

Psychological Inflexibility as it Relates to Stress, Worry, Anxiety, and Somatization in an Ethnically Diverse Sample of College Students

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Introduction

- Psychological inflexibility (PI) is associated with attempting to control and minimize experiencing unwanted feelings, thoughts, or events, and relates to one's discomfort in accepting psychological distress and the inability to live according to one's chosen values.
- Higher levels of PI have been associated with several manifestations of psychological distress.
- College students are a vulnerable population for psychological distress and PI may have a negative impact on their academics and psychological well-being.
- Little is known about the association among the relationship between PI and college students' stress, worry, anxiety, and somatization.
- This study aims to contribute to reduce this gap in knowledge.

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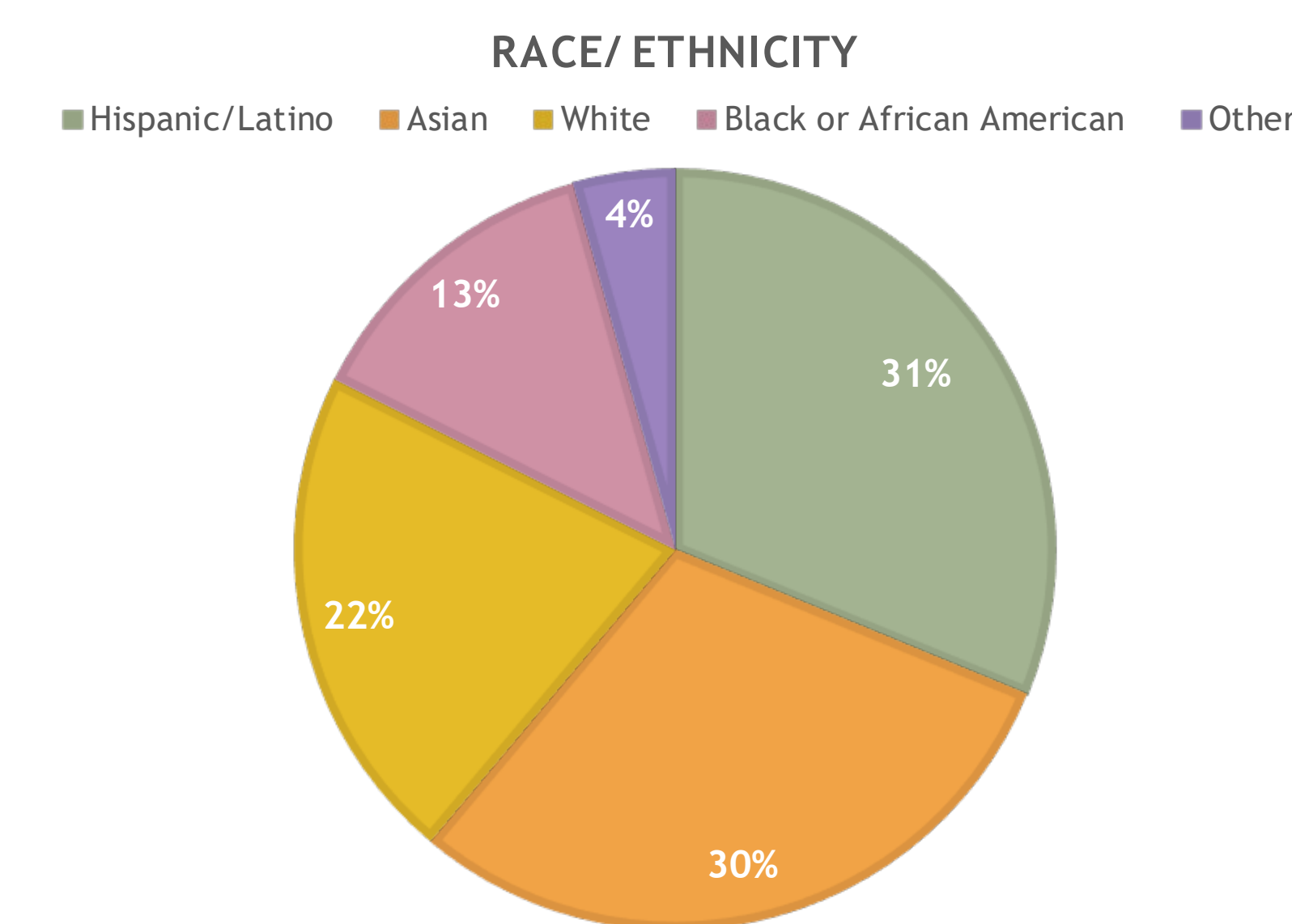
Method

