Mindfulness as a Buffer of the Associations between Stress, Neuroticism, and Relationship Satisfaction in Partnered College Students

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Mindfulness as a Buffer of the Associations between Stress, Neuroticism, and Relationship Satisfaction in Partnered College Students

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Abstract

Mindfulness has become increasingly popular due to its accessibility, ease of use, and effectiveness in symptom management. This study aimed to investigate trait mindfulness as a potential buffer of the association between external (stress) and internal (neuroticism) stressors and relationship quality in college undergraduates involved in romantic relationships.

Participants ($N = 146$) were undergraduate students from the University of Colorado Boulder who were either married, cohabiting, or involved in an exclusive and committed romantic relationship for at least 6 months. Cross-sectional data from survey measures showed that mindfulness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and neuroticism was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. In addition, both neuroticism and stress were negatively correlated with mindfulness, and neuroticism was positively correlated with stress. Mindfulness did not moderate the association between stress and relationship satisfaction or between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction. Although trait mindfulness did not moderate the associations between relationship satisfaction and either stress or neuroticism, the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction was incremental to their shared association with stress. Future research is needed on mindfulness and other coping mechanisms in college students involved in romantic relationships.

Keywords: mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, college, stress, neuroticism
Introduction

Mindfulness has become an increasingly popular topic in the last few years, both in clinical practice and in research (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). Among the many topics in this growing literature on mindfulness is research regarding mindfulness and its association with relationship quality. Although there has been substantial evidence demonstrating that mindfulness and relationship quality are positively related (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007; Kappen, Karremans, Burk, & Buyukcan-Tetik, 2018), there is little research examining this association among college students. Because starting college can be an extremely stressful transition, we were interested in evaluating the association between mindfulness and relationship quality in college students in romantic relationships, and the degree to which mindfulness moderated the associations between (a) stress and relationship quality, and (b) neuroticism and relationship quality. Although multiple studies (Azad Marzabadi, Mills, & Valikhani, 2018; Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008) have shown mindfulness to be effective at moderating stress and psychological symptoms, there is still more to be known about its effectiveness as a coping mechanism. This study aimed to explore the buffering effects that mindfulness has on the association between stress, neuroticism, and relationship quality.

Mindfulness is a concept commonly defined as the ability to purposefully bring one’s attention and awareness to the experiences of the present moment and relate to them in a nonreflexive and non-judgmental way (Khaddouma, Coop Gordon, & Strand, 2017). Mindfulness aims to reduce the emotional power and distress that sometimes accompanies one’s thoughts by de-centering from these thoughts and feelings, allowing them to emerge without reaction or judgment (Allen & Knight, 2005). Mindfulness practices are originally rooted in the
Buddhist religion and were used as a path leading to the cessation of personal suffering (Bishop, 2004). There are several components to mindfulness that may contribute to the impact it has on the management of distressing symptoms. Mindfulness involves the self-regulation of attention, which incorporates sustained attention, attention switching, and the inhibition of elaborative processing. In this light, mindfulness can be considered a *metacognitive* skill, or consisting of the two related processes of monitoring and control (Bishop, 2004).

The term ‘mindfulness’ was first applied clinically in western culture roughly 30 years ago when it was manualized by Jon Kabat-Zinn as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Zenner et al., 2014). MBSR is used widely with accompanying treatments to reduce psychological morbidity associated with chronic illnesses (Polusny et al., 2015). In addition to MBSR, another psychological treatment that incorporates mindfulness principles is Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Dialectical Behavior Therapy is a well-known successful cognitive behavioral treatment for borderline personality disorder that emphasizes the dialectic of acceptance versus change (Allen & Knight, 2005). Within this multifaceted treatment, rudimentary mindfulness exercises are taught in order to promote acceptance, while still encouraging active change (Allen & Knight, 2005). Learning these mindfulness practices is viewed as important for the resolution of the acceptance versus change dialectic and for facilitating the effective application of cognitive behavioral therapy (Linehan, 1993).

