themselves could lead them to be more productive and creative, enjoy life, and have less stress.

The role of empathy as a moderator between stress and moral disengagement is intriguing in numerous ways. Empathy could help creators to be more compassionate towards themselves and thus, resilient against the worry, depression, and anxiety that consistent content creation can bring on. Additionally, certain personality traits linked to

moral disengagement (e.g., the dark triad) coupled with YouTubers' drive to be successful may increase their risk for engaging in moral disengagement, like resorting to immoral and unethical behaviors to stay relevant, grow their channels, and obtain likes, subscribers, and views. Based on the literature review, it is not known the extent to which success and profits can push a content creator with good intentions to take on shrewd and conniving characteristics to cheat the system, like buying subscribers to speed up the monetization of their channels. It is also not known the extent to which business-minded individuals might use manipulation to obtain specific results in their businesses.

Furthermore, although there has been extensive research on how entrepreneurs cope with the fear of failure (Jenkins et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2007; Ucbasaran et al., 2013), studies on how content creators can better deal with their day-to-day operations have been relatively scarce. Lastly, little is known about entrepreneurial prevarication, which is an undesired business impediment, and what causes entrepreneurs to make unethical decisions. It is vital to understand the psychological factors that impact success for entrepreneurs (Kets de Vries, 1985). Researchers have found that entrepreneurs possess greater moral perspectives and ethical reasoning than most executives (Bucar & Hisrich, 2001; Teal & Carroll, 1999).

Therefore, in this study, it was determined that the use of empathy could be a tool for mitigating deception in business and the negative side of the entrepreneurial mindset. For example, Medic (2004) found that being a more empathetic and positive YouTube content creator can create positive limbic resonance for the visitors of their channel. Positive limbic resonance, according to Medic (2004), is when an individual's feelings are in tune or mirrored by someone else, leading to a shared experience or understanding.

When a content creator demonstrates increased empathy toward their viewership, the more likely these visitors will be to return, share the content, and tell their friends, family, and coworkers about the channel. In addition, the creator can build a relationship with their fans which can be a positive experience for both the viewers as well as the creator. Thus, work, patience, and consistent content creation is vital for YouTubers to build their community. Haynes et al. (2015) found that people with manipulative characteristics focus on themselves and their desires.

How This Study Will Close the Gap in Research

Entrepreneurship is about taking on challenges, creating new solutions and products that will help solve a problem within the creator economy, and delivering despite challenges (Sharma, 2020). A content creator with an entrepreneurial mindset seeks out what other people want and finds ways to produce and deliver products and services that fill these needs (Ries, 2011). Digital entrepreneurs and online content creators strive to overcome the legitimacy threshold and start earning the necessary revenue to support their business (Rutherford et al., 2016). Rutherford et al. (2016) defined the legitimacy threshold as the validity or acceptance a new business achieves to be considered worthy or successful. There is a mindset among content creators that fortune favors the diligent. Conducting research on long-tail keywords and creating content revolving around what consumers are interested in based on their search engine queries can lead to financial growth (Pollack et al., 2012). A long-tail keyword is a longer, more specific term versus a shorter, general term. This study sought to determine if and how practicing empathy and self-compassion can lessen the likelihood of YouTube content creators participating in moral disengagement in their quest for business creation

legitimacy. Entrepreneurial legitimacy can cause entrepreneurs to participate in immoral behaviors as they seek to speed up their rate of success (Zellweger et al., 2012). Thus, in this study, it was proposed that the ways of countering this type of engagement is to assist YouTube content creators in finding more productive ways to grow their channels.

In this study, one specific trait of the entrepreneurial mindset was focused on—the desire for status. A question the study addressed was why immoral decisions are made in the quest of entrepreneurial success. The study also focused on business legitimacy for online content creators and the role of self-compassion in relation to the desire for success and moral disengagement. Psychologists have found that empathy plays a major role in an individual's moral traits (Eisenberg et al., 1991). To this end, this study examined the role of empathy in countering negative behaviors entrepreneurs can express, like unethical decision-making. This study aimed to address and minimize the threat of unethical decision-making for digital entrepreneurs, which might in turn increase their likelihood for successful venture legitimacy, lower their potential for burnout, increase the growth of their business, and grow their brand awareness. The use of empathy can allow content creators to cater their pitch and content to target specific emotions of potential customers (Ullah, 2019). There were limited details in the literature pertaining to moral disengagement and immoral decision-making. The desire for status, although typically a positive and noteworthy trait, can lead to additional stress if the demands of the content creator outweigh their enjoyment for what they are doing (Gupta et al., 2022). There is a strong tendency for content creators to participate in moral disengagement. Understanding the content creation economy and what causes content creators to participate in unethical actions can assist consultants to help online

entrepreneurs become more empathetic (Gupta et al., 2022). In this study, the psychological constructs of empathy and self-compassion were used as counters in experiencing moral disengagement. A key takeaway from the findings of this study is that the content creator who is more empathetic and compassionate will experience less stress, greater productivity, and more enjoyment.

Literature Review

People participate in unethical decision-making when they justify their actions based on their discernment of the circumstances (Trevino & Nelson, 2016). Knoll et al. (2016) found that individuals go through a process of four stages in which they morally disconnect and choose to participate in unethical decision-making. In the first stage, the individual sees their upcoming actions as warranted rather than unethical or immoral. In the second stage, the individual finds ways to lessen their involvement in the actions they take. For example, they might blame others as being the motivators for the decisions they are making. In the third stage, individuals oppose or disregard the ramifications of their actions. In the fourth stage, the individual diminishes how their actions have affected others. For example, they might downgrade the status of an individual or group and the overall impact their actions had on them. YouTube content creators who have entrepreneurial aspirations have a great deal of confidence and ingenuity and possess a strong desire to solve problems, effectively utilize resources, and quickly identify opportunities (Rao, 2000). Social media influencers or online content creators who have a strong desire for status are extremely selective in the activities they participate in and sparingly choose the networks and associations they surround themselves with (Lynch & Corbett, 2021).

Being an entrepreneur is a state of mind which blends human activity with business activities and consequences, such as uncertainty and possible failure (Financial Times Lexicon, 2017). For example, demand to create consistent and noteworthy content can lead to a content creators' burnout and a loss of growth for their YouTube channel. Wanting to generate extra income also plays a major role in why YouTubers might choose to act immorally (Schwartz, 2013). For example, the business decision structure can be observed when the content creator focuses on the value or advantage analysis and their self-interested pursuit rather than the pain points of their potential customer.

The personality of an individual plays a significant role in predicting their entrepreneurial behavior (Zhao et al., 2005). For a business-minded individual, self-confidence relates to perceived self-esteem in conjunction with their entrepreneurial aspirations (Robinson et al., 1991).

Entrepreneurial Mindset

The business-minded YouTuber has the potential to grow their channel into a full-time, productive, and profitable business. For content creators, an entrepreneur's mindset is defined as a specific set of strategies and traits that enable them to maximize positive results in their business (Daspit et al., 2021). For example, some strategies that might be utilized are writing a promising business plan, successfully following through on that business plan, and analyzing practicality in their business. Having an entrepreneurial mindset affects how someone analyzes their life, how they provide services and products that serve the needs of others, and how they convert innovative ideas into action (Fiorio & Ferrero, 2014). Having an entrepreneur's mindset can also promote creativity, offer greater flexibility for entrepreneurs to achieve positive results, and help them form an

environment from which innovation can take place (Ireland et al., 2003). Entrepreneurs are nonconformists and risk-takers who are focused on independence, seek to be in control, and thrive in challenging environments (Marwaha & Mehandipur, 2006). McClelland's achievement theory proposes that people who have an inherent desire to succeed solve challenges themselves (Amin et al., 2018). This theory makes a connection between success and the entrepreneurial mindset. The entrepreneur's mindset is beneficial in business development; however, a strong desire for achievement and success can push YouTube content creators to engage in unethical decision-making (e.g., buying subscribers or "watch time hours" to speed up monetization requirements). Buying subscribers goes against the YouTube Partner Policy and content creators run the risk of either having their channels suspended or worse, demonetized or deleted. Further, subscriber numbers may go up, but views and YouTube watch time hours will not (Jesutofunmi, 2023).

A New Way to Examine Moral Disengagement

In this study, I theorized that YouTube content creators who have a strong desire for status may experience higher levels of stress. The need for venture legitimacy can serve to strengthen the relationship between stress and the desire for status (Wright, 2012). The two psychological constructs of empathy and self-compassion served as moderators in the study. I sought to determine how empathy could weaken the relationship between stress and moral disengagement to assist YouTube content creators to increase their productivity and creativity. It was speculated that self-compassion, by means of being less demanding on themselves and more patient with their community, would serve to decrease the likelihood for YouTube content creators to morally

disengage. This study posed that the traits related to the dark triad of Machiavellianism found in those who morally disengage indirectly relates to their desire for status and directly relates to their amoral manipulation. Amoral manipulation refers to the act of controlling other people without regard for moral considerations or moral principles. The dark triad refers to three personality traits that are categorized by egotistical, manipulative, and deceptive behaviors (Paulhus, 2002). Please reference Figure 1 for the theoretical model of this study.

Desire for Status

YouTube content creators seek alternative ways to create solutions to problems within organizations and the economy (Vujić, 2010). YouTubers who display a large desire for status prefer to have control over their decisions and future aspirations (Bailenson et al., 2011). They can be successful, whether working in teams or on their own (Davis et al., 2015) and seek to minimize constraints being placed on their actions, time, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Their desire for status drives them to gain control over their decisions and future aspirations (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research has shown that entrepreneurs have an increased motivation to achieve in comparison to managers (Shapiro & Sokol, 1982). Further, entrepreneurs who found their own company, compared to those who do not, have greater achievement motivation and are more growth-oriented (over being income-oriented) when it comes to success (Stewart & Roth, 2007).

An increased desire for status can also assist YouTube content creators in overcoming difficult obstacles, producing superior work, and being the best at what they do (Krasnova et al., 2010). Florin et al. (2007) found that the entrepreneurial mindset

includes being an achiever, being motivated, having self-efficacy, finding new ways to handle business activities, and having a proactive disposition. Desire for status stems from the capacity to create new business ideas, compliment present business models, and innovate. YouTubers first focus on their product or service ideas and then choose the business sector they can be most successful in, finding their niche (Vaynerchuk, 2018). Individuals with a strong desire to achieve results choose to persist in accomplishing their desired outcome. The willingness to endure challenges and adopt a belief in delayed gratification can help YouTubers continue to create evergreen content that helps others and offers income for many years to come. YouTubers are willing to take the less traveled path, feel comfortable taking on different viewpoints from their peers, and take less popular stances compared to those who have high levels of conformity (Davis et al., 2016).

Stress

Ninety percent of content creators deal with burnout (Hale, 2021). The pressure of producing nonstop content can weigh heavily on content creators, so much so that 71% of YouTube content creators have considered quitting (Hale, 2021). SeatGeek executive Ian Borthwick in conjunction with Vibley, a community-based platform for creators, surveyed 150 content creators and found that 45.3% had very large followings, rated between 100 to 500,000 followers, and only a few content creators had over 5 million followers (Alvarez, 2018). The results of the Borthwick Vibley study confirmed the above listed statistics. The relationship that YouTube content creators have with their community is in direct relation to the type of content they create (Alvarez, 2018). Thus, content creation and seeking to appease their viewership adds to the stress of YouTubers.

An additional stress for content creators is successfully managing to live off their earnings (Hale, 2021). In addition, they experience stress from changes to the YouTube algorithm and their follower counts. YouTubers experience cyberbullying and harassment, negative comments, and imposter syndrome (Hale, 2021). According to Hall (2022), some of the best stress relievers for content creators are to take time away from social media, read books, binge-watch movies, and exercise, along with finding a support system of friends, family, and like-minded people.

The stronger the support system that content creators have and the more they maintain their enthusiasm, the less likely they are to quit (Smith & Johnson, 2019). The stress of growing a YouTube channel can lead many creators to participate in unethical behavior, such as lying (Smith & Johnson, 2019). For example, a YouTuber can lie about their lifestyle, create video thumbnails and titles that do not accurately convey the content of their videos, steal content, or say negative things about competition with hopes of gaining new followers (Aisles of Life, 2022).

Online content creators who have an entrepreneurial mindset also have a need for venture legitimacy (Zahra & George, 2002). They are willing to consistently create content over long periods of time to serve the needs within the marketplace.

Need for Venture Legitimacy

Venture legitimacy is defined as “an idea that a new business venture will be desired by consumers but also serve the social system of accepted norms, opinions, desirability and hopes” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Policy makers as well as scholars agree that an entrepreneurial mindset is essential for adding to economic and technological development (Obschonka et al., 2017). Having creativity within business leads to the

generation of new product ideas and the development of new strategies and tactics to grow profits within an organization (Grant, 1997). Research has shown the significance of acquiring and balancing legitimacy for new business ventures (Grant, 1997). YouTube content creators, like other members of the creator economy, must be able to create legitimacy for their online business to survive and grow (Überbacher, 2014). Research by The Tilt (2022) found that there is growing stress among content creators to fit into the market standards and align with the principles of the creator economy, remain unique among other digital entrepreneurs, and avoid burnout. The YouTube Partner Program states that it takes 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 hours of watch time for a YouTube channel to become monetized (Mileva, 2023).

The desire for venture legitimacy among YouTubers may lead to their having higher levels of stress, eventually leading to their participating in nefarious activities (Kim & Kim, 2019). Based on the literature, solopreneurs, like many YouTube creators who are in the early stages of their entrepreneurial ventures, must earn the recognition and support of present and future viewers in order gain access to resources (e.g., sponsors, affiliate offers, increased ad revenue) that are essential for the growth and survival of their channels (Überbacher, 2014). Further, in their endeavor to conquer the burden of recentness and accomplish the coveted legitimacy they seek, some entrepreneurs deliberately misquote information and tell admissible lies (Rutherford et al., 2009). Rutherford et al. (2009, p. 949) stated that during the early phase of development for a new venture, many YouTubers utilize “whichever schemes and procedures” are deemed vital to create legitimacy.

The desire for venture legitimacy and the rush to get YouTube channels monetized takes the focus away from productivity and can lead to burnout (Smith, 2020). Inauthentically gaining subscribers will not help a channel improve its view count or result in any major changes for the YouTube algorithm (Smith, 2020). Moral disengagement is the procedure used by content creators for unethical decision-making (Theodoraki et al., 2022). According to Theodoraki et al. (2022), buying subscribers and fake views is considered amoral for several reasons. The biggest reason is that it compromises being fair and genuine and having integrity, traits valued within the online content creation community. Further, it undermines the credibility of content creators. In addition, it also distorts audience engagement metrics. Lastly, it creates an untrustworthy perception of popularity. YouTube content creators desire legitimacy which causes pressure for them to perform and continually create content, and this can lead to unethical decision-making. The pressure for venture legitimacy and quick results can lead to moral disengagement for YouTube content creators (Suchman, 1995). For example, being offered to get paid to mention a product they have no real interest in on their channels in exchange for a small payment may distract from their brands' real purpose (Parkin, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

There is extreme pressure to succeed as a YouTube content creator. In their 2022 State of the Creator Economy report, ConvertKit, an email marketing website that focuses on helping bloggers, creators, and business, stated that 61% of YouTube content creators deal with burnout, and this stems from the pressure to succeed (Oladipo, 2022). Some additional reasons for burnout are feeling pressure to consistently post videos,

running out of ideas, the inability to mentally disengage from working online, and physical manifestations (e.g., lack of sleep, irritability, and sadness). Moral disengagement theory provides an overview of human behavior (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2001) defined moral disengagement as a method by which people convince themselves that moral standards do not apply to them within certain circumstances or contexts. Furthermore, people form their own personal moral worth that guides their ethical behavior and prevents negative behavior.

These measures that stem from an individual's moral worth help them to foresee and manage their own actions (Fisher, 2013). Thus, when people engage in moral disengagement actions, they are straying from the moral implications of their actions (Bandura, 1999). Specifically, the propensity to morally disengage permits individuals to take actions that are not consistent with their ethical standards without feelings of guilt or self-blame (Bandura, 1999). Research has found that prior to participating in immoral behaviors, individuals psychologically change or reexamine their misconduct by way of moral disengagement techniques (e.g., ethical justification or assignment of criticism), which supports their immoral choices or activities without producing negative emotions about themselves (Detert et al., 2008).

Moral Disengagement

Higher levels of stress, whether due to their YouTube channel not growing fast enough or their running out of content ideas, can cause content creators to participate in moral disengagement (e.g., purchasing likes, fake views, and subscribers) to gain authority (Kouchaki & Desai, 2015). The potential ramifications of these actions can lead to their losing their channel or it becoming demonetized. Thus, amoral manipulation

means an individual manipulates their moral compass to participate in nefarious actions (Zimbardo, 2007). When a content creator is more self-centered rather than focused on the needs of their viewership and the community, it can lead them to experience additional stress and burnout which stems from a higher need for status and to their brand to be seen as legitimate.

Moral disengagement happens when entrepreneurs convince themselves that ethical norms do not apply to their situation (Bandura, 1977). Research has shown that empathy and self-compassion lessen moral disengagement. For example, Barnard and Curry (2011) presented evidence that both empathy and self-compassion improves emotional balance, which helps an entrepreneur learn from past transgressions instead of denying or collaborating with their past faults. Hence, the desire for self-improvement increases as the likelihood for moral disengagement decreases (Neff & Seppälä, 2016). Moral disengagement still plays a large role in shaping unethical customer opinions when considering a person's overall personality. To sustain the viewpoint of being an ethical individual, people desire to rationalize unethical or inappropriate patterns of behaviors through moral disengagement, which permits them to behave immorally while minimizing the threats of the unethical decisions on their moral psyche (Shalvi et al. 2015). For YouTube content creators, there is a relationship between stress and moral disengagement, and this moral disengagement can distance them from building trust with their followers and be seen as being ungentle (Smith & Johnson, 2020). In the context of moral disengagement, some people think that YouTube content creators are responsible for purchasing subscribers, and it is acceptable for them to participate in unethical behavior (e.g., purchasing fake views, subscribers, and watch time hours) to

speed up the monetization of their channels and be accepted into the YouTube Partner Program (Smith & Johnson, 2020). According to Bennet (2022), buying fake YouTube views with the aim for profit runs risks. For example, it could lead to a content creator getting banned by YouTube and their channel being demonetized or being taken down altogether.

