



Implicit Bias, Mindfulness, and Mental Health

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Abstract

Implicit bias, the stereotypical perception toward someone or something, negatively affects the mental wellbeing of marginalized groups which they struggle to get help for because of institutional discrimination and bias. Mindfulness, the process of being nonjudgmentally aware of the present moment, is helpful for mental health by reducing rumination and anxiety and increasing self-esteem. Intervention studies also found that mindfulness can reduce racism, prejudice, and discrimination as it increases awareness of personal biases. Yet, there are few studies on how mindfulness affects implicit bias to reduce its mental effects, especially in college students and in wider demographic. Moreover, the multitude of techniques used in intervention studies make it difficult to see how mindfulness affects implicit bias. Therefore, purpose of this literature review is to determine how implicit bias affects the mental health of marginalized college students (e.g., Latinx, women of color, LGBTQ+) and how mindfulness can be utilized to reduce implicit bias and its effects on mental health.

Introduction

- Marginalized college students can face mental health issues as they are prone to mental health issues due to explicit bias and implicit bias (Aguirre, 2018; Morris et al., 2019).
- Microaggression is difficult to test because most are not willing to self-report. It creates feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, and fear which limits honest self-examination (Hilert and Tirado, 2018).
- Implicit bias, the unconscious stereotyping that influences decisions, behaviors, and judgements, is another factor that hurts minority populations (Edwards et al., 2017).
- Due to the growing concern of the effects of implicit bias, mindfulness has been introduced as intervention. Mindfulness is the nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment (Ni et al., 2020). Programs like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) are ways mindfulness is incorporated in group settings (Fjorback et al., 2011).
- In academic settings and education, mindfulness promotes attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior (Hilert and Tirado, 2018).
- Mindfulness increases awareness of diverse cultural groups including one's own culture (Hilert and Tirado, 2018). It mediates implicit racial bias (Lueke and Gibson, 2015), racially discriminative behavior (Lueke and Gibson, 2016), and implicit intergroup bias (Huang, 2021).
- This is because mindfulness offers a possibility of opening a conscious space that allows for reduction in automatic racist associations (Polinska, 2020).

Methods

1. Entered the key words "Mental health" AND "implicit bias" AND "mindfulness" ("health" OR "wellness" OR "well being") in the Florida State University Library Database and selected articles from 1995 to 2021, to find the relationship between mental health, implicit bias, and mindfulness.
2. Reviewed the articles three times:

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| 1st Screening | Selected relevant articles from database based on their abstracts | Selected 127 articles |
| 2nd Screening | Reviewed articles based on information they have on mental health of marginalized groups, implicit bias, and mindfulness | Selected 71 articles |
| 3rd Screening | Reviewed articles selected from secondary screening based on close relation to our study: how does implicit bias, mindfulness, and mental health affect each other? | Selected 19 articles |

Results and Findings

Mindfulness is defined as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to things as they are (Ni et al., 2020). It offers a possibility of opening a conscious space that allows for a reduction in automatic racist associations (Polinska, 2020) and reduces automatic evaluation (Lueke and Gibson, 2015).

Reduced automatic evaluations reduce implicit bias toward outgroups, creating cultural understanding (Simmons, 2019). Similarly, Fisher (2019) found that mindfulness meditation constitutes a promising approach to reducing implicit bias and increasing self-awareness. Thus, it is shown that loving-kindness meditation decreases implicit bias against racial minorities. This affirms a connection between compassion for others and compassion for self (Polinska, 2018).

As well as mindfulness helping reduce the automatic responses against marginalized groups, it also benefits the individuals in the marginalized groups by the positive effect on mental health and wellbeing. Some positive effects for mental health include fewer psychological symptoms and emotional reactivity, increased life satisfaction, agreeableness, conscientiousness, vitality, self-esteem, empathy, competence, optimism, pleasant affect (Keng et al., 2011).

