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## Mindfulness, Race-Related Stress, and Relationship Satisfaction Among African American/Black Couples

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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LeShai Renee' Hunt

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Mindfulness, Race-Related Stress, and Relationship Satisfaction Among African  
American/Black Couples

by

LeShai Renee' Hunt

MS, Walden University, 2013

BA, Ohio University, 2010

AA, Cuyahoga Community College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Social Psychology

Walden University

May 2022

## Abstract

Research indicated positive correlations between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness among White couples. However, researchers had not examined the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who had experienced race-related stress. Race-related stress affects African Americans/Blacks in their daily lives and relationships. The purpose of this quantitative nonexperimental study was to investigate the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Mindfulness relationship theory and Africana womanism were used to guide the study. Survey data were collected from 51 African Americans/Black participants. Results of multiple regression analysis indicated that mindfulness was a statistically significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks and race-related stress was not. Findings from the hierarchical moderation regression analyses indicated that race-related stress was a moderator for mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Findings may be used to facilitate continued exploration of patterns of behavior, social perceptions, and social interactions related to mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who acknowledge being in a romantic relationship.

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## Dedication

I dedicated this study to Jenasia Lenise Summers (2/3/97 to 8/18/18). I love you sister, and I know that you are watching over me. You walked around proud for years saying, “My big sister is a Doctor!!” Well sis, “I AM!”

Fly high and stay pretty my beautiful Black Billionaire Visionary butterfly ...

Legendary sis,



Legendary...

## Acknowledgements

***To start, I have a big personality and hopefully this written format still gets the job done!***

***Disclaimer: There are some inside references and jokes within this “speech”. If you know, you know.***

***.If you don't...it is okay...it is all love!***

I would like to thank each and every person who has ever laid eyes on my research for your feedback. I would like to acknowledge everyone who ever gave an encouraging word, monetary support, hugs, and love during this process. It was truly eventful. I entered this program at age 22 in 2013 and I “just knew” that I would finish within 3-4 years max. I finished up my coursework by 2015.. then yeah.. I finished... at 31. So here we are!

To the Walden faculty, my committee boards..(yes, plural) all three sets! Dr. Amy Sickel for your time over the years. Dr. Krista Robertson for your “way of doing things”! It promoted the idea of standing in my power multiplied by 2,301,007! Dr. Jennifer Rounds-Bryant for sharing your wisdom, true insight of what I am perceived as in this process, and navigating through the system. Thank you Dr. Matthew Hertenstein and Dr. Brandon Cosley for your support. Dr. Rochelle Michel for your attention to detail and extensive (very clear) feedback. Biggest acknowledgement is to Dr. Alisha Powell for rocking it out with me! An even Bigger acknowledgement to my advisor, Dr. La Toya Johnson (the G.O.A.T), you were God sent! This woman was literally with me this entire journey and her unmatched assistance empowered my process to keep going immensely! All the talks! All the resources you provided! Seriously, they need to make you the president of Walden (like forreal)!

I acknowledge my parents, grandma, aunts/uncles, cousins, siblings, “family”, and friends, you know who you are! (I’m not naming and missing names sooo, yeah!) Special shout out to those who always referred to me as Dr. throughout the years (Auntie Cathy and My Greatness were for sure the loudest!)

I acknowledge myself in this process, MY WILL TO PERSEVERE. MY RESILIENCE. During this process, I experienced a number of things in life. At my lowest points, I was homeless at times, sleeping in my car, friend’s couches, church floors (overnight watch hours where the signs clearly said no sleeping.. it was where I felt safe though), and using coins from the side of my car door to eat. There were even times where I did my work at the Apple store because I was without a laptop and ran out of my time limits at the libraries in LA. Crazy and determined! I figured if children could play games all day, LeShai could do her work for four hours at a time

(who was gone check me? Haha at 5 ft, 1 inch..115lbs!). Other times, I was living what felt like the lavish life and everything was flowing, traveling oversees (getting those good ole cultural experiences, almost kidnapped once in Malaysia..I know, I know, yeahh..you will have to read my books one day). Needless to say, I kept my head up and never lost sight of my target. Even when I lost my youngest sister (one of my favorite people, a true friend, my Minnie me), I was told to take a break and I refused. I said.. “therapy? Cool! Break from school? Nah! We good over here!” The only time I took off was when I was in a financial transition which equates to three or four quarters total since 2013 to 2022. Yep! Like I said, my story will be published and additionally films to give you all a better picture of what I did to finish. Then you can share it all to inspire the masses! Why did I choose to finish? (Cause chilee this was longgg..she was tieeeeeed!) I chose to finish because years ago at my first residency, the speaker told everyone to look around the room and that the following year 50% of the people would never return. I made a decision that I would not be included in that percentile. I kept my word to myself. I chose to finish because a man once said to me, “You need to act more like a PhD.. with some more “polish”..(polish is relative)” IF I AM A PHD, I AM A PHD...IT LOOK DIFFERENT ON ME CAUSE I AM ME...no one in this world has the same DNA.. I believe that proves my point friend!

(One more) The highest praise goes to the “Big Guy”! I acknowledge my God and He is definitely up to something with this WIN because if anybody is going to step up, speak up, and create POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE.. (ya girl) I AM ALL FOR IT!! LET’S GO! LET’S GET IT! FINALLY, LETS DO A CHECK BACK 10 YEARS FROM NOW AND SEE WHAT THE WORLD HAS TO SAY ABOUT DR. LESHAI RENEE HUNT! WHAT’S NEXT? (In my Diddy voice)

OWNING MY S\*\*\*!! LOVE YA’LLLLLLLLLLLLL!!!! SMILE!