Entrepreneurs that possess ethical responsiveness, which is the ability to quickly address moral problems in the proper manner, universally acknowledge that participating in unethical actions is immoral, but they may still engage in the acts to confirm to themselves that they are suitable (Bandura, 1991). Moral disengagement entails altering the discernment of an act without altering behavior or moral standards. For example, a YouTube content creator could justify purchasing subscribers to get their channel monetized faster and start earning passive income from Google Ads. In terms of entrepreneurship, individuals frequently justify immoral actions, such as engaging in unethical decision-making, to make a profit (Bandura, 2016). The more YouTubers participate in unethical disengagement, the less likely they will be to manage their own moral consent and the more likely they will be to act immorally and experience burnout (Johnson, 2019).

Content creators are willing to tell a “validity lie,” a lie about their brand or business, to look more legitimate even though it may not be true and despite knowing it is wrong, but nevertheless they may participate in the act provided they can balance their own inner moral endorsement and consider the activity worthwhile (Theodoraki et al., 2022). The following are types of moral disengagement as described by Bandura (1986), which helps in understanding the moral disengagement of content creators:

- euphemistic labeling or having uncomplicated viewpoints or extensive fabrications,
- minimization of outcomes or explaining the ramifications of the proposed decision as nondetrimental,
- banishment of influence or allocating the decision to an extraneous enterprise,
- dislodging of responsibility or assigning blame to numerous authorities,
- injured party human debasement or assigning blame to the victim or failing to provide moral classification to the individual,
- paregoric comparison or differentiating the immoral action from greater lawlessness,
- ethical justification or expecting the decision to serve a different and, perhaps, greater moral ambition.

Ethical justification was the type of moral disengagement that was focused on in this study.

Kuratko (2020) explained that entrepreneurs, like YouTube content creators, place value on sustaining “ethical concepts” that will guide them in traveling through the moral “fragile stability” they usually encounter when aiming to “conquer numerous entrepreneurial challenges” (p. 7). The amount of passion and desire for status that content creators have are some of the most frequently observed traits within online business ventures (Smilor, 1997).

Therefore, this suggests that to gain venture legitimacy, a YouTube content creator who has a greater likelihood to morally disengage will likely participate in an

immoral process and therefore be deceptive. The content creator with a propensity to take risks is more likely to participate in immoral actions (Karmann et al., 2016). Karmann et al. (2016, p. 231) explained that having risk alignment, the philosophy that a business or brand adopts for its decision-making or processes, is the main component of business orientation, and this is related to entrepreneurial dishonesty. In summary, moral disengagement (e.g., unethical decision-making for faster results and monetization qualification) can happen when there is a desire for venture legitimacy, and it can lead to a willingness to take part in immoral actions.

Moral Disengagement as a Precursor to Immoral Decision-Making

Moral disengagement is a concept that has been extensively studied, clarifying how content creators can account for immoral conduct by influencing their ethical standards. Understanding moral disengagement is vital in understanding why people may participate in unethical decision-making regardless of if they know the difference between right or wrong (Moore, 2012). There are numerous mechanisms that encourage moral disengagement. Moral justification (actions are justified by formulating them as serving an ethical cause or legitimate purpose, thereby lowering the observed harm); euphemistic labeling (making use of language that cleanses or the lowering of the gravity of a person's actions can exonerate one of personal responsibility); displacement of responsibility (blaming other outside influences or prominent figures with aims of lessening liability); diffusion of responsibility (responsibility is shared within a group leaving the individual to feel less responsible for their own actions); dehumanization (characterizing others as less important or seen as less human can lessen the guilt others feel in harming someone else) (Bandura, 1999).

With high demands for excellence also comes increased levels of stress and feelings of vengeance and hostile behavior if results are not achieved (Locke & Christensen, 2007). There are considerable consequences for content creators who participate in moral disengagement, such as YouTube turning off their ads, being suspended from the YouTube Partner Program, or having their channel be deleted (YouTube Partner Program Policies, n.d.). Furthermore, additional guidelines content creators must pay attention to include how YouTube deals with inappropriate language, adult content, violence, derogatory and hateful content, and controversial issues (Woodcock, 2021). Failing to disclose their sponsors or lacking affiliate links in the description of their video is another example of moral disengagement within the creator economy (Dastras, 2023).

Individuals who display Machiavellian traits can be distrustful of others and see others' input as a constraint to their own goals (Ináncsi et al., 2018). These individuals tend to focus on past failures and negativity. These types of actions can place undue stress on the content creator and increase their chances for burnout. Thus, this study analyzed the use of self-compassion and empathy as ways to increase self-awareness and lower self-judgment.

Individuals who display high levels of Machiavellian traits can feel insecure, which, in turn, can produce a negative view of their social surroundings, increase their physical and mental stress, and lead them to a doom-and-gloom mindset if their goals are not achieved (Martynova, 2020). As it relates to moral disengagement, having Machiavellian traits may play a negative role. For example, a lack of quick results and subscriber counts and not being able to get their channel monetized can lead the content

creator to use manipulative measures, such as buying fake subscribers (Martynova, 2020).

Individuals who display high levels of Machiavellian traits are interested in their own goals and can be deceptive when there is a large reward for being successful (Shank, 2018). In addition, they might be less willing to cooperate in group settings, display a greater desire for greed, be dishonest to gain an edge, be manipulative toward others for personal profit, and have little to no concern for fairness (Carter & Irons, 1991). A desire for status, independence (autonomy), self-development, taking risks, having influence, being systemized, and having creativity, are all necessary psychological constructs to have to grow as an entrepreneur (Schelfhout et al., 2016). People with high levels of Machiavellian traits may not cooperate if they feel misunderstood (Brooks, 2019). Thus, empathy and self-compassion were chosen in this study as ways to weaken the relationship between stress and moral disengagement and to lessen it from happening. Rubin (2015) stated that an individual with Machiavellian traits only focuses on what they want and achieving their end goal, regardless of its cost to others. Further, this kind of individual has a desire to be rebellious and neglect social norms. An individual displaying Machiavellian traits may be mistrustful, have a devious way of connecting with others in social interactions, and have an impaired ability to feel empathy for others (Heym et al., 2019).

Individuals who display Machiavellian traits show little sympathy for others, can be insensitive as managers, and are likely to manipulate others and cause distrust among team members within their group (Fehr et al., 1992). Paulhus and Williams (2002) studied whether people with Machiavellian traits were unempathetic and found a negative

relationship between Machiavellianism and empathy. The results of their study showed a negative relationship between cordiality and responsibility. In addition, Baron-Cohen (2011) stated that individuals who possess manipulative traits signals they have deficits in their ability to feel empathy for others.

Protective Constructs in the Development of Moral Disengagement

Empathy weakens the relationship between stress and the tendency to participate in nefarious actions (Decety & Cowell, 2014). YouTube content creators who see the world through the eyes of their viewers seek to solve their hardships (Smith, 2015). Thus, content creators should focus less on what they want and desire and more on what their potential viewers want and desire. An entrepreneurial mindset like this can increase productivity (e.g., increase production of consistent quality content and revenue) and grow their brand, and most importantly, build trust among their community. Trust is built when viewers experience a YouTuber that cares about them by means of answering their comments and creating videos to help solve their pain points.

Empathy as a Moderator

In sum, the literature review showed a link between stress and moral disengagement. It also revealed that the desire to participate in unethical decision-making could stem from a person's traits. Empathy is defined as having a high regard for others' feelings and offering compassion, tenderness, and support (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Leaders with empathic traits have a unique ability to put themselves in the shoes of peers, friends, strangers, and coworkers, and they can grasp how someone else is feeling and support them (Rossingol, 2023). Further, empathetic leaders are willing to sacrifice an individual (i.e., limiting their having justice, human rights, and fairness) to save a greater

number of other individuals. Thus, the option of utilitarianism (reducing suffering and increasing happiness) is always sought after in business decision-making, ethical philosophy, or public policy (Bartels et al., 2014). Empirical research has shown that the darker Machiavellian traits are related to an individual's limited capacity for affective empathy (Fearn & Williams, 2010). For example, individuals with Machiavellian traits have a lowered reactivity to others in distress, for example, when they see crying faces or expressions of distress (Blair et al., 1997). Individuals who display high levels of manipulative traits are associated with having less of a relationship with humanity and egocentric motives (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). Furthermore, they have an absence of perceptual empathy, but their discernible empathy permits them to acknowledge what drives others and assists them in adeptly taking advantage of others (Hmieleski & Lerner, 2016). Empathy can lessen the likelihood that online content creators will use manipulative tactics such as buying subscribers or disregarding the YouTube Community Guidelines (YouTube Partner Program Policies, n.d.). By going against the YouTube Partner Program, content creators could significantly impact their revenue stream, or worse, they could lose their online business.

Based on the literature, it was determined that increasing empathy should theoretically lessen the impact of manipulative traits found in some individuals. Empathy then, might decrease the likelihood for online content creators to morally disengage and risk damaging their revenue generation and brand awareness. Further, it could improve manipulative individuals' lack of guilt and dishonesty. Empathy can also improve antisocial behavior, helping these individuals become more trusting of coworkers. Hence,

interpersonal relationships among team members could be improved (Decety et al., 2016).

This psychological construct of empathy also has the capacity to increase forgiveness, which is commonly lacking in manipulative individuals (Davis et al., 2016). Individuals who exhibit more of these traits (i.e., lack of caring or manipulateness) exhibit less forgiveness and more desire to seek revenge (Brown, 2004). Content creators can fail to utilize the YouTube Empathy Algorithm (Ullah, 2019). The YouTube Empathy Algorithm is a system created by Google which focuses on user behaviors to provide content considerations based on their online activity. Thus, increasing empathy can build viewers' trust of a content creators' brand and encourage their engagement. Further, when viewers know content creators care, they are more likely to watch their videos and return to their channel, which can result in the content creators' videos being recommended on the YouTube "suggested video" tab. The use of the YouTube Ethical Algorithm, which is a set of principles that YouTube uses to ensure moral and professional content is moderated properly on their platform, can help YouTubers who are struggling to build legitimacy by helping them focus on consumer needs rather than personal desires. The use of empathy can help predict what a potential viewer wants to engage with and can lead content creators to offer better quality content by helping to understand the desires, wants and needs of the audience. One issue with growing a YouTube channel is most content creators and businesses are unsure of what their target markets are seeking (Kramer et al., 2014). According to Ullah (2019), empathy should be the cornerstone of one's venture strategy.

Empathizing with others is difficult for content creators in that it requires them to control their ego, abandon what they want, and put their focus on what others want instead, which might entail a letting go of potential revenue (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Further, relating to the feelings and viewpoints of other people can help online content creators avoid misconstruing their viewers expectations (Ullah, 2019). YouTubers who can better articulate and interpret their potential customers' pain points will invoke their trust and confidence and increase viewership on their channel. Content creators should not hesitate to get people hooked on their brand, and they should aim to get their attention before a transaction ever takes place (Ullah, 2019). The use of storytelling and displaying empathy in videos releases oxytocin in viewers (Stelzner, 2021). Thus, when content creators use empathy, they may also build their revenue without even realizing it (Stelzner, 2021). Vulnerability can significantly help bridge the gap between the viewer and the creator. YouTube has even hired professionals to help content creators increase empathy (Bradley, 2019). Empathy is a requisite for leaving revenue on the table, meaning to ensure long-term success and monetary profits, an online content creator needs to understand what their customer base needs and desires are (Ullah, 2019). Declining some revenue is a small price for gaining lifelong viewers. Although many online content creators do not care to give away free content, it is a way to build an empathic relationship with viewers.

Self-Compassion as a Moderator

In sum, YouTube content creators might participate in moral disengagement if it is a viable option to grow their channels, get monetized faster, and be viewed as an authority by their followers. Self-compassion is comprised of paying the same amount of

attention and care to oneself as one would expect to convey to a loved one (Neff, 2003b). Fisher (2020, p. 8) stated that there is a “legitimacy threshold” for new business ventures. Further, it can serve to mitigate the harmful effects of striving for venture legitimacy and the subsequent development of moral disengagement. Self-compassion is defined as a supportive attitude toward oneself in times of trouble or when one experiences inadequacies, failure, or difficulties (Neff, 2003a). The fear of failing as an entrepreneur, in this case as a YouTube content creator, is a psychological response to a challenging obstacle or set of obstacles while in the process of forming or operating a new venture (Cacciotti & Hayden, 2015). In the literature there was a clear link between self-compassion and the need for venture legitimacy. Thus, the use of self-compassion in supporting YouTube content creators may increase the resources available to them and lessen the likelihood that they will make unethical decisions. For example, some resources available are search engine optimization tactics to attract potential customers, training to increase traffic and brand legitimacy to their YouTube channels, and having a trustworthy mentor who can emphasize delayed gratification and having patience. Industry studies have shown that 95% of web traffic comes from being ranked on the first page of the Google search engine (Shelton, 2017). Thus, rather than creating content no one is searching for, using the leverage of working smarter by way of a compassionate mentor can generate more views and likes for YouTube videos, increase brand legitimacy, and move rankings higher on Google.

Entrepreneurs can feel depressed and guilty when a business fails (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015). Shepherd and Cardon (2009) stated that self-compassion works to manage negative feelings that stem from failure. Approximately 84% of YouTube

channels have less than 1,000 subscribers (Dean, 2023). Far too many content creators quit when they are close to getting monetized and seeing their community grow.

YouTubers fail for several reasons: creating content around their needs rather than their viewers' needs, being inconsistent with their uploads, having a lack of practice, failing to learn other facets of YouTube, expecting results too soon, and not pacing themselves (Woutersen, 2021).

Content creators who have a strong support system of friends or peers can better maintain their motivation, energy levels, and content creation ideas. The literature review showed that the fear of failing is an inescapable component in the journey an entrepreneur and that it can assist as well as hinder successful entrepreneurial performance (Cacciotti et al., 2015).

Hence, the use of empathy and self-compassion through consulting and advising content creators can help them focus less on what the YouTube algorithm is searching for and more on what their customers desire (YouTube Creators, 2017). For example, an empathetic and self-compassionate consultant guiding a content creator could discuss using the "People Also Searched For" option in YouTube to find video topic ideas.

The absence of empathy and self-compassion can lead to an impairment for entrepreneurial achievement (Engel et al., 2019) and moral disengagement. Despite the small amount of research found on the relationship between empathy, self-compassion, and moral disconnection, there was an example in the literature of self-compassion lessening people's willingness to use morally disengaging tactics (Zheng et al., 2019).

The gaps that were observed in the literature include how empathy can weaken the relationship between stress, the propensity of content creators to morally disengage,

how venture legitimacy can strengthen the relationship between status and stress and be a buffer between the two, and how empathy and self-compassion can lessen the negative effects of stress content creators experience and, ultimately, lower the likelihood they will participate in moral disengagement. The following hypotheses were posed based on these gaps in the literature:

Hypothesis 1a: Amoral manipulation is positively related to moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 1b: Moral disengagement is positively related to stress.

Hypothesis 2: The need for venture legitimacy moderates the relationship between stress and the desire for status.

Hypothesis 3a: Empathy moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 3b: Self-compassion moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 4: Empathy is a stronger moderator between stress and moral disengagement for participants who were exposed to an empathy triggering scenario compared to a control group who were exposed to a neutral scenario.

Method

Participants

The recruitment efforts focused on YouTube content creators and the inclusion criteria was participants needed to reside within the United States and work either part or full time. No niche was discredited to ensure a more robust sample and to minimize bias. Ages of the sample group ranged from 18 to 70 and the total sample size was 199 participants. The sample consisted of both seasoned and new content creators. Further,

there participants who had been working on their channels for a month and others several years. Participants of this study ranged from individuals who had some high school education to those who hold post graduate degrees.

Procedures

Participants first consented to taking the online survey as shown in Appendix A. As is often seen in scholarly research, the use of surveys to outline and research human conduct is one of the most suitable methods to collect data for a study like this (Singleton & Straits, 2009). The sample consisted of self-reported racial/ethnic group standings as follows: 34.4% ($n = 68$) were Caucasian, White; 25.2% ($n = 25$) were African American and Black and Asian American; 22.1% ($n = 44$) chose "Other;" 5.5% ($n = 11$) were Native American or Alaska Native; 5% ($n = 44$) were Hispanic/Latinx; 3.5% ($n = 7$) were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; and 3% ($n = 44$) were Caucasian, Middle Eastern.

The sample consisted of self-reported employment statuses as follows: 48.2% ($n = 96$) were employed full time, 17.1% ($n = 34$) were employed part time, 4% ($n = 8$) were inconsistently employed, 8% ($n = 16$) were unemployed, 6.5% ($n = 13$) were students, and 7.5% ($n = 15$) were retired. In response to the question, "Do you consider yourself self-employed? 51.8% ($n = 103$) of respondents reported "Yes" and 45.7% ($n = 91$) reported "No."

In response to the question, "Is your channel currently monetized?" 59.3% of respondents ($n = 118$) reported having monetized YouTube channels, 39.2% ($n = 78$) reported having unmonetized YouTube channels, and 1.5% ($n = 3$) did not respond.

In response to the question, "What is your overall goal as a YouTube content creator?" 22.10% ($n = 44$) of respondents chose that they wanted to make money, 19.6%

($n = 39$) chose that they wanted to share their knowledge of the subject matter with others, 14.6% ($n = 29$) chose that they wanted to build their brand, 10.6% ($n = 21$) chose that they wanted to supplement their income, 5% ($n = 10$) chose that they wanted to quit their job, 6% ($n = 12$) chose that they wanted to free up their time to do what they wanted, 5.5% ($n = 11$) chose that they wanted to stop living paycheck to paycheck, 9.5% ($n = 19$) chose that they wanted to earn passive income, and 6.5% ($n = 13$) chose “Other.”

In response to the question, “How many subscribers do you currently have?” 32.7% ($n = 65$) of respondents reported having subscriber counts from 10,000 to 50,000, 17.1% ($n = 34$) reported counts from 5,001 to 9,999, 9.5% ($n = 19$) reported counts from 75,001 to 100,000, 9% ($n = 18$) reported counts from 1 to 100, 6% ($n = 12$) reported counts from 101 to 999, 3.5% ($n = 7$) reported counts from 100,001 to 250,000, 2% ($n = 4$) reported counts of 250,000 or more, and 1.5% ($n = 3$) reported counts of 500,000 or more. Respondents who reported counts of either 1,000 to 5,000 ($n = 17$) or 50,001 to 75,000 ($n = 17$) made up 17% of the sample.

