**Introduction**

Why do people persevere? Research in social psychology offers, at least, two explanations.

First, people persevere because they are motivated by a need for self-consistency. Researchers found that participants performed as they were expected to perform, and this is especially true in public situations.

Second, people persevere because they have the capacity to engage in self-control. Research shows that people who have temporary reductions in self-control capacity persevere on tasks less than those without reductions in self-control capacity.

The purpose of this study was to begin examining whether these explanations are competing or interactive mechanisms of perseverance.

**Method**

Participants (N = 51) completed personality tests that were ostensibly used to predict their performance on an upcoming “cognitive test.”

To manipulate self-control capacity, participants then completed either a non-depleting (easy) regulatory task or a regulatory depleting (difficult) task.

Next, participants were led to believe their personality profile indicated they were either expected to perform well or poorly on the upcoming anagram task, or they were given no feedback.

Finally, participants worked on 10 solvable anagrams until they had completed them or quit.

**Results**

Results showed an effect of Task, $F(1, 45) = 8.32, p = .006, d = .86$. There was no effect of Feedback, $F > 1, ns$, and no interaction between these two factors, $F(2, 45) = 1.37, p = .26$ (see Figure 1).

While no interaction was found, exploratory analyses suggest that the feedback may have influenced performance. Results showed that participants persevered more if they completed the easy task than if they completed the difficult task when they received no feedback, $t(17) = 2.75, p = .014, d = 1.27$ or told they were expected to perform poorly, $t(15) = 2.33, p = .034, d = 1.13$. However, participants persisted equally when they were expected to perform well $t < 1, ns$.

**Conclusion**

These data indicate that self-regulation capacity explains perseverance better than self-consistency motives. However, these data in the context of the broader literature may suggest that self-control capacity accounts for perseverance in a private context; whereas self-consistency motives may account for public displays of perseverance.

![Figure 1: Time spent solving anagrams as a function of Expectations and Regulatory Depletion Task, showing that participants persevered more after the non-depleting task than after the depleting task.](chart.png)

**References**