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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There was much research contributing to the body of knowledge regarding relationship satisfaction (e.g., Atkinson, 2013; Falconier et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Maher & Cordova, 2019; Sobral et al., 2015). Depending on their area of expertise, researchers explored varying angles of this broad field of study, with each study addressing some but not all of the facets of relationship satisfaction (Atkinson, 2013; Falconier et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Maher & Cordova, 2019; Sobral et al., 2015). There was limited research on relationship satisfaction linked to African American race-related stress with a concentration on mindfulness (Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Greer, 2011; Hwang & Chan, 2019). In the chapter, I provide information on mindfulness practices and how they were linked to other components (i.e., gratitude, well-being, pregnancy, sexual life, and conflict strategies). This study may contribute to positive social change by promoting awareness of race-related stress in African American/Black relationships and the results of practicing mindfulness. I include the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

### **Background**

Multiple studies focused on mindfulness. Several studies that concentrated on mindfulness also included other variables such as stress, race-related stress, relationship satisfaction, or additional items (Hall, 1999; Khaddouma et al., 2015). Knowles et al.

(2015) focused on mindfulness, relational partners, and conflict strategies. The study was conducted to determine what mindfulness traits were useful during times of conflict and were more constructive. The study showed that satisfaction and commitment levels increased due to mindfulness strategies.

O'Leary et al. (2016) examined whether mindfulness, gratitude, pregnancy, and well-being could reduce depression and stress over 5 weeks. Participants included 1,375 pregnant women. Mindfulness strategies were associated with heightened well-being and improved life satisfaction. This study demonstrated that overall mindfulness was useful in elevating life satisfaction.

Awosan and Hardy (2017) conducted a qualitative study of African American/Black males' and females' coupling processes and experiences. The desirability of involvement in secure intimate romantic relationships or marriage amongst never-married African American/Black men and women was measured. Participants completed a 35-item self-report on demographics and desirability for marriage and relationship surveys. Results indicated participants might experience historical and present-day racial trauma that influences their coupling processes.

Randall and Bodenmann (2017) conducted a literature review of 26 research studies on the relationship between stress and relationship satisfaction. Study participants were between 18 and 75 years old, and they reported multiple areas of stress. Results suggested that there was a negative relationship between stress and relationship satisfaction.

Dixon and Overall (2018) completed a study on mindfulness, daily conflicts, rejection fears, and destructive relationship behaviors. Seventy-two individuals participated in the study, and 83% were female. Only participants in a romantic relationship were included in the study. This study demonstrated that whether mindfulness attenuated fears of rejection in the face of daily conflict and whether there was a reduction in destructive behavior. Results showed that mindfulness reduced rejection fears during daily conflict and attenuated destructive reactions when they occurred.

Hwang and Chan (2019) conducted a study that addressed the impact of racism and race-related stress on Asian American college students. Hwang and Chan tested the effects of a culturally responsive 8-session compassionate meditation program. Results showed that there was a decrease in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

These studies displayed research with a concentration on mindfulness and included other variables such as stress, race-related stress, relationship satisfaction, or additional items. A number of these studies did not include mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, race-related stress, and African American/Black couples together in one study. I conducted the current study to focus on all four variables. There are additional factors that contribute to understanding relationship satisfaction.

### **Problem Statement**

The importance of relationship satisfaction to psychological well-being is that it increases relief of anxiety and fear (Mastrianno, 2012). Mindfulness is also associated



with increases in well-being and life satisfaction and decreases in depression, anxiety, and stress (O’Leary & Dockray 2015; Seear & Vella-Brodrick, 2013). Mindfulness, which is a mental state of being focused on the present moment and the thoughts and emotions associated with the present moment, has also been associated with relationship security and satisfaction (Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles et al. (2015) examined the relationship between mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, and commitment to the relationship. Participants were between the ages of 22 and 66 and were in a relationship on average for at least 119 months. Results showed that mindfulness had a positive effect on conflict strategies, which impacted relationship satisfaction.

A more recent study focused on meditation practices, relationships, and fear of rejection (Dixon & Overall, 2018). This study included 72 undergraduate students who were in a romantic relationship. Participants completed an online questionnaire in which they rated the experiences of conflict with their partner, fears of rejection, and caustic behavior fixed at their partner. Results showed that mindfulness served as a buffer to decrease conflict when rejection fears arose.

Many studies showed that reduced stress is correlated with higher relationship satisfaction (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). According to a literature review of 63 studies by Randall and Bodenmann (2017), findings indicated that romantic partners have an intense reciprocal impact on each other’s experiences such as behaviors and emotions. Stressors outside of the relationship can spill over into the romantic relationship (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). These stressors lead to reduced quality time, depression, and anxiety (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017).

Qualitative studies on relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks indicated that length of the relationship, emotional support, and unspoken bonds were associated with high relationship satisfaction (Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Gowen et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2013). Quantitative studies on relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks indicated expressions of affection or love and self-control were associated with high relationship satisfaction (Simons et al., 2014).

Race-related stress was defined as the racial splinter group person's perceptions of the stress related to a race-related event (Greer, 2011). Race-related stress has been correlated with low levels of life satisfaction, low self-esteem, and general psychological distress (Greer, 2011). Only one study showed a correlation between race-related stress and mindfulness (Hwang & Chan, 2019). According to Hwang and Chan (2019), Asian American college students were recruited to complete an 8-session compassionate meditation program led by their peers. The students had been targeted due to the racism and limited resources challenges they experienced on campus. As a result of their participation in the mindfulness sessions, students experienced a decrease in race-related stress, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms.

Awosan and Hardy (2017) conducted a qualitative study of relationship building and maintenance among African American/Black men and women that tested the Africana womanism theory position that race-related stress had a negative impact on African American/Black relationships. Results indicated that African American/Black couples struggle with constant racial assaults and stereotypes encountered in society, disrupting their aims to maintain relationship satisfaction. Communication was

considered a positive strategy for addressing the negative impact of race-related stress on the relationship, but couples still reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction because of the race-related stress.