In response to the question, “Would you consider yourself as an amateur or professional YouTuber?” there was an even distribution between the two responses of “amateur” or “professional.” Forty-nine point two percent ($n = 99$) of respondents reported being an amateur, while 49.7% ($n = 98$) reported being a professional.

In response to the question, “Is your focus to build your YouTube channel to be a creator full-time and to be your only source of income?” 31.2% ($n = 62$) of respondents reported “Maybe,” 28.6% ($n = 57$) reported “No,” 28.1% ($n = 56$) reported “Yes,” and 8.5% ($n = 17$) reported they were “Already there.”

In response to the question, “How long have you been working to build your channel?” 54.8% ($n = 109$) of respondents reported 1 to 5 years, 23.6% ($n = 47$) reported 6 to 10 years, 12.1% ($n = 24$) reported 10 years or more, and 6.5% ($n = 13$) reported “Less than a month.” Please see Table 1 and 2 for an overview of these findings.

Due to the specific nature of this study and the smaller niche consisting only of YouTube content creators, a qualitative Qualtrics survey was used to collect the data. The data collection process took approximately 90 days to complete. The Influencers.club website was used to find 2,000 YouTube content creators from the United States for the sample with the goal of finding 1,000 creators who were monetized and 1,000 who were unmonetized. Further, the email campaign sent 20 to 30 emails per day, 2 to 3 times per week. I expected to exhaust the list and experience low open rates. To combat this, I utilized my university student email address to send emails rather than a Gmail or Yahoo account so as not to appear ungenune and to ensure the email would not go to trash and spam folders. Further, I had an email reminder campaign and tracked the responses.

Response data was tracked via Qualtrics, and the data were scrubbed in Excel. Individuals who completed at least 80% of the survey were sent a claim code for a \$10 Amazon gift card for their participation. Respondents who did not complete at least 80% of the survey were deleted from the sample and received no compensation. The goal was to have 200 respondents in the sample, preferably composed of 100 respondents who were monetized content creators and 100 who were unmonetized.

Manipulations

Lastly, I created an experiment in which an experimental group read an empathy scenario while a control group read a neutral scenario, both groups answering the 16

questions from the Moral Disengagement measure. The overall goal of the experiment was to determine if the experimental group showed more empathy after reading the empathy triggering scenario, thus, scoring lower in moral disengagement versus the control group. Further, to determine if, by reading the empathy triggering scenario, levels of self-compassion were higher in the group that read this scenario compared to the group that did not. The group that did not read the empathy-triggering scenario read a neutral scenario which was intended not to trigger any empathetic or compassionate feelings. Examples of the scenarios can be viewed in Appendix B. The research findings from the Qualtrics survey were imported into SPSS for analysis.

The reasoning behind choosing the sample of YouTube content creators living in the United States was to minimize location and niche bias. In addition, the reasoning for requiring respondents who worked part or full time was to achieve a more robust overview of their strengths and limitations. Further, I wanted to determine what drove YouTube content creators to succeed by finding out if they met or surpassed their expectations for content creation. I also wanted to find out whether or not they chose to participate in unethical decision-making pertaining to their respective YouTube channels.

Measures

Demographics

Participants within the study were instructed to respond to demographic questions asking about their age, racial/ethnic group, employment status, and education level and respond to other questions related to content creation that included their goals as YouTube content creators, time spent building channels, monthly income (if applicable),

subscriber count, professional status as a YouTuber, and focus of becoming a full-time YouTube content creator. The demographic questions can be found in Appendix C.

Moral Disengagement

Moore et al. (2012) created a legitimate Moral Disengagement scale for adults which was suitable for this study. The measure forecasts self-reported immoral conduct. The higher the score, the greater the likelihood for moral disengagement, and the lower the score, the less likelihood for moral disengagement. An expanded version of the Moral Disengagement scale was used to measure the moral disengagement of YouTube content creators. The expanded version of the scale consisted of 16 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) that covered eight areas: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, distorting consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanization. The eight original questions found within the Moral Disengagement scale were used along with eight new questions that focused specifically on YouTube content creation. Statements included, “I don’t see a problem with purchasing subscribers to speed up the monetization requirements for YouTube.” Internal reliability for this scale was good, with $\alpha = .92$.

Amoral Manipulation

Amoral manipulation was measured using Dahling et al.’s (2009) Amoral Manipulation subscale. The Amoral Manipulation subscale consisted of 13 questions about the role of status and was measured on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). Positive statements included, “I believe that lying is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage over others” and “As a YouTube content creator, I am

highly focused on trying to win notoriety even though my channel is not where I want it to be yet.” A high score reflected the respondent had a higher level of amoral manipulation. Internal reliability for this scale was good, with $\alpha = .91$.

Empathy

An abbreviated version of Davis’s (1980) Interpersonal Reactivity index was used to measure the role of empathy in terms of venture legitimacy and moral disengagement. The measure consisted of a 13-item questionnaire that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *describes me very well* to 5 = *does not describe me well*). The goal of using this scale was to record the thoughts and feelings of respondents within a variety of situations. Statements included, “I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the ‘other person’s’ point of view” and “Other people’s misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.” A high score reflected the respondent had a higher level of empathetic behavior. Internal reliability for this sample was good, with $\alpha = .74$.

Empathetic Concern

The Interpersonal Reactivity index (Davis, 1980) contains two subscales that were used in the study, the Empathetic Concern subscale and the Perspective Taking subscale. The Empathetic Concern subscale had six items that measured the degree to which a respondent felt compassion and sympathy for others. Statements for this subscale included, “Sometimes I don’t feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems” and “When I see someone being take advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.” Items contained within this subscale were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *does not describe me at all* to 5 = *describes me very well*). A high score demonstrated an increased likelihood that the respondent would react to the predicament

of others with compassion. Six of the 13 questions pertaining to empathetic concern within the Interpersonal Reactivity index were reverse scored. Internal reliability for the Empathetic Concern subscale was relatively good, with $\alpha = .65$.

Perspective Taking

The Perspective Taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980) was used in the study. It consisted of seven items that measured the respondent's self-reported capability to support other people's viewpoints that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *does not describe me well* to 5 = *describes me very well*). Five of the 13 questions that referred to perspective taking were reverse coded. Perspective taking had a Cronbach alpha score of .60, which was good. Statements for this subscale included, "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other person's' point of view" and "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision." A high score reflected an increased capacity for the respondent to produce and comprehend viewpoints unlike their own.

Self-Compassion

An abbreviated version of Neff's (2003b) Self-Compassion scale was used that was appropriate for ages 14 and up. It consisted of 18 items pertaining to self-compassion that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all true of me* to 5 = *very true of me*). A high score reflected the respondent had a greater personal relationship to self-compassion. Three subscales of the Self-Compassion scale were used: the Self-Judgement subscale, the Isolation subscale, and the Over-Identification subscale. Each subscale contained 3 questions. Positive statements included, "I'm giving myself the care and tenderness I need" and "I'm being kind to myself." Negative statements included,

“I’m obsessing and fixating on everything that’s wrong” and “I feel separate and cut off from the rest of the world.” Scores were reverse coded for items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18. A high score indicated the respondent had a high level of self-compassion.

Internal reliability for all 18 questions was adequate, with $\alpha = .67$.

Stress

Stress was measured using an abbreviated version of Cohen et al.’s (1983) Perceived Stress scale, which measures the perception of stress in other people and the extent to which circumstances in other people’s lives are viewed as stressful. The scale consisted of 12 questions that were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not all true of me* to 5 = *very true of me*). Statements included, “In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that one of your YouTube commentators said?” and “In the last months, how often have you felt nervous and stressed about being a YouTube content creator?” A high score reflected the respondent had a high amount of stress.

Internal reliability was not optimal, with $\alpha = .58$.

Venture Legitimacy

An abbreviated version of Nagy et al.’s (2004) Legitimacy Threshold scale was used to measure the need for venture legitimacy. Items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*). Statements included, “The focus of my YouTube channel is to network and broadcast my mission” and “As a YouTube content creator, I am highly focused on trying to win notoriety even though my channel is not where I want it to be yet.” A high score reflected the respondent had more desire for venture legitimacy. Internal reliability was not optimal, with $\alpha = .58$.

Desire for Status

Dahling et al.'s (2009) Desire for Status subscale was used to measure the need for status. The subscale consisted of six questions on the role of status that were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). Statements included, "Status is a good sign of success in life" and "My status as a YouTube content creator is a good sign of my success in life." A high score reflected the respondent had more need and desire for status. Internal reliability was good, with $\alpha = .70$. Each of the scale's measures can be found in Appendix C. Normality and missing data for each of the measures can be viewed in Appendix D.

Results

The data was analyzed to determine if there were positive relationships between the variables for our hypotheses. The study sought to find if an increased desire for status would raise the likelihood for increased levels of stress. The study sought to find if stress would increase with an increased pressure to generate content. The study also sought to find if increased levels of unethical behaviors would push YouTube content creators to purchase likes, subscribers, and views to make their channels look more authoritative than they really were.

Initial Analyses

Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of 249 participants who agreed electronically to the informed consent form contained within the survey and confirmed they were at least 18 years old and lived within the United States. The participants also answered a variety of demographical questions. For example, "How much are you currently earning with your

YouTube channel?” and “Approximately how much did your YouTube channel earn last month?” Of the total number of participants, 199 completed at least 80% of the items contained within each measure, which was the minimum standard to receive a claim code for a \$10 Amazon gift card. The remaining 50 participants were not counted, as 11 respondents participated twice in the survey and 39 respondents completed less than 80% of the survey.

Respondents self-reported their ages which ranged from 18 to 70, with a mean age of 33.50 and a standard deviation of 12.06. The sample consisted of self-reported levels of education as follows: 14.6% ($n = 29$) had some high school, 14.6% ($n = 29$) were high school graduates or received a GED, 20.1% ($n = 40$) had some college, 9% ($n = 18$) had a 2-year college degree, 14.1% ($n = 28$) had a 4-year college degree, 2.5% ($n = 5$) had some graduate work, 11.1% ($n = 22$) had a master’s degree, 1.5% ($n = 3$) had a professional or doctoral degree, and 1.5% ($n = 3$) chose “Other.”

Main Analyses

This study investigated if stress and the desire for status would lead to increased moral disengagement for YouTube content creators. See Table 3 for a list of the variables and Table 4 for all correlational analyses conducted on the variables for the hypotheses.

The goal for the hypotheses was to determine whether there was a positive or negative correlation between the variables and if they were statistically significant or not. Hypothesis 1a proposed that amoral manipulation is positively related to moral disengagement. Correlations were computed among each variable to test the hypothesis. Amoral manipulation was found to be positively correlated with moral disengagement,

$r(197) = .823, p < .001$, and the results were in the expected direction and statistically significant. Please see Table 5 to view the findings.

Hypothesis 1b proposed that moral disengagement is positively related to stress. A correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between moral disengagement and stress. Moral disengagement was found to be positively related to stress, $r(196) = .420, p < .001$, and the results were statistically significant. Please see Table 6 to view the findings.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the need for venture legitimacy moderates the relationship between stress and the desire for status. Correlations were computed for each variable to test the hypothesis. There was a positive correlation between status and stress, $r(197) = .13, p < .001$, and the results were statistically significant. Venture legitimacy was positively correlated with status, $r(197) = .44, p < .001$, and stress, $r(197) = .19, p < .001$, and the results were in the expected direction and statistically significant. Hierarchical regression was used, with an additional interaction term formed to represent the need for venture legitimacy and the desire for status. In the analysis, I was interested in whether the interaction term was significant and whether its contribution to the model explained a significant proportion of variance for stress. The need for venture legitimacy was examined to see if it would moderate the relationship between status and stress. To examine these relationships Hayes's 2022 PROCESS Macro was used. First, a model containing the need for venture legitimacy, status, and stress was examined. When the interaction between desire for status and venture legitimacy was included in the model, the results were not statistically significant ($b = -.034, p = .450$). Please see Table 7 to view the findings.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that empathy moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. Stress was found to be positively correlated to moral disengagement, $r(196) = .42, p < .001$, and the results were statistically significant. Empathy was found to be negatively correlated with stress, $r(196) = -.25, p < .001$, and moral disengagement, $r(196) = -.63, p < .001$, and the results were in the expected direction.

Further, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine how strong the relationship was between the two subscales, measuring empathetic concern and perspective taking and stress and moral disengagement, respectively. Empathetic concern was found to be positively related with stress, $r(196) = .25, p < .001$, and the results were statistically significant. Empathetic concern was positively correlated with moral disengagement, $r(196) = .38, p < .001$, and the results were statistically significant. Perspective taking was found to be negatively correlated with stress, $r(196) = -.06, p = .335$, and the results were statistically nonsignificant. Perspective taking was found to be negatively correlated with moral disengagement, $b = -.18, p = .51$, and the results were statistically nonsignificant.

A hierarchical regression was conducted, with an additional interaction term representing empathy and stress. In the analysis, I was interested in whether the interaction term was significant and whether its contribution to the model explained a significant proportion of variance for moral disengagement. The relationship between stress and moral disengagement was examined to see if it was moderated by empathy.

To examine these relationships, Hayes's 2022 PROCESS Macro was used. The interaction between empathy and stress was included in the model, and the results were

statistically nonsignificant, $b = -.138$, $p = .392$. Please see Table 8 to view the findings.

Controls were utilized to determine if it would make the interaction between empathy and stress statistically significant and found that when factoring age ($p = .009$) and education ($p = .016$), the results were statistically significant. Please see Table 9 to view the findings.

To understand the form of the interaction, simple slopes were examined. The gradient of the slope was 0.261, indicating a higher rate of stress. The t -value associated with this slope was 5.836, which was highly significant ($p < .001$). The form of this interaction is shown in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 3b proposed that self-compassion moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. A correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. Moral disengagement was found to be positively related to stress, $r(196) = .42$, $p < .001$, and the results were statistically significant. Further, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between stress and moral disengagement within the experimental and control groups.

There were significant differences in the means or standard deviation score for moral disengagement in the control group ($n = 56$, $M = 2.23$, $SD = .900$) versus the experimental group ($n = 42$, $M = 1.98$, $SD = .726$). There was also a positive correlation between stress and moral disengagement in the experimental group, $r(69) = .35$.

Similarly, there was a positive correlation between stress and moral disengagement in the control group, $r(125) = .52$, as shown in Table 10. The interaction between self-compassion and stress was included in the model, and the results were statistically nonsignificant, $b = -.136$, $p = .445$. Controls were utilized to determine if it would make

the interaction between self-compassion and stress statistically significant and found that when factoring age ($p < .001$) and education ($p = .030$), the results were statistically significant. Please see Table 11 to view the findings.

To further examine these relationships, Hayes's 2022 PROCESS Macro was used. The model containing moral disengagement, stress, and the interaction term explained a significant proportion of variance for moral disengagement, $R^2 = .444$, $F(3, 197) = 18.983$, $p < .001$. Stress was positively related to moral disengagement, $b = 0.655$, $p = .295$, and the results were not statistically significant. In addition, when the interaction between self-compassion and stress was included in the model it was found to be nonsignificant, $b = -.136$, $p = .445$. Please see Table 12 to view the findings.

The data analysis shows a negative correlation when comparing the total mean score of self-compassion to stress. The correlation between self-compassion and stress was found to be statistically significant, $p = -.498$, as shown in Table 4. To understand the form of the interaction, simple slopes were examined. The gradient of the slope was -0.100 , indicating a lower rate of stress. The t -value associated with this slope was -2.236 , which was highly significant, $p < .001$. The form of the interaction is shown in Figure 3.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that empathy is a stronger moderator between stress and moral disengagement for participants who were exposed to an empathy triggering scenario compared to a control group who were exposed to a neutral scenario. In short, I sought to determine if empathy would be a stronger moderator for the respondents who were exposed to the empathy triggering scenario compared to those who were exposed to a neutral scenario.

A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between the mean and standard deviations for the experimental and control groups. The results showed significant differences, $r(193), t = -3.28, p < .001$, in the mean score for empathy for the experimental group ($N = 69, M = 3.79, SD = .606$) compared to the control group ($N = 125, M = 3.50, SD = .591$). Please see Table 13 for the findings. Further, the differences that empathetic concern and perspective taking had on the experimental and control groups was observed, and there were no significant differences in the mean or standard deviation score for empathetic concern for the experimental group ($N = 69, M = 2.99, SD = .537$) compared to the control group ($N = 125, M = 3.04, SD = .540$). Further, the findings for perspective taking showed no significant differences in the mean score for the experimental group ($N = 69, M = 3.38, SD = .570$) as compared with the control group ($N = 125, M = 3.27, SD = .576$). Please see Table 14 and Table 15 to view the findings. A correlational analysis was then performed to determine the relationship between stress and moral disengagement for each group to determine if there were any legitimate associations between the variables. Similar positive correlations were found between stress and moral disengagement in both the experimental and control groups, $r = .35$ (experimental group) and $r = .52$ (control group). Please see Table 10 to view the findings.

Lastly, I sought to test the interaction of the empathy manipulation group and stress, with moral disengagement as the outcome. To examine these relationships, Hayes's 2022 PROCESS Macro was used. The results did not support Hypothesis 4 because the interaction terms signifying the moderation effect of empathy were not statistically significant in the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. The p

value was .163, which is greater than .05, suggesting that empathy did not serve as a moderator in the association between stress and moral disengagement for the experimental group compared to the control group. Please see Table 16 to view the findings.

Supplemental Analyses

Supplemental analyses were conducted to further study various metrics. The differences in mindset between those respondents who categorized themselves as “amateur” YouTubers versus those who deemed themselves as “professional” were analyzed using the split file function within SPSS. The goal of this analysis was to determine the differences between the two groups based on their focus of wanting to be a full-time YouTuber. Did amateur YouTube content creators differ in their desire to be full-time content creators in comparison to their professional counterparts? The results showed that 20.2% ($n = 20$) of the respondents who reported being amateur content creators also reported their goal was to be a full-time content creator versus 35.7% ($n = 35$) of respondents who reported being professional content creators. Further, 42.4% ($n = 42$) of the respondents who reported being amateurs also reported that they did not have a desire to be a full-time content creator. In comparison, only 15.3% ($n = 15$) of respondents who reported being professionals also reported that they desired to be full-time YouTube content creators. Please see Table 17 for the findings.