Mindfulness is becoming a widely used practice in Western culture for its ease of use, accessibility, and effectiveness in symptom management. The growing body of research surrounding mindfulness shows that it is linked with many favorable mental and physical health outcomes (Khaddouma et al., 2017). For example, in a study exploring Internet-based mindfulness treatment programs for persons with anxiety disorders, researchers found that
participants who went through the online mindfulness program experienced a significant
decrease of anxiety symptoms compared to the active control condition; participants in the
mindfulness group also experienced reductions in symptoms of depression and insomnia, which
are commonly comorbid with anxiety (Boettcher et al., 2014). In a randomized controlled trial
exploring the effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on stress among college students,
researchers found that undergraduates who practiced mindfulness were successful in reducing
their stress levels while simultaneously enhancing their capacity for forgiveness (Oman et al.,
2008). Research on positive personality traits, mindfulness, and gratitude have also shown that
individuals with more mindful and grateful traits enjoy a higher quality of life and more physical
and psychological well-being, as well as lowered levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and higher
self-regulation (Azad Marzabadi et al., 2018). Throughout many areas of the literature,
mindfulness has been found to be an important tool for buffering the effects of psychological
discomfort.

Additional research on mindfulness has shown that it may be especially effective for
fostering interpersonal connections by bringing non-judgmental and open attention to those with
whom we interact (Kappen et al., 2018). For example, in a study exploring mindfulness-based
relationship enhancement programs for non-distressed couples, mindfulness was efficacious in
enriching intimate relationship functioning and improving individual psychological well-being
(Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004). It was also shown to boost individual partners’ stress
coping skills (Bodenmann, Charvoz, Cina, & Widmer, 2001; Carson et al., 2004). In regard to
boosting stress coping skills, recent studies have shown that mindfulness is positively related to a
greater capacity to manage common relationship stressors among couples (Barnes et al., 2007).
Recent studies have investigated this notion further and found that mindfulness is positively
associated with romantic relationship satisfaction, and thus improved relationship quality (Kappen et al., 2018; McGill, Adler-Baeder, & Rodriguez, 2016).

Despite the consistent support for the positive association between mindfulness and relationship quality, the mechanisms that account for this association remain somewhat unclear (Kozlowski, 2013). One theory is that mindfulness may cultivate higher levels of relationship satisfaction through its ability to promote more relationally competent emotion repertoires. For example, one study found that the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction was mediated by the partners’ level of skill with emotional expression and their ability to identify and communicate their emotions to one another (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Another theory is that individual psychological well-being facilitates stronger romantic relationships, and that mindfulness is associated with less psychological distress (Coffey & Hartman, 2008). Although the mechanisms behind the effectiveness of mindfulness in intimate relationships are relatively unknown, the literature consistently suggests that mindfulness can be an effective medium for creating present-focused, mentally engaged partners, and in turn increase perceptions of relationship quality (Kozlowski, 2013).

The term ‘relationship quality’ refers to how positively or negatively people feel about their relationship (i.e., their level of relationship satisfaction) (Morry, Reich, & Kito, 2010). Defining one’s own relationship quality involves attention to relationship awareness, patterns of interaction, comparisons, contrasts between individuals in the relationship, and viewing the relationship as an entity (Farooqi, 2014). Overall, it can be said that relationships that foster benefits and have less costs have high levels of relationship quality (Clark & Grote, 1998). However, practicing mindfulness increases one’s willingness to tolerate uncomfortable emotions, encourages emotional acceptance, and decreases the impact and time needed to recover from
negative emotional events (Arch & Craske, 2006). Thus, mindfulness may buffer the impacts of problematic behavior on relationship quality and relationship satisfaction.

Besides its potential positive effects on romantic relationship quality in general, mindfulness could be particularly important for relationship functioning during times of external stress, including during stressful transitions. The National Health Needs of University/College Students found that in the fall of 2015, over 20.2 million students attended college in North America (Cieslak et al., 2016). Young adults entering college are exposed to a multitude of stressors that typically occur in different domains of life (Hirsch, 1985). Some of these stressors emerge naturally in a person’s development, and some are brought on from challenging life events or changes (i.e., attending college for the first time). Important developmental tasks for adolescents involve constructing identities and sustaining intimate romantic relationships. In fact, problems involving intimate relationships are among the stressors most frequently reported by college-age students (Jackson & Finney, 2002). However, it remains unclear whether the positive effects of mindfulness on intimate relationships would be found in college students who generally are experiencing a number of major life transitions and a high level of stress (Kozlowski, 2013).