Research showed a positive correlation between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction, a negative correlation between mindfulness practices and stress, and a negative correlation between stress and relationship satisfaction among White couples (Atkinson 2013; Don 2018; Khaddouma et al., 2015). The gap in the literature was that there were no measures on the relationships between these variables for African Americans who had experienced race-related stress. Qualitative research identified race-related stress as a specific form of stress that affected African Americans in their daily lives, as well as their relationships (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). However, there were no quantitative tests on the relationships among African American/Black couples. Also, there were no tests on mindfulness effects of race-related stress in regard to the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

In the current study, I investigated the relationships between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Additionally, I used a hierarchical moderation regression analysis to test whether race-related stress moderated the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction for African Americans/Blacks.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Mindfulness was the independent variable, which was measured by a score on the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Race-related stress was the second independent (and proposed moderating) variable that was measured by the global and subscale scores of the Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS; Atkins, 2015). Relationship satisfaction was the dependent variable measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988). The participants were African Americans/Blacks who acknowledged being in a romantic relationship. Additionally, I conducted a mindfulness analysis to test whether race-related stress moderated the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction for African Americans/Blacks.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

I examine the relationships between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction. Race-related stress represented a global score and each of the four scale scores of the IRRS) (see Atkins, 2015). The third research question addressed whether each component of race-related stress moderated the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. The following research questions (RQs) and hypotheses guided the study:

RQ1: To what extent does mindfulness, as measured by MAAS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

$H_01$ : Mindfulness is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

$H_a1$ : Mindfulness is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

RQ2: To what extent does race-related stress, as measured by IRRS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

$H_02$ : Race-related stress is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

$H_a2$ : Race-related stress is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

RQ3: Does race-related stress moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks?

$H_03$ : Race-related stress does not moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

$H_a3$ : Race-related stress moderates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Karremans et al.'s (2009) theoretical model of mindfulness and romantic relationships was developed based on the existing research to explain how increased mindfulness leads to increased relationship satisfaction. The theoretical model suggests that mindfulness results in more positive relationship responses to what might normally have been negative relationship interactions (Karremans et al., 2009). Due to

mindfulness, relationship partners may direct more awareness and attention to their own emotions during challenging interactions (Karremans et al., 2009). This allows for greater regulation of their own negative emotions and produces more effective responses between partners in romantic relationships (Karremans et al., 2009). This level of interaction allows each partner to consider and value the other's point of view, which promotes empathy and emotional closeness (Karremans et al., 2009). This combination leads to increased relationship satisfaction (Karremans et al., 2009).

Research on mindfulness and relationship satisfaction addressed male and female partnerships in general (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). It was important to identify African American/Black relationship satisfaction separate from other races due to external influences (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The Africana womanism theory describes Africana women as copartners with their male counterparts (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). Africana womanism theory's key concern is to prioritize the liberation struggle for African American men, women, and children against White-supremacy-fueled racism (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The theory describes the experience of racism as having a negative effect on African American/Black male and female intimate relationships. Researchers encouraged studies on African American/Black intimate relationship satisfaction, as opposed to using research from other races to understand intimate relationships among African Americans/Blacks (Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Charon, 2007; Hudson-Weems, 2008). Both theories were beneficial to the current study because they were related to intimate relationships, mindfulness, African Americans/Blacks, and race-related stress.

A study regarding the theory on mindfulness, emotional intimacy and responsiveness were directly linked to mindfulness which enabled participants to become aware of self (Karremans et al., 2009). This allows participants to be sensitive to their responses under negative circumstances, which increases the level of relationship satisfaction (Karremans et al., 2009). I discuss this framework in more detail in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

Quantitative methodology is used to evaluate the relationship between variables to test a theory (Creswell, 2013). In the current study, the independent variables were mindfulness and race-related stress. The dependent variable was relationship satisfaction. The target population consisted of African American/Black men and women who acknowledged being in a romantic relationship. Participants were recruited from online platforms. Each person voluntarily completed the questionnaire on mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction. The questionnaire was delivered via SurveyMonkey. A moderation analysis was used to test whether each component of race-related stress moderated the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction for African Americans/Blacks.

### **Definitions**

*Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS)*: The MAAS measures mindfulness and awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Dixon & Overall, 2018). The MAAS questionnaire consists of 15 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost always*) to 6 (*almost never*; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Dixon & Overall, 2018).

*Mindfulness*: Mindfulness is an Eastern concept from Buddhist spiritual tradition that is considered a form of meditation (Conn, 2011). Mindfulness is defined as focusing attention in a specific manner, intentionally, in the present moment, and with no judgment (Edwards, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 1982). Mindfulness is acknowledging the moment. Mindfulness refers to being aware and allowing oneself to be fully engaged in current circumstances. During this process, individuals are able to take advantage of their actions (Edwards, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 1982). This practice helps individuals to experience time moment by moment (Edwards, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 1982). As a practice, mindfulness teaches a person to acknowledge each moment without judging them as good or bad, painful or pleasant, and to cope constructively without trying to dismiss or extend them (Edwards, 2013; Jon Kabat-Zinn et al., 1982; Thomas, 2013). There is no evidence that mindfulness can cause harm (Thomas, 2013). Jinslin-Goldberg et al. (2012) defined mindfulness as “a quality of consciousness characterized by clarity of attention, the flexibility of attention and nondiscriminatory awareness” (p. 349).

*Race-related stress*: Race-related stress is defined as the racial minority person’s perceptions of the stress related to racism and discrimination (Greer, 2011; Odafe et al., 2017).

*Race-related stress scale*: The Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS) is a 46-item shorter version of the original IRRS that measures race-related stress experienced by African Americans daily (Atkins, 2015). This scale consists of 46 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).



*Relationship Assessment Scale:* The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) measures relationship satisfaction (Maroufizadeh et al., 2018). The RAS questionnaire consists of seven items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not well*) to 5 (*very well*; Maroufizadeh et al., 2018).

*Relationship satisfaction:* Mastrianno (2012) stated that according to Harry Sullivan's perspective, relationship satisfaction is defined as self-reported feelings of satisfaction and met needs in a monogamous relationship.

*Stress:* The psychological or physical reaction to actual or fictional strains entrenched within a social perspective, which can influence the way people interrelate with others, especially romantic partners (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

The current study included several assumptions. First, I assumed that participants would be honest about their race. This study was for African Americans/Blacks and was completed online. Also, an assumption was that relationship satisfaction levels automatically increased after implementing mindfulness techniques (see Karremans et al., 2009). Another assumption was that participants would state the truth when answering questions during the online survey regarding their relationship status. Finally, I assumed that the RRS, RAS, and MASS were valid measurement tools (see Maroufizadeh et al., 2018; Mastrianno, 2012).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I conducted this study to contribute to the research regarding African Americans/Blacks, race-related stress, and relationships. I found numerous studies that

addressed relationships and mindfulness, but investigations of African Americans were limited (Atkinson, 2013; Falconier et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Maher & Cordova, 2019; Sobral et al., 2015). The scope of this study was African Americans/Blacks. People from other races and ethnicities were excluded. The scope also included African Americans/Blacks who were in a romantic relationship. Single individuals were excluded.