Then, a frequency analysis was run to determine if the reported time creators spent building their channel was positively or negatively correlated to their reported goals. The 63.6% ($n = 28$) of respondents who reported working 1 to 5 years on their channel chose the goal of making money versus 6.8% ($n = 3$) of respondents who

reported working for 10 or more years on their channel. Hence, those who were newer to YouTube appeared to have a stronger desire to make money versus those who were well established.

Further, there were a significant difference between the 51.3% ($n = 20$) of respondents who reported working 1 to 5 years on their channel compared to the 51.3% ($n = 20$) of respondents who reported working for 10 or more years on their channel. Ten point three percent ($n = 4$) of the group who reported working for 10 or more years on their channel also reported their goal was to share their knowledge of the subject matter in which they were interested.

The most drastic difference was found between the respondents who reported working 1 to 5 years on their channel and the respondents who reported working for 10 or more years on their channel. Eight of the 11 respondents (72.7%) who reported working 1 to 5 years on their channel also chose the goal to stop living paycheck to paycheck versus 1 respondent (9.1%) who reported working for 10 or more years on their channel. Further, 63.2% ($n = 12$) of respondents who reported working 1 to 5 years on their channel also chose the goal of earning passive income versus the 5.3% ($n = 1$) of respondents who reported working for 10 or more years on their channel. Please see Table 18 to view the findings.

Further supplemental analysis was done to determine if the experimental group who was exposed to the empathy triggering scenario displayed differences in amoral manipulation and moral disengagement compared to the control group who was not exposed to the empathy triggering scenario. There were significant differences in the mean scores for amoral manipulation in the control group ($N = 56$, $M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.50$)

versus the experimental group ($N = 42$, $M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.13$). Amoral manipulation was positively correlated with moral disengagement in the control group, $r = .82$, and the experimental group, $r = .83$. The control group displayed slightly lower positive Pearson correlation scores for amoral manipulation and moral disengagement versus the experimental group. Further, the results showed both groups were statistically significant, $p < .001$, implying both groups displayed similar levels of amoral manipulation. This finding suggests that the presence or absence of an empathy triggering scenario did not have a significant impact on the respondent's tendency to engage in amoral manipulation. Please see Table 19 to view the findings.

Lastly, the difference between the 36.28% ($n = 41$) of respondents who distinguished themselves as amateurs versus the 64.60% ($n = 73$) who reported themselves as professionals was compared to their reported earnings per month. A hundred and thirteen (57.65%) out of 199 respondents chose to answer how much they were earning per month. The results showed that only 1 respondent who reported being an amateur YouTuber also responded that they were making \$10,000 or more per month versus 15 respondents who reported being a professional YouTuber who also reported making \$10,000 or more per month. Please see Table 20 to view the findings.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to assess the role of empathy and self-compassion in lessening the likelihood of stress and moral disengagement for YouTube content creators.

The results of this study supported Hypothesis 1a and 1b, and these findings are consistent with previous literature. The six hypotheses were reviewed in the Results

section and discussed along with supporting analyses of the sample. Now, the main findings will be discussed, along with why they are important for researchers and practitioners, the limitations that were present within the study, and what scholars and researchers can do to further build on this research.

Overview of Findings

Hypothesis 1a proposed that amoral manipulation is positively related to moral disengagement. In testing this hypothesis, I also wanted to determine if the data of this study was consistent with the overall body of research that has been conducted on the amoral manipulation of online content creators. Amoral manipulation is a main trait related to Machiavellianism (Dahling et al., 2009). Amoral manipulation refers to a “willingness to totally disregard otherwise noble standards of morality and . . . see value in behaviors that are self-centered at the expense of other people” (Dahling et al., 2009, p. 10). Moral disengagement refers to disengaging from moral values while participating in behaviors that do not coincide with one’s normal and ethical values (Bandura, 1999). The correlation analysis showed a positive correlation between amoral manipulation and moral disengagement. Hence, the results show that higher levels of amoral manipulation are associated with higher levels of moral disengagement and that amoral manipulation has the potential to affect moral disengagement in individuals. This finding suggests that content creators who engage in amoral manipulation are more susceptible to engaging in strategies in which they detach themselves from ethical concerns.

The results of the present study confirm previous literature that states amoral manipulation plays a role in moral disengagement. Hence, an individual’s capacity to properly balance their emotions could be utilized in negative ways, such as for

manipulative and self-serving purposes (Austin et al., 2007). Further, in the present study, the correlations were statistically significant and thus, supporting the idea that when an individual has an internal focus, meaning their attention or mind is directed inwardly toward themselves, their business, or their brand, there is a higher probability for them to disregard moral standards and participate in amoral conduct at the expense of others (Dahling, et al., 2009, p.10) and then, justify these unethical behaviors.

For example, Smith (2021) explained that YouTube content creators who participate in amoral manipulation increase their likelihood of engaging in moral disengagement and moral self-restraint. According to Gao et al. (2017) there are three ways to mitigate the likelihood of participating in moral disengagement: (a) raise awareness about the tactics used in amoral manipulation, (b) promote a culture where ethical behavior can work to inhibit amoral manipulation, and (c) foster an environment of empathy and self-compassion to lessen the self-centeredness that is present when amoral manipulation takes place. Zhang et al.'s (2020) work also supports this notion. They found that YouTube content creators who have a high tendency towards amoral manipulation have a greater chance of experiencing moral disengagement and experience lower amounts of guilt and self-control, which can lead to moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 1b proposed that moral disengagement is positively related to stress. Moral disengagement is a cognitive state through which virtuous self-monitoring processes that usually prevent manipulative behavior are disengaged (Bandura, 1999). The results of the correlation analysis confirmed Hypothesis 1b (See Table 5 for the results). There was a moderately strong, positive relationship between moral disengagement and stress, and the results were statistically significant. Hence, the results

show that higher rates of moral disengagement engagement for YouTube content creators are associated with them having higher levels of stress. The correlation coefficient confirms that as moral disengagement increases, stress increases.

The present results support the claim made by Zhang et al. (2020) that YouTube content creators who participate in moral disengagement have a greater likelihood of dealing with burnout, stress, and diminished levels of well-being. Further, the findings of the present study are consistent with research conducted by Kang et al. (2019) who found that YouTube content creators are more prone to participate in moral disengagement than people in other occupations. The present findings show that as stress increases so does the tendency to participate in moral disengagement, which is consistent with the claim of Caprara et al. (2012) that job related stress influences employees to exhibit negative work behaviors. Previous research also has shown that as humiliation and guilt increase as a result of violating one's moral code of conduct, personal distress results (Tangney et al., 1998), and the present findings support this as there was a positive relationship found between stress and moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the need for venture legitimacy moderates the relationship between status and stress. In the correlational analysis, my findings confirmed a positive relationship between status and stress. Hence, as status increases, stress increases. Venture legitimacy was positively correlated with status indicating a strong, positive relationship between venture legitimacy and status. Similarly, relationship between venture legitimacy and stress in this study suggests a moderate positive relationship. Thus, as venture legitimacy rises, so does stress.

My analysis on the need for venture legitimacy and desire for status concluded that their relationship was statistically nonsignificant, $b = -.034$, $p = .450$. Hence, there was not enough evidence to support the moderation effect. The findings of the present study are consistent with Wang et al.'s work (2011) that showed when a content creators' status was being attacked or challenged, an increase in their desire for venture legitimacy created higher levels of stress. Both the findings of Wang et al. (2011) and the present study confirm that the quest to have a stronger online presence and brand can increase the obstructive effects of stress that come from a greater need for status.

YouTube content creators face a legitimacy threshold that needs to be cleared to build their community of subscribers and interact with them on a weekly basis. Zimmerman & Zeitz (2002) explained that if this threshold is cleared by the content creator there is a greater chance for their business to survive and new ventures to flourish by means of additional resources, access to other entrepreneurs, and sponsorship opportunities. YouTube content creators experience increased anxiety when they compare their desire for status to other content creators with larger communities of subscribers who attain more views, likes, and other metrics (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Thus, as the need for venture legitimacy and status increases, stress increases.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that empathy moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. My findings showed that stress was positively correlated to moral disengagement and the results were statistically significant. The positive correlation signifies that as YouTube content creators experience increased levels of stress, their likelihood of engaging in moral disengagement increases.

Empathy was negatively correlated with stress and moral disengagement and the results were statistically significant. Thus, demonstrates that YouTube content creators who display higher levels of empathy tend to experience decreased levels of stress and have a diminished likelihood of participating in moral disengagement. Empathy did not have a strong moderating effect on moral disengagement. Thus, the relationship between moral disengagement and stress was weakened by empathy. This suggests that YouTube content creators with a lot of empathy are less likely to experience increased levels of stress and participate in morally disengagement.

Further, as the stress of YouTube content creators increases, their likelihood of participating in moral disengagement increases. The interaction included in the model between empathy, stress, and moral disengagement was negative and statistically nonsignificant. There was not enough evidence to support the moderation effect. This shows that when YouTube content creators experience high levels of stress and engage in moral disengagement, their empathy decreases. Hence, as empathetic behavior decreases, there is a decrease in moral disengagement. Controls were utilized to determine if it would make the interaction between empathy and stress statistically significant and found that when factoring age ($p = .009$) and education ($p = .016$), the results were statistically significant. This finding suggests that the relationship between empathy and stress may be affected by age by a persons' age and scholastic background. Particularly, it is feasible that older individual's age and higher levels of educational background may have a heightened chance of experiencing and interaction between empathy and stress, compared to individuals who are younger or with less education.

Lastly, two subscales, empathetic concern and perspective taking, were analyzed to determine their relationship to stress and moral disengagement. Empathetic concern was positively correlated with stress and empathetic concern was statistically significant and positively correlated with moral disengagement. The results were statistically significant. This shows that YouTube content creators who are more empathetic may be affected more by the distress of other people, leading to an increase in their own stress levels. Further, they have a greater likelihood of engaging in moral disengagement as a coping mechanism and trying to rationalize their actions in morally challenging circumstances. Perspective taking was negatively correlated with moral disengagement and stress and the results were statistically nonsignificant. This shows that YouTube content creators who are better at taking the perspective of their subscribers may experience less stress. Further, as perspective taking increases, stress and moral disengagement tend to decrease.

While the literature review revealed limited studies on YouTube content creators, relatable research in the fields of media psychology and moral development was reviewed. Batson et al. (1981) found that people who show high levels of empathy are more adept at experiencing inward distress when they see other people in distress. Further, they found that empathy can support prosocial conduct, such as taking time to listen to other's concerns or supporting them when they are in need, hence, lowering stress levels by encouraging a sense of resolve and meaning. Research has also shown that empathy plays a major role in lessening moral disengagement since it encourages people to consider the viewpoints and feelings of others, which increases their awareness of the negative repercussions that stems from immoral actions (Batson, 2010).

Further, Bandura et al. (1996) demonstrated that as people displayed empathy for the distress or suffering of others, it became more challenging for them to participate in morally disengaged actions. YouTube content creators experience stressors, such as the pressure to keep up with the YouTube algorithm, online harassment, and negative comments. Content creators with higher levels of empathy tend to consider the viewpoints of their commentors and make moral decisions despite their challenges. In the present study, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine how strong the relationship was between the two subscales of concern and perspective taking on stress and moral disengagement. Empathetic concern had a positive correlation with stress and negatively correlated with moral disengagement and statistically significant. This shows that YouTube content creators who have higher levels of empathy and concern for others have a greater likelihood of experiencing stress. This means that individuals who have an increased sensitivity to others may experience additional stress. Perspective taking was negatively correlated with moral disengagement and stress and my findings were not statistically significant. This shows that there is a negative relationship between perspective taking, stress, and moral disengagement. Further, the relationship between perspective taking, stress, and moral disengagement was not strong enough to be considered statistically significant. The negative correlation between perspective taking and moral disengagement indicates that YouTube content creators who are better at perspective taking have a lesser likelihood of engaging in moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 3b proposed that self-compassion moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. Moral disengagement was positively related to stress, and the results were statistically significant. This shows that YouTube content creators

who participate in increased levels of moral disengagement tend to experience higher levels of stress. My findings confirmed there was a significant proportion of variance in moral disengagement. The interaction between self-compassion and stress was found to be statistically nonsignificant ($b = -.136$, $p = .445$) so it did not support Hypothesis 3b and there was not enough evidence to support the moderation effect. However, controls were utilized to determine if it would make the interaction between self-compassion and stress statistically significant and found that when factoring age ($p < .001$) and education ($p = .030$), the results were statistically significant. Thus, indicating that the relationship between self-compassion and stress is impacted by a person's age and academic background. For example, older people or those with more education may have a greater capacity or skills for dealing with stress, which could strengthen the safeguarding effects of self-compassion.

My findings showed that both groups experienced similar levels of moral disengagement. Further, the positive correlation between the two groups showed that as stress levels increased, so did the likelihood for the individuals of the experimental group to engage in moral disengagement. There was a positive correlation between stress and moral disengagement in both control and experimental groups. This shows that both groups had very similar amounts of stress and moral disengagement. Thus, showing as stress levels increased in the control group, the tendency for moral disengagement increased as well. The literature review revealed limited research on YouTube content creators and their relationship to stress and moral disengagement. Gallagher et al. (2014) confirmed the vital role of self-compassion in moderating the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. Wohl et al. (2010) found that among college students, self-

compassion lessened the immoral actions of cheating and its related stress, and the students who displayed higher levels of self-compassion did not participate in cheating, even when their levels of stress were high.

Zeng et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between self-compassion, work-related stress, and immoral behavior among members of the workforce. They found that self-compassion weakened the relationship between job-related stress and immoral or unethical behavior. In summary, the literature review revealed that self-compassion moderates the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. This indicates that YouTube content creators who focus on increasing self-compassion can be protected from moral disengagement (e.g., creating clickbait thumbnails, titles focused on clicks, buying fake likes and views) despite experiencing stress. By working to build and nurture their self-compassion, YouTube content creators can better handle higher levels of stress and make healthier moral decisions.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that empathy is a stronger moderator between stress and moral disengagement for participants who were exposed to an empathy triggering scenario compared to a control group who were exposed to a neutral scenario. Several analyses were run to better understand each of the group's responses. 69 respondents in the experimental group who were exposed to an empathy triggering scenario, and there were 125 respondents in the control group who were exposed to a neutral scenario. The means of standard deviations and stress levels between the experimental group versus the control group were calculated. The independent sample *t*-test compared the differences between stress and moral disengagement within the groups.

The descriptive analysis compared the differences between stress and moral disengagement between the groups. No significant differences for stress and moral disengagement were found for either group. The mean score for stress for the control group ($n = 42$, $M = 1.44$, $SD = .651$) was slightly higher than the experimental group ($n = 56$, $M = 1.27$, $SD = .717$). Further, the mean score for moral disengagement for the control group ($n = 42$, $M = 2.23$, $SD = .900$) was slightly higher than the mean score for the experimental group ($n = 56$, $M = 1.98$, $SD = .727$).

My findings suggests that empathy was not a strong moderator between stress and moral disengagement for the experimental group compared to the control group. This shows that being exposed to an empathy triggering scenario may not weaken the relationship between manipulative behavior and moral disengagement, and, likewise, a lack of exposure to an empathy triggering scenario may strengthen the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. Further, this shows that stress can affect a YouTube content creators' likelihood of engaging in moral disengagement. Decety and Meyer (2008) confirmed that when people are exposed to empathy-triggering scenarios, it plays a role in effecting their response to stress and moral disengagement. Valdesolo and Desteno (2006) found that under challenging conditions, empathy has an impact on moral disengagement. They placed participants in the stressful situation of public speaking, and they were judged on their performance. The participants who had higher scores in empathy displayed decreased levels of moral disengagement versus those who had lower scores.

Further, Jordan et al. (2017) investigated the role empathy played in moral behavior when participants engaged in a morally challenging task under stressful

conditions. Participants who scored higher in empathy showed less of a willingness to participate in moral disengagement despite the stressful environment. This further supports the idea that empathy can moderate the relationship between stress and moral disengagement. Klimecki et al. (2013) analyzed the link between empathy and stress responses. Participants who scored higher in empathy showed lower levels of stress when exposed to heightened emotional stimuli. This suggests that empathy may serve as a protective barrier against stress.

Fearn and Williams (2010) demonstrated a strong link between empathy and moral disengagement among online content creators, suggesting that empathy has a large role in supporting ethical behavior and lessens the likelihood that online content creators will participate in moral disengagement. In sum, based on the literature review, moral disengagement can be reduced when empathy is present, regardless of the amount of stress experienced. Further, when people who lack empathy experience high levels of stress, there is a greater tendency for them to morally disengage. Hence, empathy can serve to combat moral disengagement in stressful situations.

Managerial Implications

The results of present study offer several practical implications regarding how empathy and self-compassion can lessen moral disengagement for YouTube content creators. Empathy was analyzed to see if it was a stronger moderator between stress and moral disengagement for participants exposed to an empathy triggering scenario compared to a control group who were exposed to a neutral scenario in hopes of improving the effectiveness of online content creators, lowering the likelihood of them morally disengaging, experiencing burnout, getting demonetized, and losing their

YouTube channel. The findings of the present study are consistent with Thorne's (2022) work that showed how keeping up with the YouTube algorithm and the demand to keep publishing unique content can contribute to burnout for content creators.

YouTube content creators who use tools like TubeBuddy can generate new ideas that will help them to routinely create new content around topics their visitors may be searching for, stopping them from losing their enthusiasm and lessening their likelihood of burnout. Participating in amoral manipulation is not a guarantee for building a better online presence and growing a YouTube channel or revenue stream; rather, those who participate in amoral manipulation may experience burnout, inconsistency in their content creation, and a lack of growth as creators. YouTube content creators, as well as their other social media counterparts, should be educated about the potential ramifications of exerting manipulative behaviors (e.g., buying likes, views, and fake subscribers) so they can meet their objectives. There are numerous potential steps YouTube, as an organization, can take to increase empathy and self-compassion in their content creators with the aim of lowering their stress levels. The organization can implement mental health support programs such as self-care and stress management workshops, counseling services and psychological health resources. These resources can help content creators minimize stress and implement better coping strategies. Further, building community initiatives like developing support groups for content creators to connect with other entrepreneurs can assist them in feeling less isolated and better understood, leading to an increase in empathy and self-compassion. Lastly, providing additional online resources for YouTube content creators on self-care, mental health, depression, and anxiety can raise awareness of the problems that they face. In sum, this heightened awareness that

there are mental health resources available to YouTube content creators can assist them in recognizing the signs of burnout and stress earlier and seek guidance when needed.

