

# “A study on university Students’ Psychological Well-Being and Interaction Involvement in Class”

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## ABSTRACT

*Mental health issues are prevalent and increasing on University campuses. Prior research indicates that students’ depression, anxiety, and stress are all related negatively with academic achievement, but little research identifies reasons why students with psychological difficulties do not perform as well as their peers without these difficulties. This research proposed that students with poor psychological well-being (i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress) may be less inclined to communicate in class. Participants (N = 204) completed a survey and reported on their own depression, anxiety, stress, and interaction involvement in class. Results indicated that students who were more depressed, anxious, and stressed reported less interaction involvement in a University course.*

**Keywords:** Anxiety; Depression; Interaction Involvement; Stress

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## Introduction

Rates of mental health issues are substantial and increasing in higher education. In a survey of a general body of university students, 15.6% of undergraduate and 13.0% of graduate students screened positive for a depressive or anxiety disorder. Students who experience psychological difficulties do not achieve as highly in school as their peers. Hishinuma, Chang, McArdle, and Hamagami determined that depressive symptoms caused lower grade point averages. Because students with psychological difficulties “exhibit disruption in their communicative and social skills” this study examined the relationship between common psychological factors (i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress) and students’ classroom interaction involvement.

## Psychological Well-Being

The most common mental illness on University campuses is depression. Depression is characterized by having two or more depressive episodes, which can include depressed mood for extended periods of time, lowered interest, change in eating and sleeping patterns, and suicidal ideation found that as many of 75% of primary care patients who suffered from a depressive disorder also suffered from an anxiety disorder, which suggests that they should be studied in tandem. Anxiety disorders are also common; 11% of University students are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder that is characterized by an inability to relax or feel calm and involves frequent feelings of shakiness or nerves. Anxiety, like depression, is related to lower student academic achievement. Psychological stress is defined as a state of tension, preoccupation, and agitation reported as a result of life events or external stimuli. Stress occurs as a function of adapting to external circumstances and can be beneficial. High levels of stress, though, can result in physical or mental illnesses. These mental health issues often result in social skills deficits; such deficits may manifest in the University classroom via a lack of interaction involvement.

Interaction Involvement Interaction involvement refers to “the extent to which an individual partakes in a social environment”. the University classroom, students who are involved tend to be responsive (i.e., feel confident in what to say and how to say it in class), attentive (i.e., pay attention and listen in class), and perceptive (i.e., are able to assess how their instructor responds to them). Students who report high levels of interaction involvement report more affective learning, cognitive learning, motivation, satisfaction, and earn higher grades. Therefore, students’ interaction involvement is positive for their academic success, but their involvement may be impeded by psychological difficulties.

Interaction involvement requires full attention to an environment without distracting stimuli. Mental illness and related psychological symptoms hinder the ability to focus appropriately in class, and students who are uninvolved do not perform as well academically as involved peers. Consequently, the reason that students with

psychological difficulties have trouble succeeding in school may be in part because they remain uninvolved in important classroom

Correlations between psychological well-being and interaction involvement

**Table 1** Correlations Between Psychological Well-Being and Interaction Involvement

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Psychological well-being</b>								
1. Depression	9.72	8.69	.92	—				
2. Anxiety	10.51	10.38	.93	.71 <sup>†</sup>	—			
3. Stress	16.26	6.67	.81	.70 <sup>†</sup>	.62 <sup>†</sup>	—		
<b>Interaction involvement</b>								
4. Perceptiveness	17.61	5.07	.78	-.09	-.01	-.06	—	
5. Attentiveness	16.29	4.75	.66	-.19**	-.11	-.21**	.17*	—
6. Responsiveness	38.64	9.19	.82	-.18**	-.23**	-.26 <sup>†</sup>	.02	.51 <sup>†</sup>

communication due to a lack of confidence in interpersonal skills (Segrin, 1990).

## Method

A sample of 204 University students (128 men, 76 women) was recruited from a large Mid-Atlantic University; the students ranged from 18 to 30 years of age ( $M = 20.97$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ). Participants were provided with questionnaires including the following measures: the Depression Inventory II, the Anxiety Inventory, the Measure of Perceived Stress, and version of the Interaction Involvement Scale. The depression measure is comprised of 21 items that are measured on a 0–3-point scale ( $M = 9.72$ ,  $SD = 8.69$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ). The anxiety measure uses 21 items on a 0–3-point scale ( $M = 10.51$ ,  $SD = 10.38$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ). The stress measure is 10 items on a 0–4-point Likert-type scale ( $M = 16.26$ ,  $SD = 6.67$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ). The interaction involvement measure is 17 items and uses a 1–7-point Likert-type scale across three subscales (perceptiveness:  $M = 17.61$ ,  $SD = 5.07$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ; attentiveness:  $M = 16.29$ ,  $SD = 4.75$ ,  $\alpha = .66$ ; and responsiveness:  $M = 38.64$ ,  $SD = 9.19$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ).

## Results

Depression was related negatively to both the attentiveness,  $r(197) = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ , and responsiveness,  $r(197) = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ , but not the perceptiveness,  $r(197) = .09$ ,  $p = .22$ , dimensions of interaction involvement. Similarly, stress was related negatively to both attentiveness,  $r(197) = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ , and responsiveness,  $r(197) = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not perceptiveness,  $r(197) = .06$ ,  $p = .39$ . Anxiety was related negatively to responsiveness,  $r(197) = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ , but not to perceptiveness,  $r(197) = .01$ ,  $p = .87$ , or attentiveness,  $r(197) = .11$ ,  $p = .10$ . See Table 1 for all correlations.

## Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between students' psychological well-being and their interaction involvement in class. Depression and stress were both related negatively to attentiveness and responsiveness. Anxiety was related negatively only to students' attentiveness in class. Interestingly, none of the psychological well-being variables were related significantly to perceptiveness. Perceptiveness may be of more importance in a clinical sample or when instructors criticize students because receiving negative information appears to elicit greater awareness from students with psychological difficulties. Students with psychological difficulties have a myriad of problems that interfere with their ability to be fully involved in their classrooms, including feelings of hopelessness, exhaustion, impaired functioning, rumination, lack of sleep, and poor sleep quality. Results of this study indicate that these psychological factors account for a small portion of the variance in interaction involvement. Although these effect size is small, University instructors and researchers should consider the complexities of students' psychological states in University classrooms and resulting communication behavior in order to keep these students involved in the learning process.

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