

Examining the mediating and moderating roles of distress tolerance in the relationship between anxiety, depression, and cognitive-behavioral coping styles

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INTRO

- Distress tolerance (DT) represents one's perceived ability to experience and endure aversive conditions.¹
- DT has been implicated as a transdiagnostic vulnerability to emotional disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression), and has been linked with the maladaptive coping behaviors that often co-occur with anxiety and depression, like avoidance and substance abuse.^{6,9,2-4}
- Our study aims to address gaps by examining the mediating and moderating role of DT in linking various coping styles and behaviors, with anxiety and depression symptoms.

METHODS

- A large undergraduate sample (N = 253 undergraduate students) completed questionnaires to assess anxiety and depression (DASS), distress tolerance (DTS), and coping behaviors (BRIEF-COPE).
- A factor analysis was conducted to derive subscales (adaptive, social, avoidant) for the BRIEF-COPE.

RESULTS

- Avoidant, but not adaptive or social coping, was significantly and strongly associated with anxiety (r=.46) and depressive (r=.65) symptoms.
- Reduced DT was associated strongly with anxiety (r=-.53), depression (r=-.53), and avoidant coping (r=-.51), and weakly with adaptive (r=-.13) coping.
- No interaction was observed between DT and avoidant coping in predicting anxiety or depressive symptoms.
- Avoidant coping, however, significantly mediated the relationship between reduced DT and increased anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- Contrary to hypotheses, neither adaptive and social coping were significant, inverse predictive of anxiety or depressive symptoms.

DISCUSSION

- Our results align with theoretical models, suggesting DT may link chronic, negative emotional states in anxiety and depression to maladaptive coping (avoidance, substance abuse).
- However, we failed to find evidence for a protective role of adaptive or social coping in the present study.
- Our findings suggest the links between DT, maladaptive coping, and anxiety/depressive symptoms merit additional consideration in empirical efforts to improve our understanding, prevention, and treatment of anxiety and depressive related conditions.
- Further research may use multimodal, prospective designs to probe reciprocally reinforcing nature of these relationships and their relevance to comorbidity.
- Limitations include the cross-sectional nature of the study, which precludes causal interpretations, and a non-clinical sample. Replication in transdiagnostic, clinical samples and with temporally sensitive measure tools is warranted.

In a cross sectional survey completed by college students, reduced distress tolerance was associated with anxiety, depression, and avoidant coping behaviors that may contribute to or confound symptom severity.



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Table 2. Zero-order bivariate (Pearson) correlations of coping behavior subscales.

	DASS_Dep	DASS_Anxiety	DTS
1. COPE - Distract	.10	.13*	-.19*
2. COPE - Act	-.13*	-.00	-.06
3. COPE - Deny	.26*	.27*	-.31*
4. COPE - SubtUse	.38*	.27*	-.20*
5. COPE - EmotSupt	-.09	-.00	-.04
6. COPE - InstSupt	-.13*	-.04	-.03
7. COPE - Disengage	.59*	.43*	-.43*
8. COPE - Vent	.20*	.16*	-.29*
9. COPE - Reframe	-.27*	-.13*	.13*
10. COPE - Plan	-.05	.02	-.08
11. COPE - Humor	.02	.06	-.11
12. COPE - Accept	-.03	-.02	.04
13. COPE - Religion	-.03	-.01	-.01
14. COPE - Blame	.52*	.32*	-.01*

Figure 1. Distress Tolerance Mediates link between Avoidant Coping and depressive and anxiety symptoms.

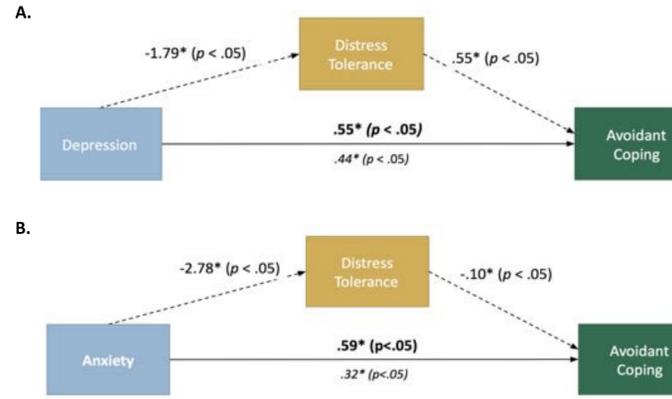
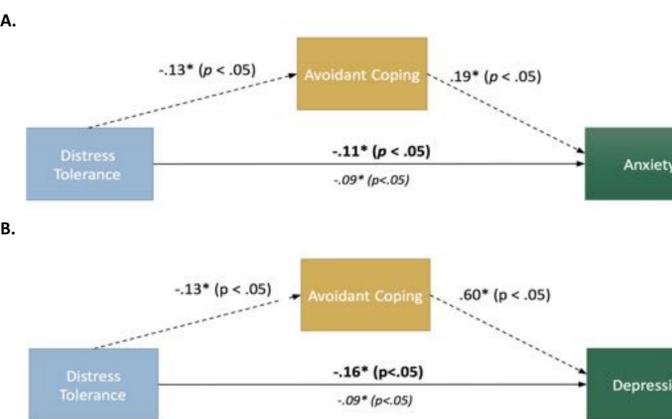


Figure 2. Avoidant coping Mediates link between Distress Tolerance and depressive and anxiety symptoms.



References

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Supplementary materials.

Supplemental table 1. Demographics table.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>
Age	18.99 (1.85)	17 - 32

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
<i>Female</i>	159	62.8
<i>Male</i>	93	36.8
<i>Gender nonconforming</i>	1	0.4
<i>Other</i>	0	0

Race & Ethnicity		
<i>African American or Black</i>	31	12.3
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	2	0.8
<i>Asian American or Asian</i>	34	13.4
<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>	16	6.3
<i>Middle Eastern</i>	3	1.2
<i>Multiracial</i>	5	2
<i>White or Caucasian</i>	160	63.2
<i>Other</i>	2	0.8