Mindfulness has been shown to promote self-compassion and empathy (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness is described as an emotional trait, being nonjudgmental, a process or state of consciousness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), and a state of mind (Germer et al., 2005). Mindfulness is also defined as a form of mental visualization to assist in lowering psychological vulnerability to oversensitive aspects of the mind that can bring on anxiety, inward problems, and interactive challenges (Stew, 2011). Content creators need to implement mindfulness as they decide what kind of content they should create for their customers. Mindfulness training has been shown to enable individuals to focus on their emotions without trying to keep them away or repress them (Coffman et al., 2006). People who participate in mindfulness training are encouraged to open their consciousness without penalizing themselves. Thus, practicing mindfulness can offer a content creator more self-compassion, deterring negative responses and cynical self-judgement.

Segal et al. (2001) explained that being mindful combats counterproductive thoughts and feelings and offers additional time to address them with kindness, understanding, and eagerness. Mindfulness training can lead to heightened levels of empathy. Fan et al. (2011) stated that how a person focuses on their inner thoughts effects areas of the brain that are essential to enhancing empathy. Mindfulness improves empathy by way of self-awareness. According to Shapiro et al. (2007), when a person strengthens the awareness of their thoughts and feelings, it leads to an improved recognition of how these ideas are occurring and what happens when they arise.

Mindfulness keeps an individual focused on being nonjudgmental, understanding, and kind.

Limitations and Future Research

There are numerous potential limitations concerning the results of this study. There has been limited research specifically conducted on YouTube content creators. Thus, one of the strengths of this study was the opportunity to determine the role empathy and self-compassion play in lowering moral disengagement in this niche of online digital entrepreneurs. Further, it provides additional insights into the challenges that this sector of the content economy face and how to better serve them.

A potential limitation of this study is that respondents were only from the United States. Including a larger segment of the world population as a sample could affect results of statistical significance. Therefore, there is a need for future research that considers a more extensive demographic breakdown of content creators.

A significant limitation of the study was the sample size of 125 (control) respondents versus only 69 (experimental) respondents for the correlational analysis. Hence, it would be helpful for further research to include a greater sample size which could offer more statistical power and improve the reliability of the findings.

In this study the scenarios that were tested were relevant to the sample tested. Nevertheless, future research should be comprised of a more diverse sample from other parts of the world to better test the generalizability of the research. Exposing other cultures to empathy triggering scenarios and seeing how their responses differ from those of their American counterparts would further add to the findings of the present study.

The focus of the present study was the impact that empathy and self-compassion had on the stress of YouTube content creators and how an increase in supportive behaviors could lessen the likelihood that they would participate in moral disengagement. Content creators who remain manipulative and exhibit Machiavellian traits could be researched further in future studies. Furthermore, studying other content creators on other social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest) should be explored in future empirical research. More strategies should also be developed to lessen the likelihood of content creators participating in moral disengagement and for them to grow their business. For example, in the present study, it was not confirmed that empathy was a stronger moderator of the relationship between stress and moral disengagement for respondents who were exposed to the empathy triggering scenario compared to the control group. Perhaps, if the sample size was larger with content creators from around the world rather than just those from the United States, this relationship could be confirmed. Thus, studying how other cultures outside the United States react should be investigated in future studies.

The present study only focused on two major dimensions of Machiavellianism, amoral manipulation, and moral disengagement, to explore stressors that YouTube content creators experience (Judge et al., 2013). It is critical, then, that other aspects of Machiavellian traits (e.g., a desire for control) are studied in future research. In addition, researching specific work environments and other stressors content creators have (e.g., debt, family responsibilities, lack of employment) that might relate to other Machiavellian traits or manipulative characteristics could assist in finding ways to lower amoral manipulation and moral disengagement (e.g., prevent a lack of compassion or

empathy and encourage supportive and caring behaviors). Future researchers studying amoral manipulation in YouTube content creators could provide additional support for online content creators who have a high level of Machiavellian traits to become more self-compassionate and empathetic to their community.

Additionally, future research might study the effects of empathy and self-compassion on YouTube content creators as a long-term stress management strategy to see if the destabilizing effects of moral disengagement and amoral manipulation are easier to validate. Lastly, an additional major limitation of the study was the limited amount of research discovered in the literature review on YouTube content creators. Relevant literature in the fields of moral development and media psychology was found and utilized that was closely related. However, it would be helpful for further research to be conducted in these areas, specifically focusing on YouTube content creators to better understand their needs.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the role of empathy and self-compassion in lessening moral disengagement for YouTube content creators. The overall goal of the study was to gather at least 200 participants from different niches, preferably 100 participants who had YouTube channels that were monetized and 100 participants who had YouTube channels that were nonmonetized. The objective of the study was to determine if empathy and self-compassion lessened the likelihood for online content creators to participate in manipulative behaviors and to decrease the amount of stress they experience.

The findings of the present study suggest that higher levels of empathy contribute to decreased levels of stress and moral disengagement, which is consistent with previous literature. Bandura et al. (1996) found that people who displayed higher levels of empathy had a lower likelihood of participating in moral disengagement behaviors. Furthermore, Carlo et al. (1991) stated that empathy was negatively correlated with moral disengagement for younger people. The present results revealed a negative correlation between empathy and stress, which suggests that empathy can combat high levels of stress, but this could not be confirmed because of the sample size. Some of the findings of the present study are inconsistent with previous research, such as the research by Riess et al. (2012), who found that employees who received empathy training experienced less stress than those who did not receive training. Weng et al. (2013) studied the relationship between empathy and stress in college students and found that increased levels of empathy were linked to decreased levels of stress.

The willingness to morally disengage and participate in amoral behaviors is always a risk for entrepreneurial-minded content creators with a need for venture legitimacy, especially if they have low levels of compassion and empathy. Amoral behaviors will continue to challenge YouTube content creators who are in a rush to get ahead. Amoral behavior for a content creator can result in a loss of trust with their community of subscribers, a lack of consistent content creation, and increased instances of burnout (Yurieff, 2019).

Lastly, although the present study did not indicate that the empathy triggering scenario drastically lowered levels of moral disengagement and stress in the experimental group versus the control group, there were examples in the literature that indicated this.

Previous literature has stated that exposure to these types of scenarios help people to become more sympathetic to other people's feelings and concerns, leading them to have a stronger capacity for empathy. Further, empathy triggering scenarios help to activate the mirror neuron system (Decety & Cowell, 2014). When people read, listen to, or witness empathy triggering scenarios, their mirror neuron system is heightened. According to Decety and Cowell (2014), an activation of the mirror neurons is strongly linked to higher levels of empathic responses.

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Tables**Table 1***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion	Criteria
	18 years old or older
	Reside in the United States
	Work part or full time
	All niches
	Monetized or unmonetized YouTube channels

Table 2*Demographics*

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Goal as a creator		
Make money	44	22.1
Share knowledge	39	19.6
Build my brand	29	14.6
Supplement income	21	10.6
Quit my job	10	5
Free up my time	12	6
Stop living paycheck to paycheck	11	5.5
Earn passive income	19	9.5
Other	13	6.5
Subscribers		
1–100	18	9
101–999	12	6
1,000–5,000	17	8.5
5,001–9,999	34	17.1
10,000–50,000	65	32.7
50,001–75,000	17	8.5
75,001–100,000	19	9.5
100,001–250,000	7	3.5
250,000 +	4	2
500,000 +	3	1.5
Professional status		
Amateur	99	49.7
Professional	98	49.2
Self-employed		
No	91	45.7
Yes	103	51.8
Education		
Some high school	29	14.6
High school–GED	29	14.6
Some college	40	20.1
2-year degree	18	9
4-year degree	28	14.1
Some graduate work	5	2.5
Master's degree	22	11.1
Professional degree/Doctorate	3	1.5
Other	3	1.5

Table 4*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables*

Variable	Significance	DS	VL	AM	STR	SC	MD	EMP	EC	PT
Desire for status (DS)	<i>r</i>	1	.441**	.136	.128	-.065	.089	-.099	.137	.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.056	.073	.361	.214	.166	.055	.602
	<i>N</i>	197	197	197	197	197	196	196	196	196
Venture legitimacy (VL)	<i>r</i>	.441**	1	.173*	.189**	-.100	.095	-.026	.347**	.180*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.015	.008	.163	.186	.723	.000	.012
	<i>N</i>	197	197	197	197	197	196	196	196	196
Amoral manipulation (AM)	<i>r</i>	.136	.173*	1	.439**	.486**	.823**	.614**	.357**	-.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.056	.015		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.285
	<i>N</i>	197	197	197	197	197	196	196	196	196
Stress (STR)	<i>r</i>	.128	.189**	.439**	1	-.498**	.420**	-.253**	.253**	-.063
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.073	.008	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.380
	<i>N</i>	197	197	197	197	197	196	196	196	196
Self-compassion (SC)	<i>r</i>	-.065	-.100	-.486**	-.498**	1	-.483**	.449**	-.240**	.166*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.361	.163	.000	.000		.000	.000	.001	.020
	<i>N</i>	197	197	197	197	197	196	196	196	196
Moral disengagement (MD)	<i>r</i>	.089	.095	.823**	.420**	-.483**	1	-.634**	.379**	-.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.214	.186	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.595
	<i>N</i>	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196
Empathy (EMP)	<i>r</i>	-.099	-.026	-.614**	-.253**	.449**	-.634**	1	-.150*	.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.166	.723	.000	.000	.000	.000		.035	.000
	<i>N</i>	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196
Empathetic concern (EC)	<i>r</i>	.137	.347**	.357**	.253**	-.240**	.379**	-.150*	1	.332**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.035		.000
	<i>N</i>	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196
Perspective taking (PT)	<i>r</i>	.037	.180*	-.077	-.063	.166*	-.038	.457**	.332**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.602	.012	.285	.380	.020	.595	.000	.000	
	<i>N</i>	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196	196

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5*Amoral Manipulation Related to Moral Disengagement*

Variable	Significance	AM	MD
Amoral manipulation (AM)	Pearson correlation	1	.823**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	<i>N</i>	197	196
Moral disengagement (MD)	Pearson correlation	.823**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	<i>N</i>	196	196

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6*Moral Disengagement Related to Stress*

Variable	Significance	MD	STR
Moral disengagement (MD)	Pearson correlation	1	.420**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	<i>N</i>	196	196
Stress (STR)	Pearson correlation	.420**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	<i>N</i>	196	197

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7*Moderation Analysis for Venture Legitimacy, Status, and Stress*

	Coefficient				
	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	.532	.611		.871	.385
Venture Legitimacy (VL)	.250	.182	.345	1.372	.172
Desire for Status (DS)	.148	.159	.250	.933	.352
VLxDS	-.034	.044	-.322	-.757	.450

Note. B = Unstandardized coefficient; Beta = Standardized coefficient; Dependent variable: Stress.

Table 8*Moderation Analysis for Empathy Moderator*

	Coefficient				
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.722	.811		4.590	.001
Empathy (EMP)	-.564	.211	-.380	-2.667	.008
Stress (STR)	1.031	.478	.776	2.155	.032
EMPxSTR	-.179	.128	-.491	-1.400	.163

Note. B = Unstandardized coefficient; Beta = Standardized coefficient; Dependent variable: Moral disengagement.

Table 9*Controls for Empathy Moderator*

Variable	Control	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant		4.450	1.064		4.180	.001
Empathy		-.469	.270	-.304	-1.738	.085
Stress		.786	.613	.582	1.281	.203
EMPxSTR		-.138	.160	-0.367	-.859	.392
	Age	-0.014	0.005	-0.183	-2.636	.009
	Race ^a *	-0.018	0.027	-0.042	-0.691	.491
	Education **	-0.077	0.031	-0.165	-2.447	.016
			DF	Adjusted R ²		
F		28.414	129	0.549		

Note. DF = Degrees of freedom.

^a0.1.

*0.05. **0.01.

Table 10*Stress and Moral Disengagement in Control and Experimental Groups*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	STR	MD
Control group	—	—	—	—
Stress (STR)	1.44	.651	—	.52
Moral disengagement (MD)	2.23	.900	.52	—
Empathy group	—	—	—	—
Stress (STR)	1.27	.717	—	.35
Moral disengagement (MD)	1.98	.726	.35	—

Note. *n* = 125 for control group. *n* = 69 for empathy group.

Table 11*Controls for Self-Compassion Moderator*

Variable	Control	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant		4.187	0.246		17.005	.001
Self-compassion (SC)		-0.280	0.255	-0.172	-1.097	.275
Stress (STR)		0.655	0.624	0.485	1.050	.295
SCxSTR		-0.136	0.178	-0.303	-0.767	.445
	Age *	-0.022	0.006	-0.283	-3.821	.001
	Race ^a	-0.039	0.030	-0.088	-1.316	.190
	Education*	-0.077	0.035	-0.167	-2.196	.030
			DF	Adjusted R ²		
F		18.983	129	0.444		

Note. DF = Degrees of freedom.

^a0.1.

*0.05.

Table 12*Moderation Analysis for Self-Compassion*

	Coefficient ^a				
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.045	.838		3.634	.001
Self-compassion (SC)	-.392	.226	-.246	-1.736	.084
Stress (STR)	.827	.537	.623	1.541	.125
SCxSTR	-.149	.155	-.345	-.961	.338

Note. B = Unstandardized coefficient; Beta = Standardized coefficient.

^a Dependent variable: Moral disengagement.

Table 13*Empathy for Control and Experimental Groups*

Variable	Control		Experimental		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Empathy	3.50	.59	3.79	.606	-3.28	.001	0.48

Table 14*Empathetic Concern for Control and Experimental Groups*

Variable	Control		Experimental		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Empathetic concern	3.04	.540	2.99	.537	.700	.242	0.09

Table 15*Perspective Taking for Control and Experimental Groups*

Group	Control		Experimental		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Perspective taking	3.27	.576	3.38	.570	-1.22	.222	0.19

Table 16*Empathy Related to Stress and Moral Disengagement*

	Coefficient ^a				
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.722	.811		4.590	.00
Stress (STR)	1.031	.478	.776	2.155	.032
Empathy (EMP)	-.564	.211	-.380	-2.667	.008
STRxEMP	-.179	.128	-.491	-1.400	.163

Note. B = Unstandardized coefficient; Beta = Standardized coefficient;

^a Dependent variable: Moral disengagement.

Table 17*Desire to be Full-Time Amateur or Professional Content Creator*

Valid answer	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Amateur status				
Yes	20	20.2	20.6	20.6
Maybe	33	33.3	34.0	54.6
No	42	42.4	43.3	97.9
Already there	2	2.0	2.1	100.0
Total	97	98.0	100.0	
Professional status				
Yes	35	35.7	37.2	37.2
Maybe	29	29.6	30.9	68.1
No	15	15.3	16.0	84.0
Already there	15	15.3	16.0	100.0
Total	94	95.9	100.0	

Table 18*Time Working on YouTube Channels*

Goal as creator	Time working on channel	N	%
Make money	Less than a month	13	6.5
	1 to 5 years	28	63.6
	6 to 10 years	12	27.3
	10+ years	3	6.8
Share my knowledge	Less than a month	2	5.1
	1 to 5 years	20	51.3
	6 to 10 years	10	25.6
	10+ years	4	10.3
Build my brand	Less than a month	1	3.4
	1 to 5 years	16	55.2
	6 to 10 years	7	24.1
	10+ years	5	17.2
Supplement my income	Less than a month	2	9.5
	1 to 5 years	11	52.4
	6 to 10 years	4	19.0
	10+ years	4	19.0
Quit my Job	Less than a month	1	10.0
	1 to 5 years	3	30.0
	6 to 10 years	3	30.0
	10+ years	3	30.0
Free up my time	Less than a month	2	16.7
	1 to 5 years	3	25.0
	6 to 10 years	4	33.3
	10+ years	2	16.7
Stop living paycheck to paycheck	Less than a month	1	9.1
	1 to 5 years	8	72.7
	6 to 10 years	1	9.1
	10+ years	1	9.1
Earn passive income	Less than a month	4	21.1
	1 to 5 years	12	63.2
	6 to 10 years	2	10.5
	10+ years	1	5.3
Other	Less than a month	0	0.0
	1 to 5 years	8	61.5
	6 to 10 years	4	30.8
	10+ years	1	7.7

Table 19*Amoral Manipulation and Moral Disengagement for Control and Experimental Groups*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	AM	MD
Control group	—	—	—	—
Amoral manipulation (AM)	2.62	1.50	—	.82
Moral disengagement (MD)	2.23	.900	.82	—
Empathy group	—	—	—	—
Amoral manipulation (AM)	2.11	1.13	—	.83
Moral disengagement (MD)	1.98	.726	.83	—

Note. *n* = 125 for control group. *n* = 69 for empathy group

Table 20*YouTube Content Creators' Earnings Per Month Earnings*

Earning	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
10–50	11	5.5	9.6	9.6
51–100	7	3.5	6.1	15.8
101–500	30	15.1	26.3	42.1
1,000–5,000	28	14.1	24.6	66.7
5,001–10,000	6	3.0	5.3	71.9
501–999	16	8.0	14.0	86.0
10,000+	16	8.0	14.0	100.0
Total	114	57.3	100.0	