Previous research suggests that young adults may not always be adopting effective coping strategies to deal with the stressors that they experience (Jackson & Finney, 2002). This is a problem considering that an estimated 43.0% to 89.6% of young adults have reported experiencing at least one adverse life event, like a stressful transition, in their lifetime (Smyth, Hockemeyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008). For some, a potentially distressing change that occurs from adolescents into young adulthood is the transition from attending high school to attending college. This change is an exciting experience full of possibility and
newfound motivation to achieve. However, the transition can also include coexistent stressors that stem from complex social, emotional, and academic adjustments that could affect one’s intimate relationships (Darling, McWey, Howard, & Olmstead, 2007). Previous research has found a positive association between negative symptoms and life events during high-risk psychosocial circumstances (Monroe, Imhoff, Wise, & Harris, 1983). A transition such as going to college is an example of a high-risk psychosocial circumstance due to the heightened vulnerability the person experiences. Major life transitions involve periods of loss, change, or disruption of a prior structure or order, and thus tax a person’s coping resources and protective factors (i.e., intimate relationships) by their attempts to manage the demands of the transition (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). As a result of this developmental transition, some college students are subject to high amounts of chronic stress (Towbes & Cohen, 1996). This chronic stress stems from changes in responsibilities and work, finances, and in family and interpersonal relationships. These changes include several ‘firsts’ like developing independent decision-making skills, learning to manage finances, and living independently (Darling et al., 2007). When chronic stress occurs within a certain aspect of life like school, students can be left feeling psychologically inept and personally inadequate (Jackson & Finney, 2002). A previous study regarding the transition from high school into college found that social support, life events, and psychological symptoms were reciprocally related across time, and that the nature of these relationships altered during a time of major life transition. Among participants, 64% of reported variance in psychological symptoms occurred at the time of entrance to college from high school. Based on the prevalence of this issue, it is clear that both coping with stressful life events and fostering the development of relationships are suitable targets for prevention efforts (Compas et al., 1986). These experiences, mixed with an amplified workload, demanding social
opportunities, and pressure to make friends, may lead to an overwhelming experience for some people that can have a negative impact on their mental health and put strain on their existing intimate relationships.

Although college students may not always be adopting effective coping strategies to deal with external stressors, previous studies on personality also point toward a need for more research in this population concerning effective coping strategies for distressing internal factors, such as neuroticism (Bolger, 1990). Neuroticism is a personality factor that is characterized by the tendency to experience negative affect, arouse quickly and disproportionately to emotional stimuli, and experience increased stress vulnerability (Armstrong & Rimes, 2016). Neuroticism has been cited as one of the most important factors associated with psychopathology, including mood and anxiety disorders (Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010). Neuroticism is characterized by a propensity to put oneself into situations that foster more negative affect, to show preferential attention to negative stimuli, and to experience more negative events overall (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). Previous research has found that to manage their symptoms, people with higher levels of neuroticism tend to take part in ineffective coping modes such as wishful thinking, self-blame, and distancing (Bolger, 1990). This suggests that neuroticism leads people to cope ineffectively and in turn leads them to experience more distress (Bolger, 1990).

In terms of romantic relationships, previous research suggests that neuroticism is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Heller et al., 2004). Neuroticism is also associated with the tendency to make maladaptive attributions in marriage and to use ineffective coping styles overall (Heller et al., 2004). Given the association between neuroticism and poorer relationship outcomes, it is important to identify individual differences that may moderate the association between neuroticism and outcomes such as relationship satisfaction. The current study examined
whether mindfulness moderates this association, such that higher levels of mindfulness may weaken the negative association between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction.