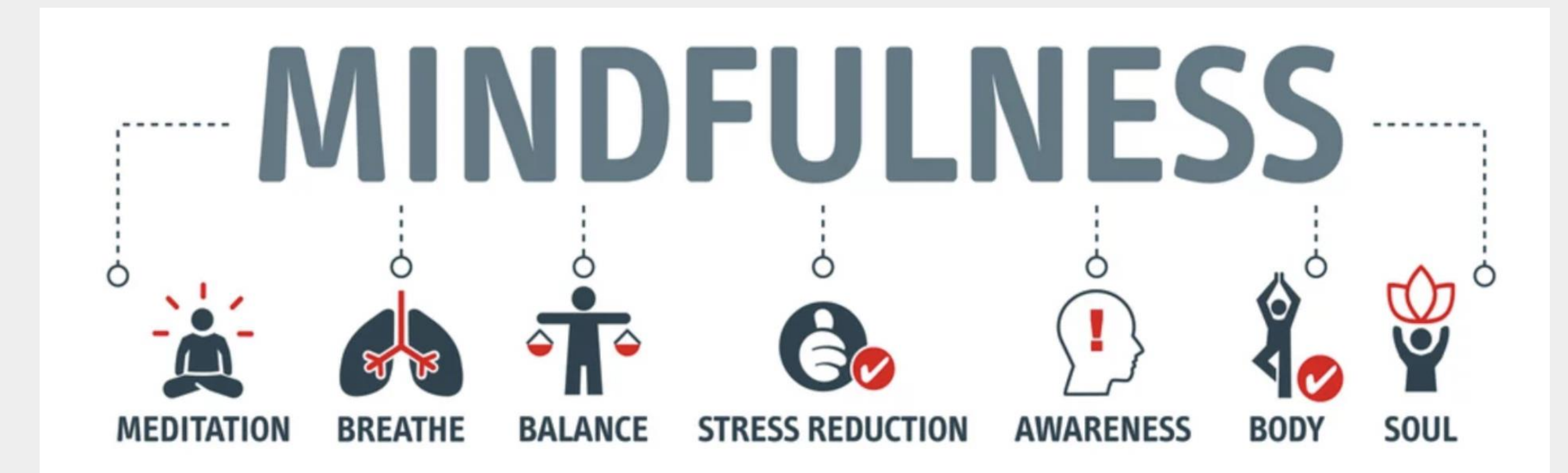
Marginalized groups benefit from mindfulness impacts of reduced stress, negative feelings, aggression, and sleep disturbances while enhancing regulation of emotions and psychological resilience (Hunsinger et al., 2019). Moreno and colleagues (2021) observed that on days when participants felt down, they would cognitively push themselves for strength and the motivation to keep going. This entailed being mindful of their thought processes and striving to get up and continue living their day-to-day lives without focusing on the stressors of uncertainty. This shows the spiritual benefits of mindfulness and being mindful on the thought process.

The mental health problems caused by implicit bias in underrepresented marginalized groups in college include women of color (Aguirre, 2018), Asians (Kaltiso et al., 2021), the Latinx community (Moreno et al., 2021), people with low-income (Ni et al., 2020), the LGBTQ+ community (Lueke and Gibson, 2015), and the elderly (Edwards et al., 2017).

In addition, mindfulness should be studied by itself since previous studies use training with multiple other components, therefore making it hard to determine how effective mindfulness is for reducing implicit bias (Keng et al., 2011).

Conclusion

- This literature review aimed to determine how implicit bias affects the mental health of marginalized college students and how mindfulness can be used to reduce implicit bias and its mental health effects.
- Overall, there are previous experiments supporting that mindfulness can decrease implicit bias because it reduces reliance on automatic thoughts. There are also intervention studies using mindfulness techniques that led to improved mental health.
- Based on our literature review, there were little research on how implicit bias affects other marginalized groups in college like women, women of color, Asians, Latinxs, LGBTQ+ community, and the intersections of these identities. It was also found that past research could not determine the exact effects of mindfulness on implicit bias because of using other techniques at the same time.



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