Figures

Figure 1

Theoretical Model

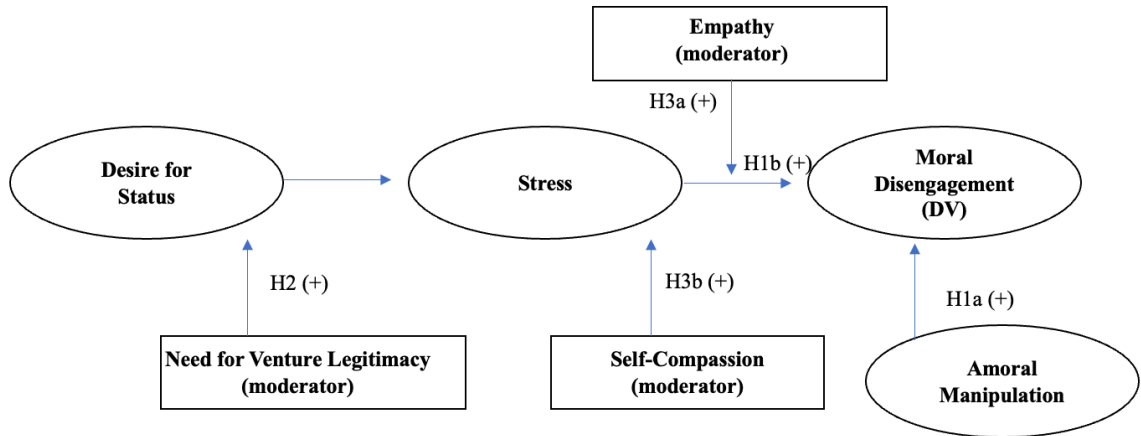


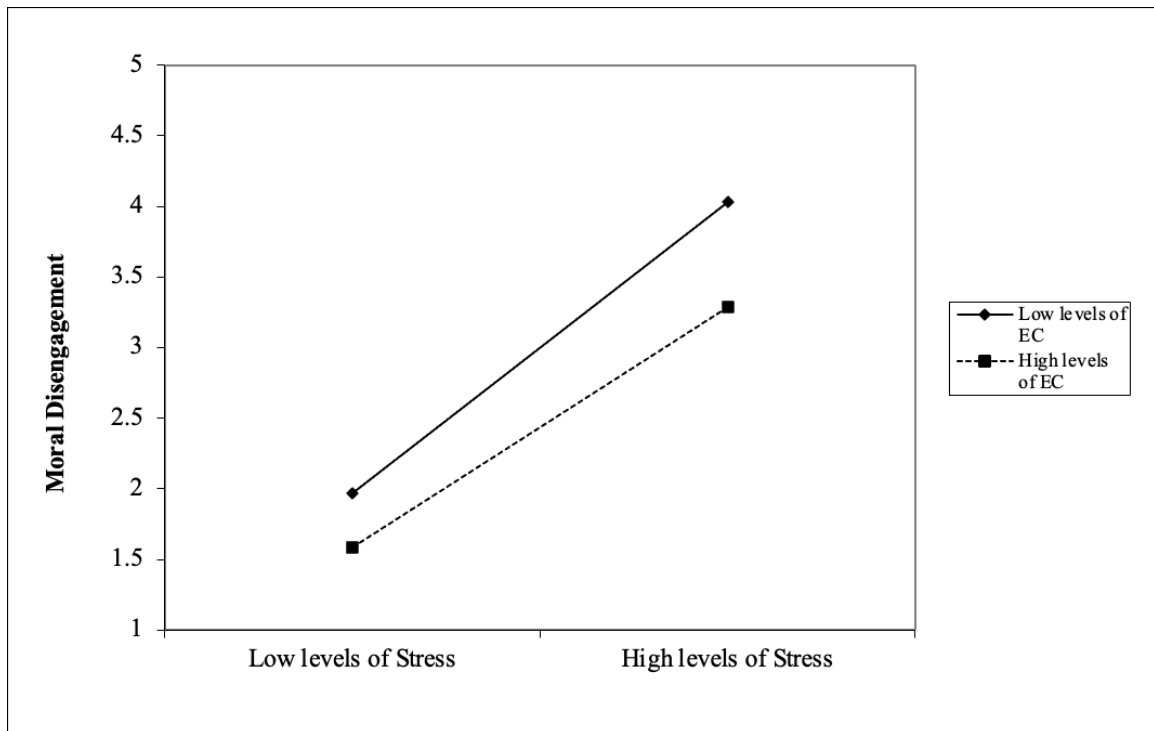
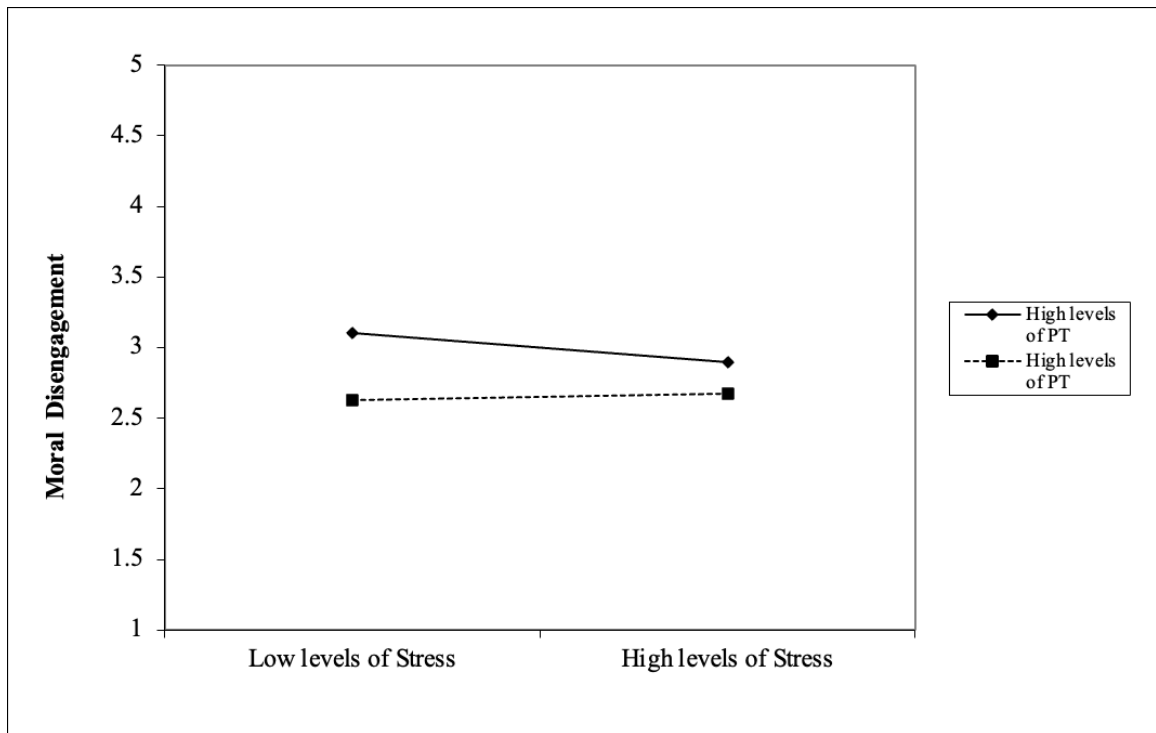
Figure 2*Simple Slope for Empathetic Concern*

Figure 3

Simple Slope for Perspective Taking



Appendix A

Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

University of Missouri–St. Louis

Principal investigator: Nathan Pennington

Department: Business

Faculty advisor: Matthew Taylor

IRB project number: 2095395

Key Information About the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to better understand the stressors placed on YouTube content creators. This is an online study that will last approximately 20 minutes. Your participation will involve completing questionnaires. The questionnaires will include asking about the development of your YouTube channel and production habits, as well as demographic information. There will be approximately 200 people that will be involved in this research conducted through the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

For your time and effort, I will be offering compensation in the amount of a claim code for a \$10 Amazon gift card for respondents who complete at least 80% of the questions within the survey.

The confidentiality risk associated with this research will be minimized by all data files and online survey material being saved on a password protected database. Access to participant data and the online survey itself will be restricted to the principal investigator.

Participant email addresses used for compensation will be stored in a separate password protected database, separate from survey responses. There will be no way for the principal investigator to link an email address to a survey response. Email addresses will be deleted as soon as compensation has been awarded. The surveys are confidential and there will be no way to pair up an individual with their responses. I will not be collecting IP addresses. There is always the possibility of tampering from an outside source when using the internet for collecting information. While the confidentiality of your responses will be protected, the data are downloaded from the internet, so there is always a possibility of hacking or other security breaches that could threaten the confidentiality of your responses.

There are no direct benefits for you to participate in this study. However, your participation may provide valuable insight into the stress that YouTube content creators face. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or withdraw your consent at any time. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose to participate or withdraw.

I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection) that would lead to disclosure of your data as well as any other information collected by the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may contact the investigator (Nathan Pennington, 616-885-0035, napwh7@umsl.edu) or the faculty advisor, (Dr. Matthew Taylor, 314-516-5402). You

may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the University of Missouri–St. Louis Office of Research Compliance (314-516-5972 or irb@umsl.edu).

- Yes, I do consent (1)

- No, I do not consent (2)

Appendix B**Scenarios*****Empathy Scenario***

Imagine you have a friend who has been unemployed for quite some time. She has been trying to improve her CV by studying different courses and acquiring different skills. Your coworker is also facing financial troubles and really needs a job. She has applied for multiple jobs over the past few months but has not been called back. Additionally, she has given interviews, been tested, and even done internships, but she still faces rejection from prospective employees. After her 20th interview, she receives another letter of rejection from the company. Upon seeing that, she tears up the letter and screams, "I'll never be able to find a job!"

What are 3 things that you could say to her to help her in this difficult time?

Neutral Scenario

Two students that are in a psychology class are conducting an empirical study for a final paper, which their teacher has decided that they can work on together. Student A loves the topic of statistics, so they agree to conduct all the research analysis and compile the writing needed for the research section of the paper. Student B hates statistics and has no interest in the topic, so they volunteer to read and research the details for the literature review and draft the introduction for the paper. Both students decide to work together on the method and discussion portions of the paper. In addition, each of the students decide to make comments on how to improve each other's drafted sections before they submit the final draft of the paper together.

What is your analysis of this scenario?

Appendix C**Demographic Questions**

What is your overall goal as a YouTube content creator?

1. Make money
2. Share my knowledge of the subject matter I am interested in with others
3. Build my brand
4. Supplement my income
5. Quit my job
6. Free up time to do the things I want to do
7. Stop living paycheck to paycheck
8. Earn passive income
9. Other _____

How many subscribers do you currently have?

1. 1–100
2. 101–999
3. 1,000–5,000
4. 5,001–9,999
5. 10,000–50,000
6. 50,001–75,000
7. 75,001–100,000
8. 100,001–250,000
9. 250,000+
10. 500,000+

Would you consider yourself an amateur or professional YouTuber?

1. Amateur
2. Professional

Is your focus to build your YouTube channel to become a full-time creator? (As your only source of income.)

1. Yes
2. Maybe
3. No
4. Already there

Is your channel currently monetized?

1. Yes
2. No

How much are you currently earning with your YouTube channel?

1. \$10–\$50 per month
2. \$51–\$100 per month
3. \$101–\$500 per month
4. \$501–\$999 per month
5. \$1,000–\$5,000 per month
6. \$5,001–\$10,000 per month
7. \$10,000+ per month

Approximately how much did your YouTube channel earn last month?

How long have you been working to build your channel?

1. Less than a month
2. 1–5 years
3. 6–10 years
4. 10+ years

What is your age?

What is your racial/ethnic group? (Select all that apply)

1. Native American or Alaska Native
2. Asian American
3. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
4. African American, Black
5. Caucasian, Middle Eastern
6. Caucasian, White
7. Hispanic/Latinx
8. Other _____

What is your employment status? (Select all that apply)

1. Employed full time
2. Employed part time
3. Employed, but it is inconsistent (e.g., temporary or seasonal work)
4. Unemployed
5. Student
6. Retired

Do you consider yourself self-employed?

1. No
2. Yes

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Select all that apply)

1. Some High School
2. High School Graduate/GED
3. Some College
4. 2-Year College Degree (e.g., Associates)
5. 4-Year College Degree
6. Some Graduate work
7. Master's Degree
8. Professional or doctoral degree (MD, JD, PhD)
9. Other: _____

Thank you taking the time to do this survey.

In order to ensure that your survey and compensation are linked, **you must enter the SAME numeric ID code below and on the compensation website**. It will be an 8-digit number that is created as follows: [current month][current date][birth month][birth date]* *Use two digits to represent each of these numbers (so if the current month is March, use 03, not just 3) Examples: If today is November 6th and my birthday

is April 23rd, my ID # would be 11060423. If today is February 17th and my birthday is August 12th, my ID# would be 02170812.

To receive your Amazon gift card, **please enter your ID code below and click “NEXT”** to proceed to the compensation website where you need to **provide your name, ID code, and email address**. This information will not be paired with the responses to this survey, which are confidential.

Main Variables

Self-Compassion Scale (Neff et al., 2003b)

Instructions: Think about a situation you are experiencing right now that is painful or difficult. It could be some challenge in your life, or perhaps you are feeling inadequate in some way. Please indicate how well each statement applies to how you are feeling toward yourself right now as you think about this situation, using the following scale:

Scale from 1–5 with 1 = *Not at all true for me* and 5 = *Very true for me*

1. I'm giving myself the care and tenderness I need.
2. I'm obsessing and fixating on everything that's wrong.
3. I see my difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.
4. I'm being tough on myself.
5. I'm keeping my emotions in balanced perspective.
6. I feel separate and cut off from the rest of the world.
7. I'm being kind to myself.
8. I'm getting carried away with my feelings.
9. I'm remembering that there are a lot of other people in the world feeling like I am.
10. I'm being a bit cold-hearted towards myself.
11. I'm taking a balanced view of this painful situation.
12. I'm struggling more than others right now.
13. I'm being supportive toward myself.
14. I'm blowing this painful incident out of proportion.
15. I'm remembering that difficult feelings are shared by most people.

16. I feel intolerant and impatient toward myself.
17. I'm keeping things in perspective.
18. I'm feeling all alone right now.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980)

Instructions: The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate number on the scale from 1 to 5. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter next to the item number. **READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING.**

Scale from 1–5 with 1 = *Does not describe me well* and 5 = *Describes me very well*

1. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other person's" point of view.
2. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.
3. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
4. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.
5. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.
6. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.
7. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.

8. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.
9. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
10. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.
11. I would describe myself as a soft-hearted person.
12. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in their shoes" for a while.
13. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

Desire for Status Subscale (Dahling et al., 2009)

Instructions: Rank the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 = *Strongly disagree* and 7 = *Strongly agree*.

1. *Strongly disagree*, 2. *Disagree*, 3. *Somewhat disagree*, 4. *Neither agree nor disagree*, 5. *Somewhat agree*, 6. *Agree*, 7. *Strongly agree*

1. Status is a good sign of success in life.
2. Accumulating wealth is an important goal for me.
3. I want to be rich and powerful someday.
4. My status as a YouTube content creator is a good sign of my success in life.
5. Accumulating wealth with my YouTube channel is an important goal for me.
6. I assume that most people are out for their own success as YouTubers.
7. Most people are concerned more about "the greater good" than personal success.
8. A big personal victory justifies anything that I had to do to attain it.
9. Most people who succeed as YouTube content creators lead clean, moral lives.
10. Personal development is one of my most important goals as a YouTuber.
11. I want to use my YouTube channel to be rich and powerful someday.
12. Creating good content is more important to me than having money in the bank.

Moral Disengagement Measure (A. Moore et al., 2012)

Instructions: Rank the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 = *Strongly disagree* and 7 = *Strongly agree*.

1. *Strongly disagree*, 2. *Disagree*, 3. *Somewhat disagree*, 4. *Neither agree nor disagree*, 5. *Somewhat agree*, 6. *Agree*, 7. *Strongly agree*

1. It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about.
2. Taking something without the owner's permission is okay as long as you're just borrowing it.
3. Considering the ways people grossly misrepresent themselves, it's hardly a sin to inflate my own accomplishments a bit.
4. People shouldn't be held accountable for doing questionable things when they were just doing what an authority figure told them to do.
5. People can't be blamed for doing things that are technically wrong when all their friends are doing it too.
6. Taking personal credit for ideas that were not your own is no big deal.
7. Some people have to be treated roughly because they lack feelings that can be hurt.
8. People who get mistreated have usually done something to bring it on themselves.
9. I feel it is okay to spend money on "likes" so that my videos will be seen as more popular.
10. It is okay to purchase subscribers so that my channel may look more authoritative.

11. I don't see a problem with purchasing subscribers to speed up the monetization requirements for YouTube.
12. Social engineering my content is fine with me if it will make my videos seem more important and increase views and watch time.
13. Creating the simplest forms of content for the highest performing result is important to me.
14. I have thought about making reaction videos about other creators' content, and the idea of getting a copyright strike does not concern me.
15. I am willing to make controversial videos if it will help me gain more subscribers and increase revenue.
16. I usually do not place SEC affiliate disclaimers below my videos even though I am getting paid by my affiliates. My subscribers don't know anyway.

Legitimacy Threshold Scale (Nagy et al., 2012)

Instructions: Rank the following statements from a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 = *Not confident at all* and 7 = *Confident all of the time*.

1. *Not confident at all*, 2. *Rarely confident*, 3. *Somewhat confident*, 4. *Confident some of the time*, 5. *Confident*, 6. *Confident most of the time*, 7. *Confident all of the time*

1. The focus of my YouTube channel is to network and broadcast my mission.
2. My YouTube channel is focused on persistent personal selling.
3. My YouTube channel is focused on broadcasting my brand to as many people as possible.

4. As a YouTube content creator, I am highly focused on receiving advice from individuals like mentors and consultants who can help me build my channel.
5. My YouTube channel and brand is focused on obtaining brand deals from sponsors.
6. As a YouTube content creator, I am highly focused on trying to win notoriety even though my channel is not where I want it to be yet.

Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983)

Instructions: For each question choose from the following alternatives from 0 to 4.

0. *Never*, 1. *Almost never*, 2. *Sometimes*, 3. *Fairly often*, 4. *Often*

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that one of your YouTube commentors said?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to balance the workload of the content you are producing?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed about being a YouTube content creator?
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about building your YouTube channel effectively?
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way as a YouTuber?
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with the amount of demands your subscribers are sending you?

7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life stemming from building your YouTube channel?
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things and able to handle your content creation?
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control, like negative comments made on your channel?
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so much that you could not overcome them?

Amoral Manipulation Subscale (Dahling et al., 2009)

Instructions: Rank the following statements from a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 = *Strongly disagree* and 7 = *Strongly agree*.

1. *Strongly disagree*, 2. *Disagree*, 3. *Somewhat disagree*, 4. *Neither agree nor disagree*, 5. *Somewhat agree*, 6. *Agree*, 7. *Strongly agree*

1. I believe that lying is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage over others.
2. The only good reason to talk to others is to get information that I can use to my benefit.
3. I am willing to be unethical if I believe it will help me succeed.
4. I am willing to sabotage the efforts of other people if they threaten my own goals.
5. I would cheat if there was a low chance of getting caught.

Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)

Instructions: Listed below are statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Read each item and decide whether the statement is true or false as it pertains to you.