This study was designed to expand on the findings from prior research on mindfulness and intimate romantic relationships. We examined college students in intimate relationships and examined the main and moderated associations between protective factors (mindfulness), potential internal (neuroticism) and external (stress) risks, and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, this study examined the associations between mindfulness, stress, neuroticism, and romantic relationship satisfaction in college students, and whether mindfulness moderated the associations between stress and romantic relationship satisfaction and neuroticism and romantic relationship satisfaction. Based on prior research, it was hypothesized that (a) mindfulness would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction; (b) both stress and neuroticism would be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction; and (c) mindfulness would moderate the associations between stress and relationship satisfaction, and neuroticism and relationship satisfaction. Concerning the last hypothesis, it was hypothesized that the associations between stress and relationship satisfaction and neuroticism and relationship satisfaction would be smaller in magnitude at higher levels of mindfulness (i.e., that mindfulness would buffer the negative association between stress or neuroticism and relationship satisfaction).

Methods

Participants

Participants consisted of undergraduate students from the University of Colorado Boulder who were recruited from an introductory psychology course and participated in the study for course credit. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be ≥18 years old, be enrolled in an
introductory psychology course, and be married, cohabiting, or involved in an exclusive and committed romantic relationship for at least 6 months. There were no multivariate outliers and only one univariate outlier on the measure of relationship satisfaction; data from this individual was excluded from analysis.

The analyses are based on data from 146 participants between the ages of 18 and 39 ($M = 19.99$ years old, $SD = 2.98$ years old). In regard to gender, 62.3% of participants identified as female. With respect to race and ethnicity, 80.1% of the sample identified as White, and 14.4% identified as Latino. Length of relationship ranged from 6 months to 194 months ($M = 23.75$, $SD = 23.68$). Data were collected using an online survey. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Colorado Boulder.

**Measures**

**Demographic characteristics.** Age, race/ethnicity, sex, gender, and marital status were assessed using standard demographic questions. Participants were also asked if they were married, cohabiting, or involved in an exclusive romantic relationship, and if so, the length of their relationship in months.

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness was measured using the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). This questionnaire consists of 39 items regarding the five facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience. The questionnaire consists of either positive (*I’m good at finding words to describe my feelings*) or negative (*I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions*) statements that allude to mindfulness qualities. Participants were asked to rate each item according to their own opinion of what is generally true for them using a 1-5 rating scale with 1
being *never or very rarely true*, and 5 being *very often or always true*. Items were reverse scored as necessary and summed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of mindfulness (α = .84).

**Life Events.** Negative life events were measured using the “bad events” category of the Life Events Survey (Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993). The negative life events survey consisted of 24 yes or no questions regarding a range of negative life events that the participant may have experienced within the last six months. Some examples of the negative life events items included on the measure were gained weight (at least ten pounds), had a project or assignment overdue, divorce/marital separation, and death of close friend. A final score was computed by calculating the frequency of ‘yes’ responses to create a total number of negative life events experienced in the last six months.

**Neuroticism.** Levels of neuroticism were measured using the Neuroticism Scale from the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-FFI is a shortened version of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R). The NEO-FFI has 60 items (12 per domain) that were derived from the original 240 items. The five factor domains assessed by this measure are neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. In this study, only the 12-item neuroticism domain was administered. Items on the neuroticism scale included statements like *I am not a worrier* and *I often feel inferior to others*. Participants rated how much they agreed with each statement or found it to be true with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. Items were reverse scored as necessary, and a final score was calculated by summing the item scores, with higher scores indicating higher levels of neuroticism (α = .88).

**Relationship Quality.** Levels of perceived relationship satisfaction were measured with the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16) (Funk & Rogge, 2007). The CSI-16 was developed
through testing eight well-validated self-report measures of relationship satisfaction, including the Marital Adjustment Test, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and an additional 75 potential satisfaction items. From this pool, principal-components analysis and item response theory was applied to develop the CSI scales. The CSI-16 consists of 16 general questions regarding participants’ feelings towards their relationship; 15 items are rated on a 0-5 scale and 1 item is rated on a 0-6 scale. The first 10 questions consisted of statements like “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?” The last six questions asked the participant to rate their immediate feelings about their relationship using bipolar rating scales. A total score was computed by reverse scoring as necessary and summing the item scores, with higher scores indicating higher levels of relationship satisfaction (α = .96).

