

TITLE: The Role of Psychological Inflexibility and Mindfulness in Psychological Distresses among Black Americans

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Introduction: Research suggests that Blacks in the United States (U.S.) are vulnerable to distress (e.g, depression, anxiety, and somatization) from a wide range of psychosocial factors (CDC, 2004, 2010). Yet the way in which Black Americans cope with their emotions and behaviors is an understudied topic. The present study investigated whether psychological inflexibility and mindfulness, two widely studied coping processes, predict a range of psychological distress among Blacks.

Background: Numerous studies have found that exposure to sociocultural factors—such as economic hardships and experiences of discrimination, racism, limited social support, and violence—increases the risk for psychological distress (Giurgescu et al., 2012; Jager, 2011; Lincoln, Taylor, & Chatters, 2013; Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & BeLue, 2011). Additionally, recent studies have demonstrated that the way an individual reacts to a stressor and regulates his/her emotions and behaviors is associated with a range of psychological distress (Eisenberg et al., 2005). Since information regarding coping and regulation strategies among Black Americans is scarce, it is imperative to gain a general understanding of the associations that are made with psychological distress among this group. Two major regulation processes that have received a lot of attention in recent years are mindfulness and psychological inflexibility.

Purpose: To better understand the issue of psychological distress and to promote well-being of Black Americans within the framework of mindfulness and psychological inflexibility.

Method: The current study was conducted at a public research university in a metropolitan area of the southeast region of the United States. A sample of 358 Black undergraduates was recruited through a web-based research management system that admits undergraduates to volunteer for psychological experiments in exchange for course credit. Approximately 85% ($n = 305$) of the Black American students were female, and 15% males ($n = 54$). The mean age of this sample was 20.73 ($SD = 5.17$, range 16 – 57 years old). Also, about 52.9% of the participants identified as being middle class, 29.8% as working class, 9.2% as upper-middle class, 7.8% as poor, and 0.3% as upper class. The participants were asked to complete anonymous web-based questionnaires that examined the relationship between psychological inflexibility, mindfulness, and psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety, somatization, and general distress). The two prominent measures of the study were the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (AAQ-II; Bond et al., 2011). The MAAS is a 15-item self-report scale designed to measure attention and alertness to internal and external events in the present moment. The AAQ-II is a 7-item questionnaire designed to screen acceptance, experiential avoidance, and psychological inflexibility. Additionally, the Brief Symptom Inventory-18 (BSI-18; Derogatis, 2001) was used to assess depressive, anxious, and somatic symptoms, and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12; Goldberg, 1978) was used to assess general psychological distress.

Results: Psychological inflexibility was positively correlated with depression ($r = .66, p < .01$), anxiety ($r = .64, p < .01$), somatization ($r = .55, p < .01$), and general psychological distress ($r = .59, p < .01$). Mindfulness was negatively correlated with the psychopathological symptoms of depression ($r = -.29, p < .01$), anxiety ($r = -.30, p < .01$), somatization ($r = -.28, p < .01$), and general distress ($r = -.22, p < .01$). However, after a simultaneous regression analysis was conducted, it was found that psychological inflexibility remained a unique predictor for depression, anxiety, somatization, and general distress, but mindfulness did not remain a significant predictor (regression results will be presented in a table).

Conclusion: The results of this study suggest that mindfulness might be associated with psychological distress through psychological inflexibility among Black college students in the United States. Future research could further investigate why mindfulness does not seem to be a unique predictor for this population. In addition, it would be beneficial to evaluate the interaction between psychological inflexibility and a specific sociocultural context (e.g., exposure to discrimination or experiences of low SES) with a Black American sample.