



# Negative Affect: Perceived Stress, Relationship Avoidance, and Morality-Conscience Guilt

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## Introduction

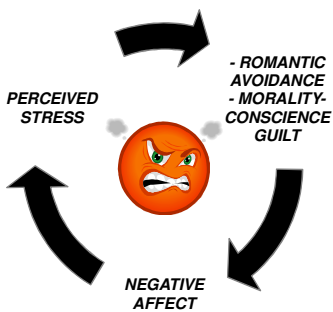
This study is looking at the relationships between the psychosocial factors of perceived stress, relationship avoidance, morality-conscience guilt, and the outcome of negative affect in college students. And also how perceived stress, relationship avoidance, and morality-conscience guilt contribute to negative affect.

Students who do not have adequate social skills may find college life to be stressful (Oppenheimer, 1984). Being overly anxious in relationships can lead to despair and dysfunction in students (Baumeister, 1995).

Chronic stress within the student can heighten feelings of distress and dissatisfaction (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989). If unable to cope with social rejection by peers, some may experience negative affect such as anxiety, fear, shame or other mental health problems (Simpson, 2007). In addition, college students are often confronted with new moral dilemmas (to have sex with a stranger, to use drugs, to experiment sexually). Unresolved guilt over these experiences can lead to chronic stress and depression (Symes, 1995).

## Model

Lazarus & Folkman, (1984)



## Hypotheses

- Higher levels of Perceived Stress will be positively associated with Higher levels of Negative Affect
- Higher levels of Relationship Avoidance will be positively associated with Higher levels of Negative Affect
- Higher levels of Morality-Conscience Guilt will be positively associated with Higher levels of Negative Affect
- Collectively, Perceived Stress, Relationship Avoidance, and Morality-Conscience Guilt will account for a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variable.

## Method

- IRB approval obtained
- Participants recruited only from a large state university
- Paperless, cross-sectional correlation survey; QDS computer based
- Participants received academic credit

## Measures

### Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

- Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ , reported
- Convergent & Discriminant validity (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)
- Uses 20 items to measure both positive and negative affect
- 5-point likert type scale (1- not at all; 5- extremely)
- "irritable"

### Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983)

- Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$ , reported
- Good Construct validity (Cohen & Williamson, 1988)
- Uses 14 items to measure the degree to which situations are appraised as stressful
- 5-point likert type scale (0-never; 4-very often)
- "In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?"

### Multi-Item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment (MIMARA) (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998)

- Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$  (avoidance), reported
- Convergent & Discriminant validity (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998)
- Uses 36 items to measure adult romantic attachment orientations (anxiety, avoidance)
- 7-point likert type scale (1-strongly disagree; 7-strongly agree)
- "I worry a lot about relationships"

### Revised Moshier Guilt Inventory (RMGI) (Moshier, 1998)

- Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ , reported
- Convergent & Discriminant validity (Moshier, 1966)
- Uses 114 items to measure sex-guilt, hostility-guilt, and morality-conscience guilt
- 7-point likert type scale (0 - not true for me; 6 - extremely true for me)
- "I punish myself..."

## Results

### Demographics

	Mean	SD
N = 324	21.09	5.30
Age:		
GENDER	N	%
MALE	78	25.1
FEMALE	246	75.9
ETHNICITY	N	%
CAUCASIAN	192	59.3
AFRICAN-AMERICAN	62	19.1
LATINO(A)	30	12.1
OTHER	40	9.3

### Univariate Statistics

	Mean	SD	Poss. Range	Study Range	Calculated $\alpha$
PANAS	21.95	6.92	10-50	10-46	.88
PSS	26.98	7.16	0-76	7-42	.84
MIMARA	3.79	1.14	1-7	1-6.65	.87
RMGI	66.06	14.13	0-132	31-114	.87

### Bivariate Statistics

	Age	Gender	Relationship Status	PANAS	PSS	MIMARA	RMGI
Age	—						
Gender	-.09	—					
Relationship Status	.06	.05	—				
PANAS	.03	.07	-.10	—			
PSS	-.03	.13	.05	.15**	—		
MIMARA	-.04	.13*	-.02	.61**	.15**	—	
RMGI	.00	.08	-.05	.33**	.43**	.43**	—

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01

### Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Variables	$\beta$	t	Tolerance	VIF
Age	.05	1.19	1.00	1.00
Gender	-.01	-.22	.98	1.02
Relationship Avoidance	.06	1.35	1.00	1.00
Perceived Stress	.56	11.17***	.98	1.03
Morality-Conscience Guilt	.08	1.64	.99	1.01

F (5, 318) = 38.22\*\*\*, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .369, \*\*\*p < .001

Dependent variable: NEGATIVE AFFECT

## Discussion

Every student experiences stress throughout their college years from the rigors of academic curricula and the challenges of new social relationships. Anxiety related to romantic relationships can compound the stress experienced by students. Guilt associated with behaviors (e.g., drug use, sex) that violate personal moral codes could further compound the stress in these students. It is stress that is shown to be the significant predictor of negative affect in college students. Negative affects such as frustration, irritation, nervousness and anger have been shown to be related to stress in college students (Eisenbarth, 2004). While relationship avoidance and morality-conscience guilt are affected by stress, may not have necessarily contributed to negative affect.



### Clinical Implications

Clinical programs addressing precursors of negative affect is recommended as a way to promote mental health of college students.

Prospective longitudinal studies on stress reduction interventions that promote adaptive coping skills is recommended.

Further investigation of other variables that may contribute to negative affect

### Design Limitations

Data taken from only one university

The cross-sectional correlational study design of our study does not account for causal relationships.

Generalizability, unequal gender distribution of our sample, majority being female.

## References

Please refer to handout.