Results

Means and standard deviations for the study measures can be found in Table 1. To evaluate the hypothesized bivariate associations between mindfulness, stress, neuroticism and relationship satisfaction, Pearson correlations were computed; these results are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in the table, mindfulness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and neuroticism was negatively associated relationship satisfaction. In addition, both neuroticism and stress were negatively correlated with mindfulness, and neuroticism was positively correlated with stress.

To evaluate the hypothesis that mindfulness would moderate the association between (a) stress and relationship quality and (b) neuroticism and relationship quality, two interaction terms were created. Scores on the mindfulness, stress, and neuroticism measures were mean deviated (i.e., centered), and a Mindfulness × Stress and a Mindfulness × Neuroticism interaction terms were computed. Regression analyses were then performed in which relationship satisfaction
scores were regressed onto one of the two interaction terms, adjusting for the component terms and demographic variables (age, gender, race, ethnicity, and length of relationship); separate analyses were computed for stress and neuroticism. The regression coefficients for the interaction terms were not significant for stress ($b = -0.08$, $p = .97$) or for neuroticism ($b = -0.05$, $p = .84$). These results suggest that mindfulness did not moderate the association between stress and relationship satisfaction or between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction.

Because these interaction terms were not significant, they were dropped from the model, and a second set of regression analyses were performed in which relationship satisfaction scores were regressed onto demographic variables, mindfulness, and either stress or neuroticism. These analyses tested whether mindfulness was uniquely associated with relationship satisfaction, over and above any shared associations with demographic characteristics and either stress or neuroticism. A summary of these analyses can be seen in Table 2. As can be seen in this table, the regression analysis showed that mindfulness was significantly and positively associated with relationship satisfaction, adjusting for demographic characteristics and stress. In comparison, mindfulness was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, adjusting for demographic characteristics and neuroticism. Finally, neuroticism was significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, adjusting for mindfulness.

**Discussion**

This study was conducted to examine the main and moderated associations between mindfulness, stress, neuroticism and relationship satisfaction in college undergraduates involved in romantic relationships. It was initially hypothesized that (a) mindfulness would be positively associated with relationship quality; (b) both stress and neuroticism would be negatively associated with relationship quality; and (c) mindfulness would moderate the associations
between stress and relationship quality, and neuroticism and relationship quality. Concerning this last hypothesis, it was hypothesized that the associations between stress and relationship quality and neuroticism and relationship quality would be smaller in magnitude at higher levels of mindfulness (i.e., that mindfulness would buffer the negative association between stress or neuroticism and relationship quality).

The results provided partial support for the study hypotheses. As hypothesized, mindfulness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction. These results were consistent with findings from previous studies (Kappen et al., 2018; McGill et al., 2016). This suggests that the more mindful traits people exhibit, the more satisfied they are in their relationship. Additionally, the results provided partial support for the second hypothesis, which suggested that both stress and neuroticism would be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. The finding that neuroticism was significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction is consistent with previous studies on neuroticism and romantic relationships (Heller et al., 2004) which found that in romantic relationships, neuroticism is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. However, stress was not associated with relationship satisfaction in this study, which is inconsistent with prior research.

The current study also examined a third hypothesis, in which it was predicted that mindfulness would moderate the associations between stress or neuroticism and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, it was hypothesized that mindfulness would weaken (i.e., buffer) the negative association between stress or neuroticism and relationship satisfaction. Results did not support the third hypothesis, which suggests that trait mindfulness may not buffer the associations between either stress or neuroticism and relationship satisfaction. These results for relationship satisfaction are inconsistent with the perspective advanced by Oman et al. (2008),
who suggested that mindfulness may be an important tool for buffering the effects of psychological discomfort. The negative association between neuroticism and trait mindfulness suggests that participants who had higher levels of neuroticism were also lower in trait mindfulness. Therefore, because it would be expected that there would be relatively few people with higher levels of neuroticism who also reported higher levels of mindfulness, it would be difficult to find an interaction between two components that are so highly correlated.