- | | | |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my life if I am not encouraged. | True | False |
| 2. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my own way. | True | False |
| 3. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability. | True | False |
| 4. There have times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right. | True | False |
| 5. No matter who I am talking to, I'm always a good listener. | True | False |
| 6. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone. | True | False |
| 7. I'm always willing to admit when I make a mistake. | True | False |
| 8. I sometimes try to get even, rather than forgive and forget. | True | False |
| 9. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable. | True | False |

- | | | |
|---|------|-------|
| 10. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own. | True | False |
| 11. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others. | True | False |
| 12. I sometimes am irritated by people who ask favors of me. | True | False |
| 13. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings. | True | False |

Appendix D

Normality and Missing Data

Measures

Status

A skewness and kurtosis analysis were run for the total means of the 7 scales. Each of the scales were then reviewed for univariate normality, and all were found to fall within acceptable skewness and kurtosis ranges of -2 and 2 . All scales had acceptable reliability. Further, the analysis was used to check for normality, missing data, and normal distribution for each of the respective measures. The total mean scores for stress were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from -0.042 to $.771$, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.070 to -1.225 . Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases. No outliers were present in Figure D1. There were 197 valid responses with two missing items within this variable. The total mean value of all 12 questions was screened using a histogram within the SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed. The histogram showed the data to be symmetrically skewed within this variable. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the stress data followed normal distribution, $D(197)$, $r = 0.076$, $p = .008$.

Figure D1

Boxplot of Stress

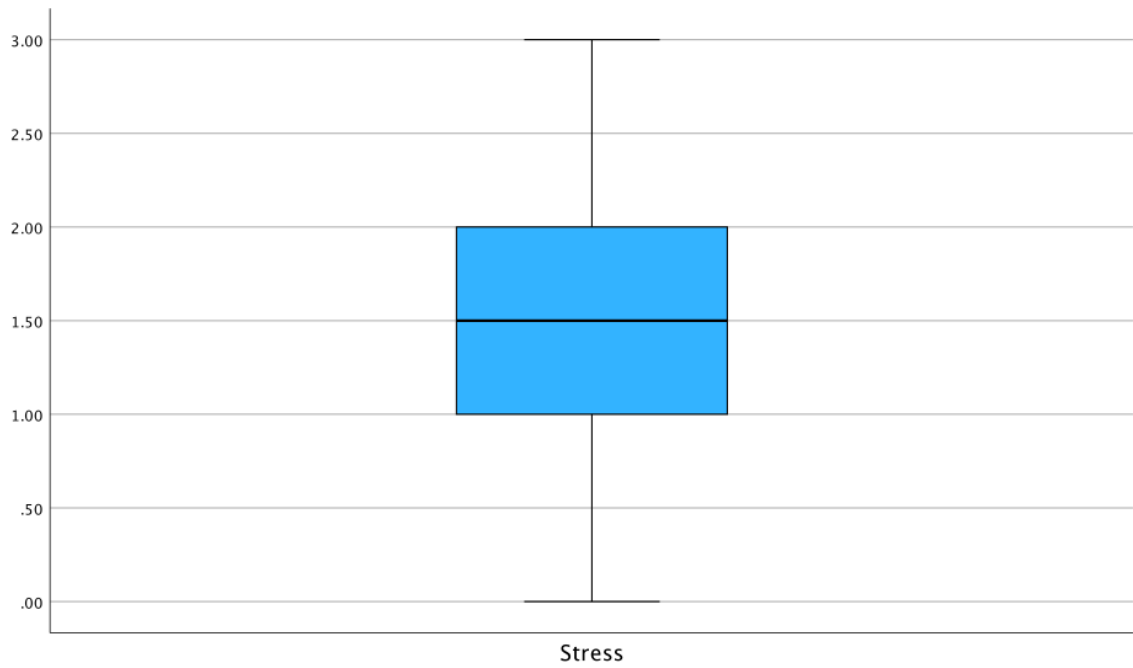
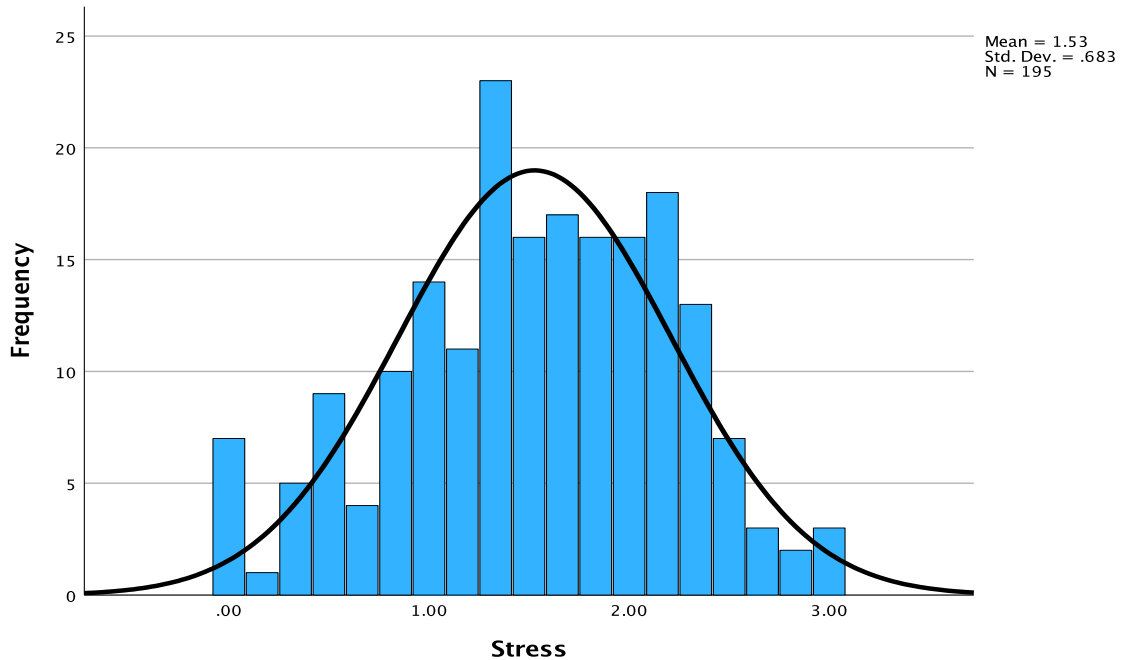


Figure D2*Histogram of Stress**Venture Legitimacy*

The total mean scores for venture legitimacy were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from -0.079 to 0.223 , and kurtosis values ranged from -0.079 to -1.172 .

Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases. No outliers were present as shown in Figure D3. There were 197 valid responses with two missing items within this variable. The total mean value of all six questions was screened using a histogram within the SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed.

The histogram showed that the leptokurtic data to be symmetrically skewed within this

variable as shown in Figure D4. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the venture legitimacy data followed a normal distribution, $D(197)$, 0.078, $p = .005$.

Figure D3

Boxplot of Venture Legitimacy

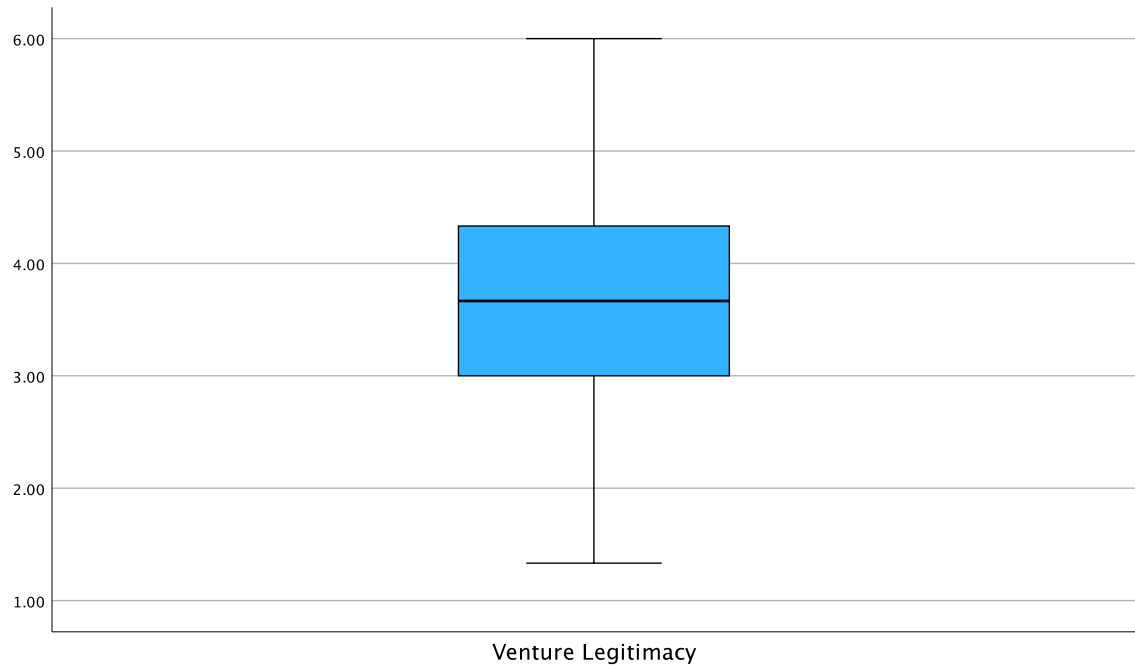
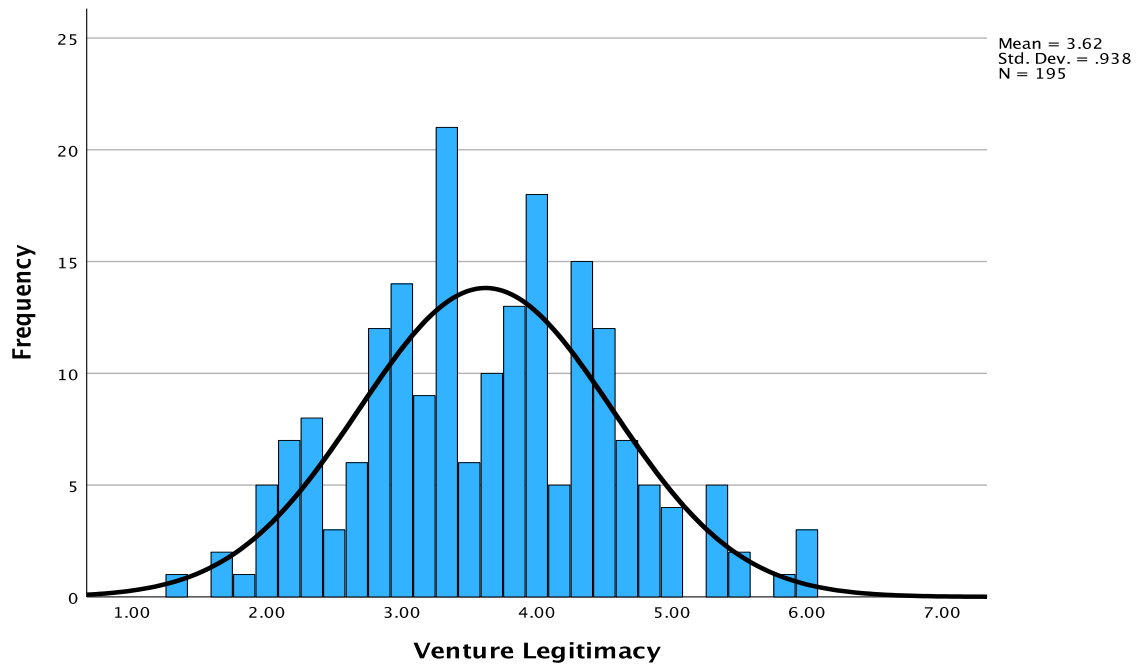


Figure D4*Histogram of Venture Legitimacy**Amoral Manipulation*

The total mean scores for amoral manipulation were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from 0.066 to .793, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.668 to -1.227 . There were 197 valid responses with two missing items within this variable. Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases. No outliers were present as shown in Figure D5. The total mean value of all six questions was screened using a histogram within the SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed. The histogram showed that the leptokurtic data skewed to the right within this variable as shown in Figure D6.

The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the amoral manipulation data did not follow a normal distribution, $D(197), 0.173, p = <.001$.

Figure D5

Boxplot of Amoral Manipulation

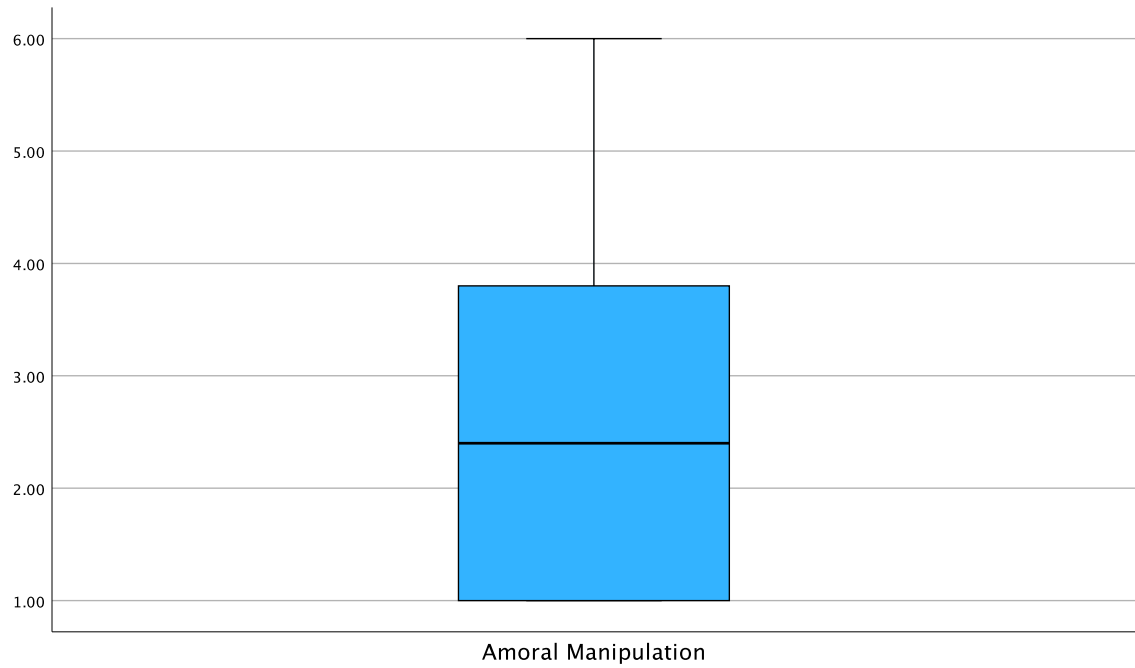
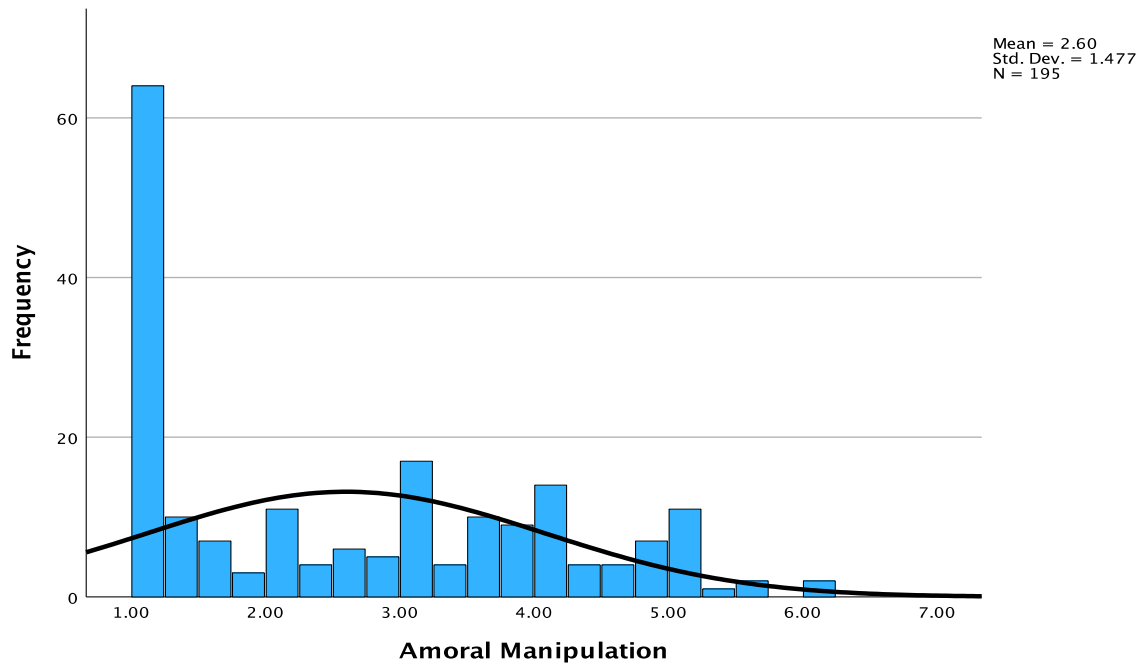


Figure D6*Histogram of Amoral Manipulation**Stress*

The total mean scores for stress were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from -0.232 to $.671$, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.422 to 1.248 . There were 197 valid responses with two missing items within this variable. Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases, and two were detected but were not extreme values. No outliers were present as shown in Figure D7. The total mean value of all 10 questions was screened using a histogram within the SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed. The histogram showed that the leptokurtic data was symmetrically

skewed within this variable as shown in Figure D8. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the stress data followed a normal distribution, $D(197)$, 0.076, $p = .008$.

