

**TITLE:** Emotion dysregulation and negative affect are moderated by psychological inflexibility in individuals with analogue Generalized Anxiety Disorder

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**Introduction:**

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a psychological disorder characterized by emotion dysregulation (Mennin et al., 2005), or difficulties in modulating emotional experience when needed to engage in goal-directed activity (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Difficulties in emotion regulation often result in increased negative affective responding (Mennin et al. 2005), but it is unknown if there are factors moderating the relationship between these variables. One possibility is psychological inflexibility, or difficulty contacting the present moment and acting according to values (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999).

**Purpose:** We hypothesize that one’s level of psychological flexibility will moderate the relationship between emotional dysregulation and negative affect. The purpose of this analysis was to specifically examine the relationship between these variables at differing levels of psychological flexibility.

**Method:** This study included 177 individuals with “analogue” GAD (i.e., they reported symptoms consistent with GAD) through data collected through MTurk. Participants completed self-report measures, including the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) and the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ). After watching a sad video, they completed the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS).

**Results:** Using Hayes’ PROCESS Macro for bootstrapped regression, the interaction between emotion dysregulation and psychological flexibility on negative affect was significant ( $t(176) = 2.59, p = .01$ ). Although the effect of the DERS on negative affect was significant at all levels of the moderator, it was positive and strongest ( $t(176) = 5.68, p = .000$ , effect size  $d = .21$ ) at the highest scores (+1 SD) of psychological inflexibility, and the weakest – although still positive and significant – for those at the lowest scores (-1 SD) ( $t(176) = 2.98, p = .003$ , effect size  $d = .11$ ).

**Conclusion:** Psychological inflexibility moderates the relationship between emotion dysregulation and negative affect in response to a sad stimulus. When psychological inflexibility is high, emotion dysregulation has a greater effect on negative affect.

**Recommendations:** This finding may open the field to subsequent questions regarding how emotional regulation and emotion responding are moderated by alternative variables. Additionally, interventions which change psychological flexibility (e.g., Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) should be examined in how they might alter negative emotional responding.

Keywords: Emotional dysregulation, negative affect, psychological flexibility, moderation.