### **Limitations**

The limitations in this study were related to the selection of only African American/Black participants (within a researcher's control). The sample size for this study was small (fewer than 100 African Americans/Blacks). I was approved to administer the study because the sample size was sufficient to conduct a hierarchical regression analysis. The sample represented a very small portion of the African American/Black population. The study was also limited because I only assessed individuals who were connected to an online social media platform. One other limitation was that it focused solely on relationship satisfaction. Response bias may have occurred if participants did not feel comfortable answering a question truthfully. To address the limitations of this study, I provide information regarding the rationale for the population selection and methodology in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

The original contribution of this study was to fill the gap in the literature by providing quantitative results on the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Black who acknowledged

being in a romantic relationship. The results of the study may contribute to the discipline of social psychology by providing information that can be used to facilitate continued exploration of patterns of behavior, social perceptions, and social interactions related to mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who acknowledge being in a romantic relationship. The findings may lead to positive social change by creating awareness that can promote mindfulness as a means to increase relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. In this chapter, I provided the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth review of mindfulness practices, race-related stress, and their connection to African American/Black relationship satisfaction.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in the literature regarding the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. I did find studies that pertained to mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Some studies included fear of rejection, commitment to the relationship, and sexual satisfaction (Dixon & Overall, 2018; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Knowles et al., 2015). Some studies pertained to African Americans/Blacks concerning mindfulness or race-related stress while other studies included variables such as community-based stress, high blood pressure, mindfulness, and hopelessness (Khaddouma et al., 2015; Odafe et al., 2017; Sehgal et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2018).

I found research that addressed relationship satisfaction among an array of cultures. Previous studies revealed that the leading cause of individuals seeking psychological assistance was dissatisfaction in relationships (Knowles et al., 2015). Many studies supported the notion that human beings experience new concepts of self on a daily basis that alter their personal views, perceptions, and belief systems (Holzel et al., 2011; Olendzki, 2010). Olendzki (2010) stated that several individuals focused on not allowing themselves to change despite new challenges and environmental exposures. According to Olendzki, people who resisted change in order to persist or believed in striving to remain in the same mental condition, experienced emotionally unhinged stress, anxiety, and depression. As external stimuli change, the mind is structured to generate a match to that change (Olendzki, 2010). As changes occur due to resistance to change, a

person's mental state manufactures symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (Olendzki, 2010). From a Buddhist viewpoint, a person who identifies with the static sense of self (nonchanging) experiences psychological distress (Holzel et al., 2011). In contrast, individuals with symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression indicated a decrease in these levels after integrating mindfulness practices (Holzel et al., 2011). Practicing mindfulness condenses the symptoms by enabling individuals to experience fewer distractions in everyday life by extending their attention in a focused manner (Holzel et al., 2011).

According to Buddhist philosophy, a changed view of self is a strategic component in the practice of instituting formulas to experience bliss (Holzel et al., 2011). Mindfulness techniques embrace change, which permits the normal function of the brain (Holzel et al., 2011). Due to regular changes in the external environment, utilizing daily mindfulness practices can elevate health by reducing stress, anxiety, eating disorders, and depression, thereby increasing relationship satisfaction (Holzel et al., 2011). In this study, I evaluated the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. This chapter includes the literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, conceptual framework, and a literature review related to mindfulness, African Americans/Blacks, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I conducted a literature review search that provided results on defining terms, components of meditation, history of meditation, mindfulness, brain functioning, theories, benefits, techniques, African Americans/Blacks, race-related stress,

relationships, and intimate relationships. I initially filtered my search for articles published between 2015 and 2021. After limited findings, I included three articles published between 1954 and 1965 and one article from 1992. Most of the articles were published between 2000 and 2019. The databases included PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, SocINDEX with Full Text, and PsycEXTRA. The key search terms that were used included *African American or Black, self-esteem, self-affirmations, self-acceptance, performance, affirmations, relationships, race-related stress, self-concept, health promotion, attitude (psychology), behavior change, behavior modification, health behavior, meditation, mindfulness, gratitude, relationship theory, social cognition, self-compassion, behavioral intention, social comparison, self-validation, neuroplasticity, relationship satisfaction, and cognitive dissonance*. For the years 2014–2019, I selected PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocINDEX with Full Text, PsycEXTRA for a modified search that included mindfulness, and a total of 32,483 articles appeared. I added relationship satisfaction and the number decreased to 215 articles. I included African Americans/Blacks as a third search term, and the number decreased to one article. I combined African Americans/Blacks AND relationship satisfaction, and 389 articles came up. I found 108 articles using African Americans/Blacks AND race-related stress. Once I added meditation, the articles were reduced to one article with Asian Americans included in the title. I completed another search through the Walden library databases. I entered African American/Black AND mindfulness, and 814 articles appeared. I added the term relationships, and 116 articles appeared. Out of those articles, I selected 42

articles that targeted relationship satisfaction, African Americans or Blacks, race-related stress, depression, anxiety, stress, and meditation.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

There were many theoretical frameworks used to explore the theme of meditation. In this study, I selected the mindfulness relationship theory and Africana womanism to investigate the influences on African American/Black relationship satisfaction.

#### **Mindfulness Relationship Theory**

Karremans et al.'s (2009) theoretical model of mindfulness and romantic relationships was developed based on the existing research to explain how increased mindfulness led to increased relationship satisfaction. The theoretical model suggests that mindfulness results in more positive relationship responses to what might normally be negative relationship interactions (Khaddouma et al., 2015). Due to mindfulness, relationship partners direct more awareness and attention to their own emotions during challenging interactions (Khaddouma et al., 2015). This allows for greater regulation of their negative reactions and produces more effective responses between partners in romantic relationships (Khaddouma et al., 2015). This level of interaction allows each partner to consider and value the other's point of view, which promotes empathy and emotional closeness (Khaddouma et al., 2015). This combination leads to increased relationship satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015).