Figure D7

Boxplot of Stress

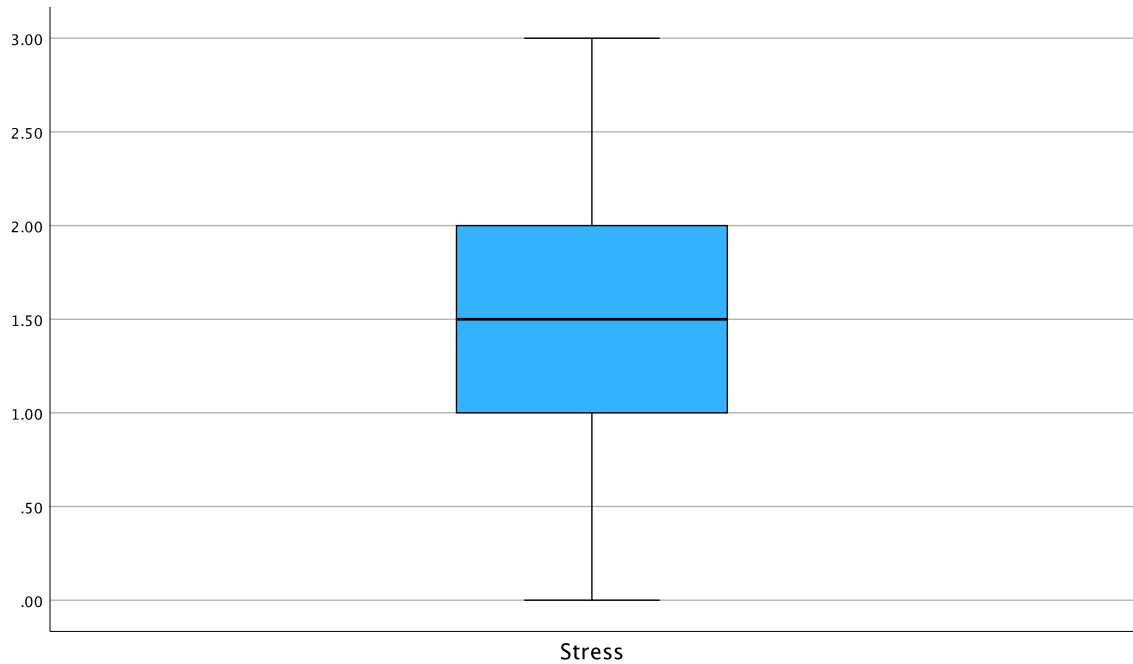
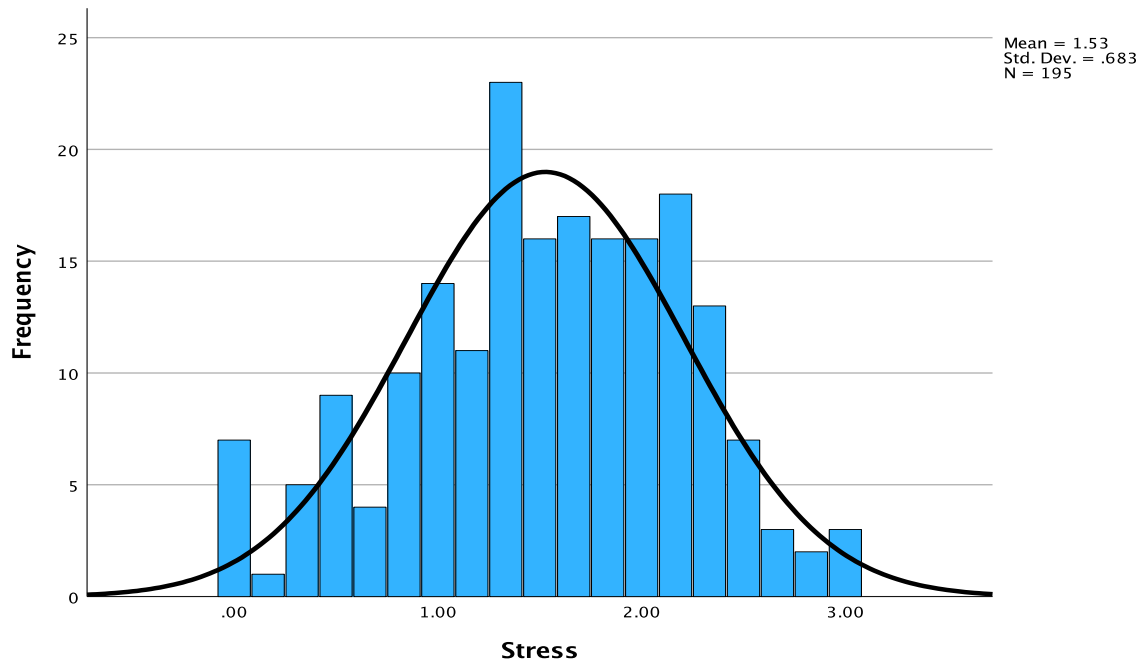


Figure D8*Histogram of Stress**Self-Compassion*

The total mean scores for self-compassion were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from -0.103 to $.273$, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.761 to -1.394 . There were 197 valid responses with two missing items within this variable. Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases, and one was detected but was not extreme as shown in Figure D9. The total mean value of all 18 questions was screened using a histogram within the SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed. The histogram showed that the leptokurtic data was skewed to the right

within this variable as shown in Figure D10. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the self-compassion data did not follow a normal distribution, $D(197)$, $0.157, p = <.001$.

Figure D9

Boxplot of Self-Compassion

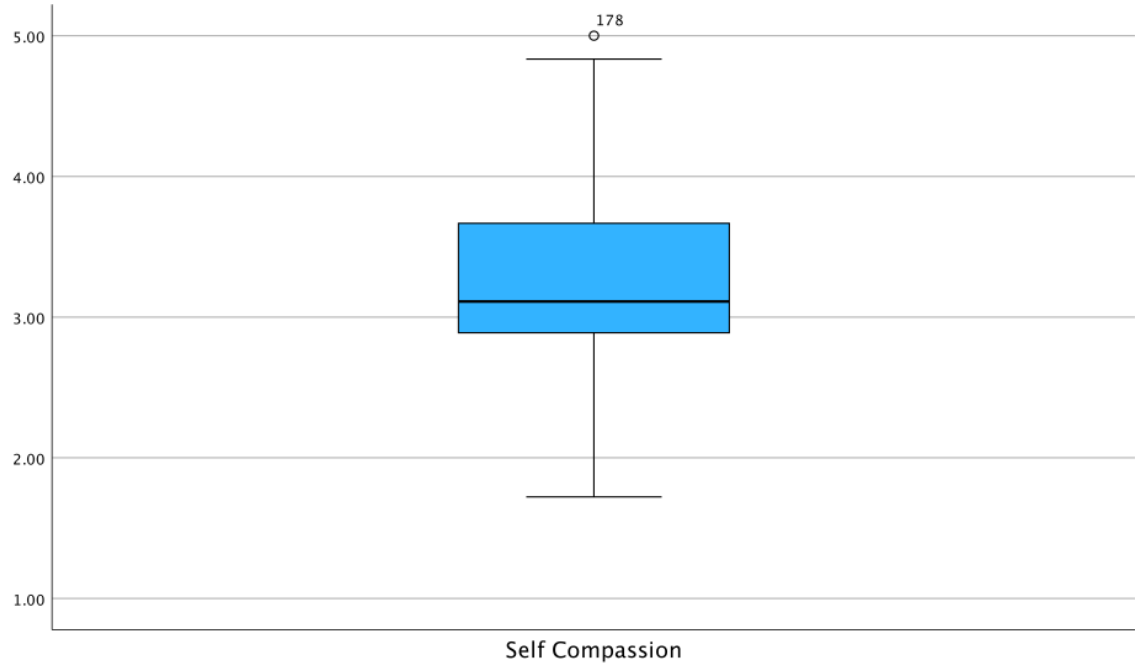
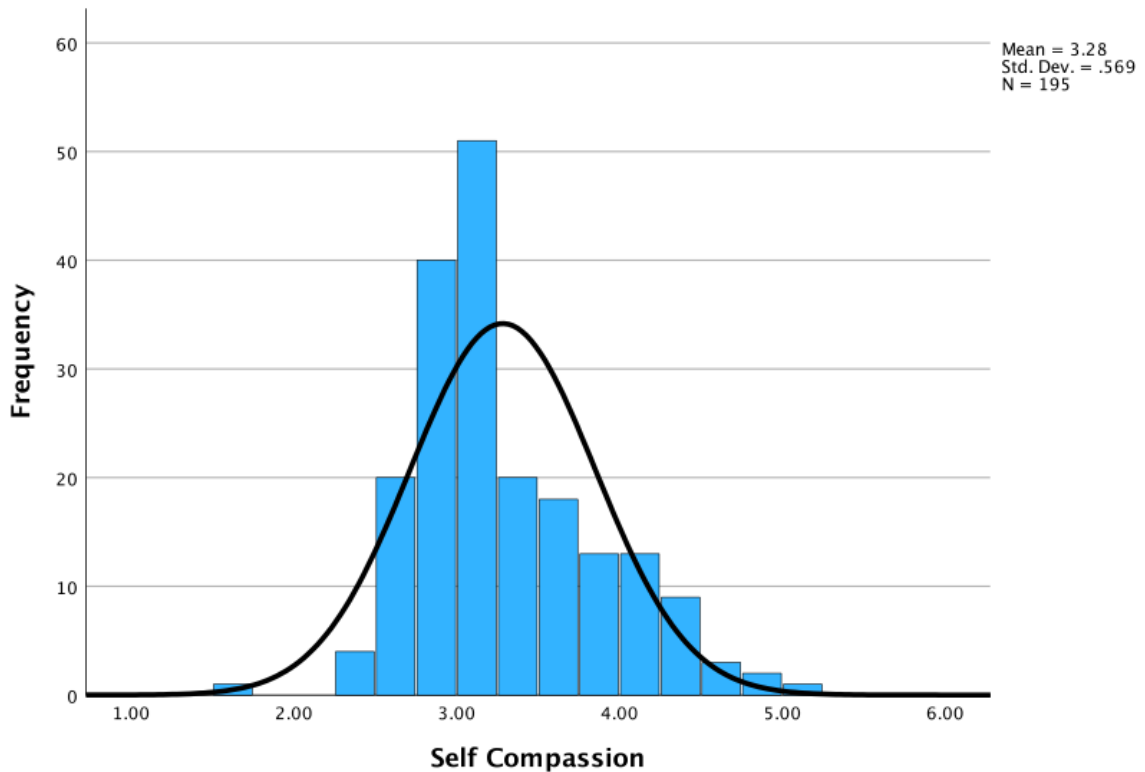


Figure D10*Histogram of Self-Compassion**Empathy*

The total mean scores for empathy were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from -0.013 to $.868$, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.234 to -1.174 . There were 196 valid responses with three missing items within this variable. Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases. No outliers were found as shown in Figure D11. The total mean value of all 18 questions was screened using a histogram within the

SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed. The histogram showed that the leptokurtic data was symmetrically skewed within this variable as shown in Figure D12. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the empathy data did not follow a normal distribution, $D(197), 0.091, p = <.001$.

Figure D11

Boxplot of Empathy

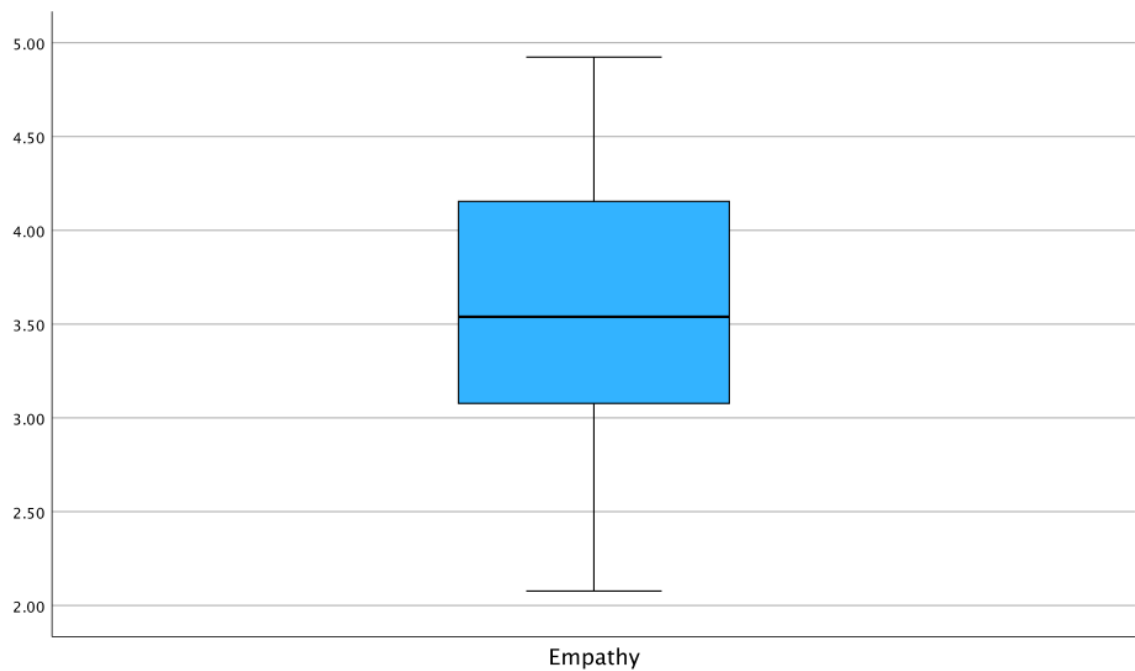
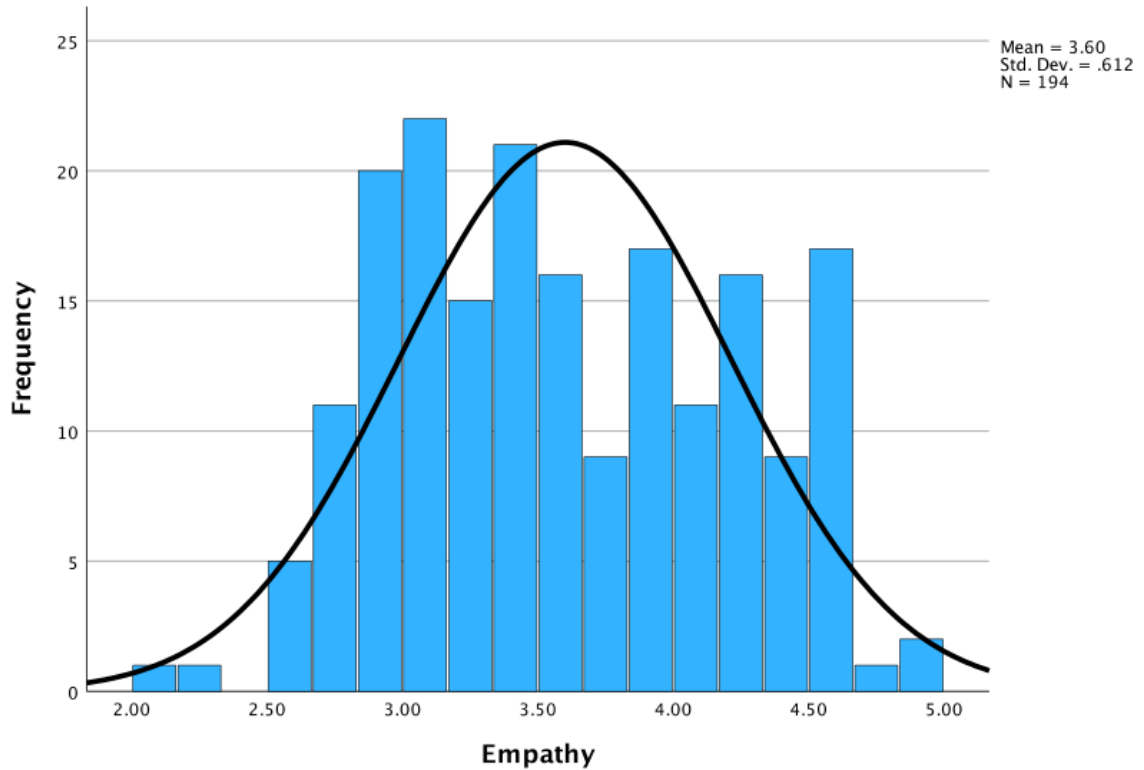


Figure D12*Histogram of Empathy**Moral Disengagement*

The total mean scores for moral disengagement were screened for outliers and normality, and none of the items exhibited high skewness or kurtosis exceeding the cutoffs of ∓ 2.00 for skewness and ∓ 7.00 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Skewness values ranged from -0.141 to $.897$, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.217 to -1.189 . There were 196 valid responses with three missing items within this variable. Univariate outliers were examined using box plots for extreme cases. No outliers were found as shown in Figure D13. The total mean value of all 16 questions was screened using a

histogram within the SPSS software to determine if the data was normally distributed. The histogram showed that the leptokurtic data was symmetrically skewed within this variable as shown in Figure D14. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the empathy data did not follow a normal distribution, $D(197), 0.126, p = <.001$.

Figure D13

Boxplot of Moral Disengagement

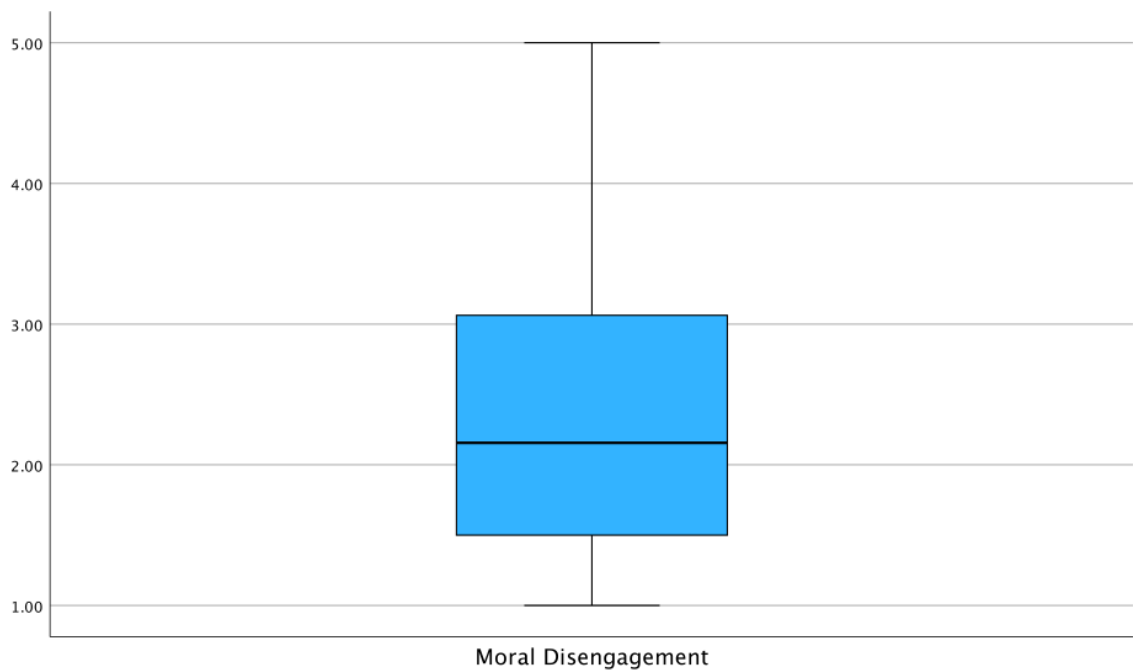


Figure D14

Histogram of Moral Disengagement