Analyses were also performed to test whether mindfulness was uniquely associated with relationship satisfaction, over and above any shared associations with demographic characteristics and either stress or neuroticism. These analyses showed that mindfulness was significantly and positively associated with relationship satisfaction, adjusting for demographic characteristics and stress. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of trait mindfulness tend to have higher levels of relationship satisfaction independent of the external stressors they face. In comparison, mindfulness was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, adjusting for demographic characteristics and neuroticism. This suggests that mindfulness is not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction over and above their shared association with neuroticism. Finally, neuroticism was significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, adjusting for mindfulness. This suggests that neuroticism is significantly associated with relationship satisfaction over and above mindfulness.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study, including limitations of the sample, measures, and design. First, there were various notable limitations of the sample that affect the generalizability of the study. Because a non-clinical sample of college students was used, the study may not be generalizable to a more clinical (i.e., more distressed) sample. There was also
an unbalanced distribution of race, with 80.1% of participants identifying as white. While the findings gave new insight on the romantic white college student experience, it cannot be generalized to a more diverse group of students who may have different needs, values, cultures, and practices (Hall, Yip, & Zárate, 2016). Future studies should use a more diverse, balanced sample of college students in romantic relationships to see if the results are generalizable to a more diverse population.

In addition, there were various limitations in regard to the measures used in this study. The first limitation was that the survey of measures used was administered to students through an online platform, rather than in an in-person controlled lab setting. Because the students took the survey online, there was little control over the speed in which they took the survey, their accuracy of answers, or where and under what conditions they took the survey. The second limitation was that all constructs were measured with self-report questionnaires. As noted in previous research, the use of strictly self-report measures has certain limitations (Carson et al., 2004; Kappen et al., 2018), including potential response bias, which is a participant’s tendency to respond to measures a certain way (e.g., responding in a socially desirable fashion). Finally, the fourth important limitation of this study was the measure used to assess mindfulness. The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) measures five trait facets of mindfulness, which are: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience (Baer et al., 2006). Although this measure assesses trait mindfulness, it does not provide information on the participants previous history with mindfulness; more specifically, whether they were previously trained in mindfulness interventions, how often they practice mindfulness, etc. Future studies should consider training
participants in mindfulness interventions to evaluate the degree to which practicing mindfulness buffers the association between stress or neuroticism and relationship satisfaction.

Finally, there was also a limitation to the study design. This study used a cross-sectional study design rather than a longitudinal study design. Because of the nature of a cross-sectional design, the direction of influence among constructs cannot be established. Future research should consider using a longitudinal study design to examine predictors of changes in relationship satisfaction over time.

**Future Directions**

This study provided several implications for future research in the field of mindfulness, romantic couples, internal (neuroticism) and external (stress) stressors. Although this study focused on the college student population, it would be interesting to test mindfulness as a moderator of the associations between stress and neuroticism and relationship satisfaction in more established relationships. The results of this study also suggest that there could be noticeable differences in learned versus trait mindfulness. Previous studies call for a need for an expanded body of research regarding the moderating or mediating role of mindfulness (McGill et al., 2016). It may be useful for researchers in the future to test this notion by training a group of individuals with high neuroticism in mindfulness interventions, rather than examining only trait mindfulness. Although this study expanded on the body of research regarding mindfulness, neuroticism, stress, and young romantic couples, there is also need for more research on relationship satisfaction and potential coping mechanisms in college students experiencing major life transitions and other life stressors.
Conclusion

This study explored mindfulness as a potential coping mechanism for stress and neuroticism in young romantic couples. Although trait mindfulness did not moderate the associations between relationship satisfaction and either stress or neuroticism, mindfulness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and this association was incremental to the shared association with stress. This study suggests there could be potential benefits to teaching mindfulness interventions to individuals with neuroticism, and further suggests that there may be differences in trait versus learned mindfulness. Future research is needed on mindfulness and other coping mechanisms for college students in romantic relationships.
References


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https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894(04)80028-5


### Table 1

**Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Study Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Neuroticism</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
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<td>3.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>- .21**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>- .66***</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.35***</td>
<td>67.29</td>
<td>12.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* < .05, **p** < .01, ***p*** < .001.
Table 2

*Results from Regression Analyses Predicting Relationship Satisfaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Neuroticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>2.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<td>3.17</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>2.86</td>
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