This theory was applied in a study that included 322 participants who were in relationships to measure mindfulness, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015). In this study, sexual satisfaction was linked to the components

of mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Khaddouma et al. confirmed that satisfying romantic relationships during adulthood promoted better mental and physical health. Khaddouma et al. also concluded that mindfulness contributed during adulthood promoted better mental and physical health. Participants completed an online survey, and results indicated that mindfulness was differentially correlated with relationship satisfaction coupled with an additional variable, sexual satisfaction, which promoted increased satisfaction.

Another study included this theory in the investigation of 96 individuals and a separate group 136 to measure the effects of mindfulness on relationships (Don, 2018). The individuals answered a series of questions that covered growth and destiny belief, mindfulness, attachment insecurity, and relatedness need satisfaction. The results indicated that participants with increased mindfulness were more likely to have a positive impact on their relationships. Participants were also more prone to the belief of growth and were positively aware of how to approach their relationships. These acts resulted in satisfaction and interconnectedness.

I selected this theoretical model for the current study because it proposed that mindfulness was useful in relationships in which individuals were seeking satisfaction (see Karremans et al., 2009). The theory discusses how during relationship interactions, positive responses are elevated due to mindfulness in situations that would usually result in a negative outcome throughout perplexing times (Karremans et al., 2009). These outcomes transpire because participants possess greater awareness and the ability to focus on their own emotions (Karremans et al., 2009). While seeking relationship satisfaction



by incorporating mindfulness, participants demonstrated that they valued their partner's viewpoint more, which led to empathy and increased their levels of intimate contentment (Karremans et al., 2009). This framework underpinned the research questions of the current study by focusing on mindfulness in relation to intimate relationship satisfaction. African womanism was an additional theory that was appropriate for the current study.

### **Africana Womanism**

According to Hudson-Weems (1997), the Africana womanism theory was developed to enable Africana scholars to create their own models and theories for African Americans/Blacks. European theorists had posited theories to influence the understanding and behaviors of other cultures including African Americans/Blacks (Hudson-Weems, 1997). Due to the effects of 400 years of slavery, the African American/Black experience was contrary to their White counterparts, and studies needed to address them separately with this in mind (Hudson-Weems, 1997). According to Franklin (2019), White suggested that the Black experience needed to be addressed through Black lenses. Franklin specified that theories and interventions for African Americans/Blacks should be grounded in the Black lived experience as opposed to using White theories to define them.

In this study on mindfulness, I examined African American/Black intimate relationship satisfaction separate from other races based on the Africana womanism theory. Additionally, research on mindfulness in connection to relationship satisfaction had addressed male and female partnerships in general (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The Africana womanism theory describes Africana women as copartners with their male

counterparts (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). Africana womanism theory's key concern is to prioritize the liberation struggle against White-supremacy-fueled racism (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The theory describes the experience of racism as having a negative effect on African American/Black male and female intimate relationships. Researchers encouraged studies on African American/Black intimate relationship satisfaction, as opposed to using research from other races to understand intimate relationships among African Americans/Blacks (Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Charon, 2007; Hudson-Weems, 2008).

Africana womanism was applied in one study of five groups that consisted of 24 African Americans (Pellerin, 2012). For 7–10 days, participants were monitored and instructed to take pictures of their ideal self along with a description. The themes that were listed from the collection of photos included community responsibility, independence, education and talent, religion, friendship, self-pride and joy, family and love, fun, beauty, and admiration. Results also suggested that participants heavily desired family-centered lifestyles as opposed to what popular culture states in rap music (i.e., one-night stands, multiple partners, or money over women). These portrayals were aligned with the Africana womanism philosophy and the concept of reclaiming the self to combat negative stereotypical portraits of African womanhood.

Through the application of the Africana womanism theory, Franklin (2019) stated that Dr. Joseph White (Black philosopher) expressed that in understanding the African American/Black experience, the hermeneutics of language were key (i.e., music lyrics, ebonics). Dr. Joseph White (2019, as cited in Franklin, 2019; Mena & Saucier, 2014)

linked language and music to old slave hymns that were a core line of communication. Mena et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study that addressed the works of Nina Simone's lyrics through ethnographic content analysis that categorized them as historical, psychological, sociopolitical, and pop culture. Nina Simone's works were used in light of the African American/Black community based on the Africana Womanism theory, and her music influenced politics and the Black liberation movement (Mena et al., 2014). Mena et al. explored eight albums with a total of 44 songs. Results demonstrated that Simone identified love, oppression, psychological and emotional vulnerabilities, strengths, and Africana womanism through her music. Out of the 44 songs, 24 addressed positive or negative love relationships. The lyrics also contributed to examples of the experiences of depression, anxiety, codependent relationships, suicide, and substance abuse. Some of Simone's lyrics identified with the desirability of positive male and female partnerships giving light to Africana womanism theory.

I found this theory to be appropriate for the projected study because it acknowledged the African American/Black experience as separate from other races due to influences of historical racial happenings. The Africana Womanism theory rationally proposed that the African American/Black experience should be measured in a solitary state to identify their real needs. Results showed that in one instance, African Americans/Blacks desired monogamy which was counterintuitive to findings of research that does not utilize this theory (Pellerin, 2012). This was important to consider because, in this study that I conducted, race-related stress was measured as a component. By incorporating it, the Womanism Theory became an operating factor. In addition to both

theoretical frameworks, there are other key variables that I reviewed regarding this study, that included and were not limited to meditation, history of meditation, cognitive psychology, attention regulation, body awareness, and emotion. Cognitive dissonance and neuroplasticity are also listed with additional key variables.

## **Literature Review**

### **Meditation**

Buddhism is not the only wisdom tradition that practices the process of meditation (Edwards, 2013). Meditation is initiated from Eastern religious practices and is recognized as a therapeutic tool (Thomas, 2013). Additionally, Edwards (2013) mentioned that cognitive-behavioral therapy programs incorporated meditation into their customary practices along with other therapeutic programs that focused on reducing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. There was an amalgam of therapeutic programs that incorporated meditation-based treatment. These programs included and were not limited to cognitive therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, meditation-based art therapy, meditation-based stress reduction, mode-deactivation therapy (Jennings & Apsche, 2014).