- College students were invited to participate in a one-time self-administered online survey.
- Survey consisted of questions in array of areas regarding their psychological and physical health.
- Independent variable:** Psychological Inflexibility (Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II).
- Dependent variables:** *Stress* (Perceived Stress Scale), *Worry* (Penn State Worry Questionnaire), *Anxiety* (Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale-7), *Somatization* (Patient Health Questionnaire- Somatic Symptom Scale).
- Covariates include:** age, sex, race/ethnicity, and self-reported socioeconomic status.
- Descriptive analyses and MANCOVA were conducted.

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Results

- Sample include 551 students with a mean age of 21.66 (SD=4.8); 77.6% females.
- 31% of the sample considered living "from check to check" or being almost poor/poor.
- Participants were racially and ethnically diverse.



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Results (cont.)

Table 1. Sample demographics: total and by level of psychological inflexibility

Variable	Total n (%)	Low PI n (%)	High PI n (%)
Sex			
Female	425 (78.6)	195 (75.3)	219 (81.7)
Male	116 (21.4)	64 (24.7)	49 (18.3)
Age			
18-25	489 (92.1)	228 (88.0)	246 (92.1)
26-74	53 (7.9)	31 (12.0)	21 (7.9)
Race/Ethnicity			
White	115 (21.3)	60 (23.2)	53 (19.8)
Black	72 (13.3)	32 (12.4)	37 (13.8)
Asian	162 (29.9)	66 (25.5)	92 (34.3)
Hispanic/Latino	169 (31.2)	94 (36.3)	71 (26.5)
Other	23 (4.3)	7 (2.7)	15 (5.6)
SES Perception			
Living well/comfortably	374 (69.4)	192 (74.1)	174 (64.9)
Living from check to check/almost poor/ poor	165 (30.6)	67 (25.9)	94 (35.1)

Note: PI= psychological inflexibility; SES= socioeconomic status. Cell sample sizes vary due to missing data. Low PI=lowest thru 20; High PI= 21 thru highest; % reflect frequencies within PI
*p < .10; **p < .05

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Results (cont.)

- There was a statistically significant difference between students with low and high psychological inflexibility in terms of their combined levels of stress, worry, anxiety, and somatization; $F(4, 512) = 37.56, p < .001$; Pillai's Trace = .227).
- This is, high PI was positively related with the presence of stress, worry, anxiety, and somatization, even after controlling for demographic covariates.
- Results for the individual dependent variables were as follows:

Variable	Level of PI	Mean (SD)	F Value
Stress	Low	7.3 (2.4)	13.45**
	High	8.1 (2.6)	
Worry	Low	46.3 (13.2)	89.23**
	High	57.5 (12.4)	
Anxiety	Low	3.9 (3.9)	138.15**
	High	9.4 (6.0)	
Somatization	Low	4.6 (4.1)	45.47**
	High	7.7 (5.4)	

Note: Analyses are adjusted for age, sex, race/ethnicity, and self-reported socioeconomic status.
**<.001

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Conclusion

- College students' psychological inflexibility is an important factor to consider in understanding their stress, worry, anxiety, and somatization.
- Students' ability to handle psychological distress could be increased through teaching psychological flexibility techniques
 - Mindfulness-based therapies
 - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

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