



Cognitive Fusion Moderates Relations of COVID-19 Stress and Anxiety Symptomology



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Introduction

- COVID-19 stress is positively associated with anxiety symptoms.¹
- Limited research identifies factors that may buffer anxiety in the context of COVID-19 stress.
- Cognitive fusion (e.g., becoming entangled with one's thoughts) is positively associated with anxiety in the context of negative life events.²

The present study aimed to assess cognitive fusion as a moderator of COVID-19 stress and anxiety symptoms.

Method

Participants

- $N = 293$ undergraduate college students from a midwestern University.
- $M_{age} = 19.50$, $SD = 2.41$, 77.6% Female; 94.1% White, 3.0% Asian/Asian-American, 2.1% Hispanic/Latino, 1.7% Black/African-American, 1.3% American Indian

Procedure

Participants completed an online survey battery.

- *COVID Stress Scales*³
 - Danger and Contamination*, $\alpha = .90$
 - Socioeconomic Consequences*, $\alpha = .93$
 - Xenophobia*, $\alpha = .92$
 - Traumatic Stress*, $\alpha = .92$
 - Compulsive Checking*, $\alpha = .83$
- *Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales-21*⁴
 - Anxiety Subscale*, $\alpha = .85$
- *Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire*⁵, $\alpha = .95$

Results

Variable	<i>B</i>	95% CI
Danger × CFQ	0.010	0.004, 0.0162
SES × CFQ	0.002	-0.006, 0.0111
Xenophobia × CFQ	0.001	-0.0120, 0.0143
Trauma × CFQ	0.003	-0.009, 0.0149
Compulsion × CFQ	0.012	0.004, 0.0204

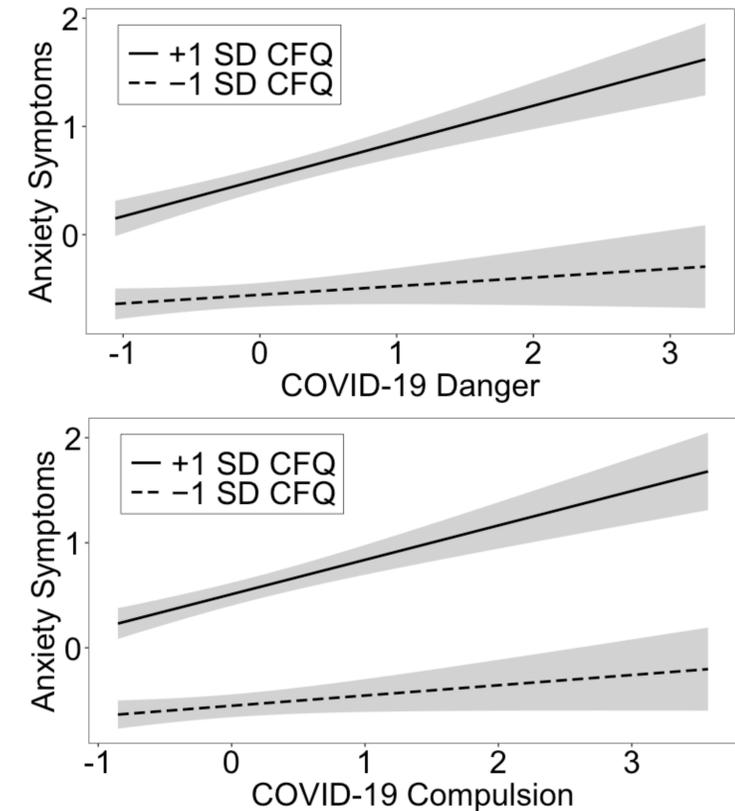
Note. Table displays interactions of COVID-19 Stress Scales and CFQ accounting for anxiety symptoms. CFQ = Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire; SES = Socioeconomic Consequences. Bold text indicates significance.

Associations of COVID-19 danger- and compulsion-related stress with anxiety are weak at low levels of cognitive fusion

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Results



Note. Figures display simple slopes for significant interactions. Results presented in standardized format. CFQ = Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire.

Discussion

- COVID-19 danger and compulsion relations with anxiety symptoms were weaker at low cognitive fusion relative to high cognitive fusion.
- Cognitive fusion did not moderate other COVID-19 stress scales, which may be due to low base rates on the COVID-19 Stress Scales.
- Future directions include interventions that reduce cognitive fusion to clarify buffering effects on anxiety symptoms in the context of COVID-19 stressors.

References

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