Holzel et al. (2011) stated that meditation was beneficial to psychiatric, functional somatic, and stress-related symptoms. Functional somatic are having symptoms of suffering that are not attached to an actual disease (Hozel et al., 2011). Research showed that meditation was beneficial to multiple clinical disorders (Holzel et al., 2011). These disorders consisted of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, and chronic pain (Holzel et al., 2011). According to Leary et al. (2015), depression, anxiety, and

stress levels were lowered through meditation. In a case study, one participant stated that “My long-lasting anxiety is slowly diminishing” (Fernros, Furhoff, & Wandell, 2008). Higher sleep quality and longer hours, life satisfaction, and happiness are associated with meditation (Leary et al., 2015). Jinslin-Goldberg, Tanay, and Berstein (2012) stated that meditation increased attention and awareness of positive emotions and helped them to occur naturally.

In opposition, the absence of meditation resulted in positive emotions that were partially experienced or dismissed in total (Jinslin-Goldberg et al., 2012). More studies gave other feedback on the benefits of meditation. For instance, Thomas (2013) provided results from a meditation study that showed a reduction in aggressive incidents and a sense of calmness was present in situations that usually produced unsettled behaviors by 76%. This study in particular explained that these results affected individuals with learning disabilities (Thomas, 2013).

Meditation is seen in many forms including sitting and walking. All forms of physical movement play a part in the practice of meditation. According to Dunkley, Goldsmith, and Gorzalka (2015) meditation is accomplished through cognitive exercises during a very simple task, such as eating and cleaning. An assortment of factors arises in the process of meditation that includes thoughts, body sensations, emotions, and acknowledging them as they ascend and descend to follow (Holzel et al., 2011). Meditation-based techniques focus on breathing and relaxed states to assimilate conscious and unconscious action to achieve awareness, acceptance, and insight (Edwards, 2013; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1992). In some instances, meditation techniques were

expanded as courses over eight-week sessions where individuals were taught to regulate their knowledge and approach all stimuli willingly and remain in the present moment (Leary et al., 2015).

In one study, the goal was to investigate the influence of self-identification intervention in relation to spirituality, meditation, and identity perception (Edwards, 2013). Ten South Africans made up the sample and seven were women. The technique was a breath-based evaluation where participants were encouraged to relax with long exhalations, for instance, listening to their heartbeats and timing the exhalations and inhalations (Edwards, 2013). As a result, there were changes in identity perception associated with meditation and spirituality that placed participants in a relaxed, pleasant, alert state and improvements in experiences and identity perceptions (Edwards, 2013).

### **History of Meditation**

Meditation originated from Buddhist practices that began over 5,000 years ago (Gotnik et al., 2016). Holzel et al. (2011) stated that ancient Buddhist philosophies birthed *mindfulness* (defined in the next section) through meditation. This method of meditation was used to achieve happiness. To achieve happiness, one has to be open to change and understand the remaining as a particular “self” conflicts with the targeted outcome (Holzel et al., 2011). According to Holzel et al. (2011), the essence of Buddhist psychology stated that the idea of an individual remaining in a static mental state is nonexistent. In other words, Olendzki (2010) there is no such thing as the unchanging self. The unchanging self contributes to the concept of human beings and their evaluation of self as an infinite process. Informative leaders, such as the Dalai Lama embraced the

perception of a person being self-governing, and tangible as absent (Gyatso, 1984, p. 70; Olendzki, 2010). The Dalai Lama stated that “this seemingly solid, concrete, independent, self-instituting I under its own power that appears actually does not exist at all” (Gyatso, 1984, p. 70; Olendzki, 2010). This means that real acknowledgment of one’s existence is to accept oneself as a parade of happenings that continues to carry on into multiple states of being. The indication that one’s mental state remains the same over time is a fabrication (Gyatso, 1984, p. 70; Olendzki, 2010).

In some cases, individuals are in a constant battle of staying the same. In essence, the mind is in a constant battle of change due to external and internal involvements. When a person competes with the natural state of the mind in opposition, then it leads to psychological disorders (Olendzki, 2010). Olendzki (2010) describes psychological distress, rendering to Buddhist ideologies, as associating existence with the static sense of self. Psychological distress is considered anxiety, depression, and many other mental disorders. Alternatively, the key to happiness, according to Buddhist philosophy, is an ongoing change in viewpoint (Holzel et al., 2011). The practice of liberation is birthed through the concept of never finding self because there is nothing to be found (Holzel et al., 2011). Meditation practices are used to achieve this concept. Meditation is constantly expanding. In 2007, more than 20 million American adults, close to one out of every 11 individuals meditated (Kang, Dovidio, & Gray, 2014). Based on the research above, meditation has been shown to advance one’s mental state (e.g. Gotnik et al. 2016; Holzel et al. 2011; Olendzki 2010). The positive effects of meditation were a reduction in depression, anxiety, and stress within the mental state (Olendzki, 2010). This is important

to acknowledge in this study because it supports the measurement of mindfulness in relation to a less stressed individual which is connected to self-awareness (Olendzki, 2010). As previously stated, awareness promoted relationship satisfaction and overall linked to mindfulness (Karremans et al. 2009).

### ***Cognitive Psychology, Mindfulness, and Gratitude***

In mindfulness practices, the brain (organ) was a crucial component of the entire experience. Gotnik et al. (2016) took the initiative and completed a study on what parts of the brain were affected by mindfulness treatment programs. Current meta-analyses showed that long-term meditators displayed structural and functional actual changes in the brain (Gotnik et al., 2016). These eight regions included the anterior cingulate cortex (*attention regulation*), sensory cortices and insula (*body awareness*), the hippocampus (*emotional regulation*), prefrontal cortex (*reappraisal*), and the cingulate cortex (*emotional regulation*) (Gotnik et al., 2016; Holzel et al., 2011). The study did not exclude individuals based on age, ethnicity, or health status (Gotnik et al., 2016). These regions will be explained in detail in the next section.

