

Title: Examining Self-Concealment Within the Framework of Psychological Inflexibility and Mindfulness

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Introduction: A pervasive and habitual pattern of deliberately keeping personal information from others has been a central topic in psychotherapy and personality psychology. A construct that reflects this pattern is self-concealment, which is defined as “the predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative.” Two major self-regulation processes that have been investigated in recent CBT literature are psychological inflexibility and mindfulness. Psychological inflexibility refers to “the rigid dominance of psychological reaction over chosen values and contingencies in guiding actions.” Mindfulness, is an adaptive regulation process of becoming non-judgmentally aware of the present moment.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to determine whether psychological inflexibility and mindfulness would be uniquely associated with self-concealment when controlling for each other and key demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) and whether these associations are moderated by gender.

Method: Participants were 1060 undergraduates (77% female; $n = 816$) between the ages of 17 and 60 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.76 \pm 5.00$) at a large urban Southeastern university. The participants were mostly “Black” (34%), female (77%) and “heterosexual” (92%). An online web-based survey was given and included items from the Self-Concealment Scale, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II, and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale.

Results: Mindfulness was significantly and negatively associated with self-concealment. Psychological inflexibility was significantly and positively related to self-concealment. There was a significant inverse association between mindfulness and psychological inflexibility. Being older was associated with lower self-concealment, greater mindfulness, and lower psychological inflexibility. Being female was associated with greater psychological inflexibility. Being a sexual minority was associated with greater self-concealment, lower mindfulness, and greater psychological inflexibility.

Conclusion: The present study has extended the extant literature by conceptualizing self-concealment within a framework of psychological inflexibility and mindfulness. The intersection of gender and sexual minority status on self-concealment requires further investigation, as it may explain within group differences in the mental health functioning of sexual minority individuals.