### ***Attention Regulation, Body Awareness, and Emotion***

Mindfulness techniques target attention regulation, body awareness, emotion regulation (reappraisal), and emotion regulation (exposure, extinction, and reconsolidation) (Holzel et al., 2011). Attention regulation is the core of mindfulness practices. It developed in the early stages of the practice and was used throughout to maintain awareness of the other functions (Holzel et al., 2011). According to Holzel et al. (2011), attention regulation was substantial because it was used to stay connected to the



meditation process as opposed to shifting off into a daydream state of mind. In this process, when one was distracted, they would return to the focal point.

Body awareness was the concept of detecting any elusive bodily sensations (Holzel et al., 2011). In Buddhist teachings, body awareness was one of the initial facets to develop (Holzel et al., 2011). This awareness included breathing, feelings, and other body senses (Holzel et al., 2011). Emotional regulation reappraisal was the modification of emotional responses through the act of monitoring (Holzel et al., 2011). Buddhist practices acknowledged this procedure as a system of overpowering regret and pain (Holzel et al., 2011). In this case, one accepts emotions in a nonjudgmental way.

Emotional regulation exposure, extinction, and reconsolidation allowed individuals to be affected by external stimuli based on whatever was present in the atmosphere (Holzel et al., 2011). Practitioners were directed to meet unfriendly emotions by embracing them as opposed to dismissing them (Holzel et al., 2011). These emotions include fear, anger, sadness, and dislike. According to Holzel et al (2011) by facing fear, anger, sadness, and dislike, they would go away and were replaced with pleasant emotions. There was an amalgam of cases and studies that incorporated attention regulation, body awareness, emotion regulation (reappraisal), and emotional (exposure, regulation, and reconsolidation).

### ***Cognitive Dissonance and Neuroplasticity***

Along with the physical aspects of the brain, understanding the process of cognitive dissonance and neuroplasticity was beneficial too. Both are mental processes. These two components were mentioned to understand what takes place inside of the mind

as mindfulness and gratitude techniques were incorporated. Mindfulness and gratitude were two processes that acknowledge alternative schools of thought in the cognitive domain (McMillan et al., 2011).

**Cognitive Dissonance.** Cognitive dissonance is the experience of discomfort in the mind due to personal thoughts of self and behavior lacking alignment (McMillan et al., 2011). This process disrupts thoughts and behavior in order to realign them so the thoughts and behaviors are a match (McMillian et al., 2011). During mindfulness practices, individuals instructed the brain to change unwarranted thoughts to focus on other thoughts (i.e., thoughts of breathing, relaxing, heartbeats, walking, sitting, and eating) and ultimately produced an alternative behavior. Gratitude focuses on positive thoughts (i.e., thoughts of thankfulness) to interrupt negative thought patterns (McMillan et al., 2011).

An example of cognitive dissonance was shown in a study where young girls with body image concerns focused on verbal, written, and behavioral exercises to change and increase body satisfaction (McMillan et al., 2011). In this case, 124 female undergraduates participated in the study and answered the question, “Do you have body image concerns?” (McMillan et al., 2011). The question interrupted the thought pattern, created awareness, and discomfort so that researchers could implement verbal, written, and behavioral exercises that enabled thought and behavior alignment (McMillan et al., 2011). The study, “motivated girls to reduce their thin-ideal internalization, which in turn decreases body dissatisfaction, dieting, negative, and eating disorder symptoms” (McMillan et al., 2011, p. 129).

**Neuroplasticity.** In the same sense, cognitive dissonance is a process that changes thoughts and behavior. Neuroplasticity is similar to cognitive dissonance in functioning. In this procedure, one retrains the brain to develop a new neural response to external stimuli. Long (2006) stated that the brain regenerates and reprograms itself to environmental challenges, attention, and will through the course of life leading to alternative lifestyles based on intention. An individual's material self-interest is an adaptable and rational computer in reference to the mind as the brain (Long, 2006). There were multiple ways that the brain played a part in mindfulness and gratitude techniques.

Thoughts are linked to neurological associations the one has formed in the present, past, or future. Each day a number of "triggers" (psychological associations) are processed through the mind (Kawakami et al., 2012). Triggers include and are not limited to environments, words, people, and everything within that particular setting. A person can begin the process of making themselves aware of those triggers good/bad and in some cases eliminate the response in other instances so that mindfulness remains the key feature. Through meditation practices, people became more aware of thoughts and were able to process each one through concentration and make connections to the root of the thought (Kawakami et al., 2012).

For example, based on the concept of neuroplasticity, mindfulness and acceptance-based models have been used for athletic performance enhancement (Gardner & Moore, 2012). In such cases, mindfulness and acceptance-based paradigms "promote a modified relationship with internal experiences (i.e., cognition, emotions, and physiological sensations), rather than seeking to change their form or frequency"

(Gardner et al. 2012., p.309). Athletes that acknowledged self-performances in a nonjudging manner, moment-to-moment awareness, and acceptance of one's internal state were equipped to execute at peak levels (Gardner & Moore, 2012).

Mindfulness-based techniques were assimilated which elevated athletes' ability to deliver quality performances. Sports psychology suggested that mindfulness-based techniques included the concept of athletes focusing their attention on "task-relevant external stimuli, goal setting, imagery, precompetitive routines, and self-talk which allows control over one's cognitions, emotional states, and physiological sensations in the service of the creation and/or maintenance of an assumed ideal performance state" (Gardner et al., 2012, p.310). As declared, in this illustration the brain developed a new neural response to internal and external stimuli, reprogramming itself to the environmental challenges and intention (Long, 2006).

By eliminating discomforting thoughts and replacing them with comforting thoughts, cognitive dissonance and neuroplasticity were executed (McMillan et al., 2011; Long, 2006). Changes in the mind occurred automatically based on the reviewed terms and studies in this study. Through the process of meditation, particularly, mindfulness, African American, and relationship satisfaction were the variables being evaluated to see if relationships occurred. Results listed whether there were positive or negative strengths relating to relationship satisfaction (McMillan et al., 2011).

Based on the previous sections, mindfulness was defined and described as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Edwards, 2013; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1982). It illustrated that mindfulness

can be a full body and mind experience. For the remainder of this section, all of the variables I mentioned (e.g., mindfulness, race-related stress, African Americans/Blacks, and relationship satisfaction) for this study were highlighted through specific articles that demonstrated how they have been tied together in previous research (e.g., Atkinson, 2013; Awosan, 2017; Falconier et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 1979; Greer, 2011; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Maher et al., 2019; Sobral et al., 2015). As formerly reflected, mindfulness was used as a tool to measure diverse arenas (e.g., athletic performance enhancement, stress, couple satisfaction, levels of substance abuse) in correlation to the human experience (Gardner, 2012; Polinska, 2018; Womack, 2017). There was limited research on relationship satisfaction linked to African American race-related stress with a concentration in mindfulness (e.g., Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Greer, 2011; Hwang & Chan, 2019).

### ***Mindfulness and African Americans***

Hall (1999) performed a research study on African American/Black college students at Hampton University which provided an overview of mindfulness, the benefits, and techniques. The benefits included reduced anxiety, improved cognition, and reduced psychological distress (Hall, 1999). Researchers directed students to focus on their breathing twice a week before studying (Hall, 1999). Meditation practices took place for 10 minutes at the beginning and end of each study session (Hall, 1999). The essential component of this study was to understand whether there is a fluctuation in African American/Black college students' GPAs with the unification of meditation. Regarding

this dynamic, results showed that students who meditated during the study ended the semester with significantly higher GPAs in comparison to non-meditators (Hall, 1999).

For this study, Hall (1999) examined Far Eastern transcendental meditation that was transferred to the United States by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in 1959. This style of meditation practice concentrated specifically on mantras (words or sounds used in a repetitious form) to achieve an altered state of mind (Hall, 1999). Egyptian meditation which concentrated on visualizing an Egyptian symbol that epitomizes a particular quality or characteristic was a huge influencer in the process, as well (Hall, 1999). The symbol embodied the eminence of a specific goal (Hall, 1999). In this study, these items were introduced to provide evidence of appropriate breathing and posture methods to properly direct students during testing (Hall, 1999).

According to Wright et al. (2018), a cross-sectional, correlational design was used to examine the correlation between mindfulness and African American/Black college students with two additional variables. The two additional variables included perceived stress and blood pressure among African American college students (Wright et al., 2018). The convenience sample included 20 African American/Black male and female undergraduates to understand how lifestyle behaviors contribute to chronic disease risk (Wright et al., 2018). Results displayed that after self-directed mindfulness for five minutes a day those with moderate stress had higher mindfulness-awareness than those with high stress (Wright et al., 2018).

The key takeaways in this section include concepts about African American/Black students who were instructed to meditate before studying which resulted in higher GPAs

(Hall, 1999). This section also included research on stress and chronic disease risk amongst students who were of African American/Black descent (Wright et al., 2018). Results demonstrated that mindfulness increased higher awareness in those with moderate stress versus the higher stressed participants (Wright et al., 2018). Given the demonstrated evidence of the benefits of mindfulness, I included this variable in this study on mindfulness, race-related stress, African Americans, and relationship satisfaction.

### **Relationship Satisfaction**

Fitzpatrick and Best (1979) stated that communication was the principal component of relationships in that messages were sent through various levels of intimacy and in different forms. The forms included a combination of single-mode verbal, nonverbal, and environmental cues (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). In relationships, partners defined their bond through modes of communication (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). The research discussed that family life was defined through the centrality of space, affect, energy, time authority, and significance as features of family life (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). These same items were identified as major instruments of relational life (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). Couples utilized energy and time to make decisions to create meaning in their lives (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). The Relational Dimensions Instrument was used in this study to determine the effects of relational modes within relationships. The Relational Dimensions Instrument included sharing (i.e., talking about one another's day), the ideology of traditionalism (i.e., traditional gender roles), temporal regularity (i.e., eating schedule), assertiveness (i.e., forced or persuasive gesturing), autonomy (i.e.,

private/separate room), the ideology of uncertainty and change (i.e., established freedom of some sort), undifferentiated space (i.e., leisure to interrupt spouse), and conflict avoidance (i.e., limited arguing) (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). The results showed that couples who agreed on relational modes and differences were slightly more cohesive (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). In the same instance, those who disagreed displayed more affection toward each other (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). Both sets of couples had similar levels of relationship satisfaction (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979).

Relationship satisfaction was directly linked to life satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2015). Initial research studies stated that the quality of relationship satisfaction was based on relational modes (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). Recent research focused on gender roles to determine relationship satisfaction (Sobral et al., 2015). According to Sobral et al. (2015) relationship satisfaction was a critical element of relationship quality and one can perceive additional elements as prominent to or covarying with satisfaction. Additional variables were considered as and not limited to intimacy, trust, and commitment (Sobral et al., 2015). Research literature focused on gender differences in regard to relationship satisfaction and men reported as having higher fear of intimacy levels in comparison to women (Sobral et al., 2015). Previous research was inconsistent in results of gender differences and academics claim that intimacy was displayed inversely amongst the two genders (Sobral et al., 2015). In general, individuals varied in desires and objectives within relationships and their ability to satisfy a significant other (Sobral et al., 2015). Fear of intimacy was measured on its level of influence in reference to relationship satisfaction based on gender (Sobral et al., 2015). Fear of losing the self and fear of



losing the other were the two targeted variables of fear of intimacy (Sobral et al., 2015). Fear of losing the self (FLS) was expressed as an individual's feelings of discomfort in permitting oneself to depend on their significant other (Sobral et al., 2015). Fear of losing the other (FLO) was defined as an individual's feelings of discomfort connected to exposing the self to their significant other, losing the approval of their partner (Sobral et al., 2015). The results showed that relationship satisfaction was lowered when partners were mismatched with FLO and FLS (Sobral et al., 2015). For instance, men with higher FLO and women with higher FLS displayed low levels of relationship satisfaction (Sobral et al., 2015). Also, males with higher FLS and women with lower FLS displayed low levels of relationship satisfaction (Sobral et al., 2015).

Additional research used dyadic coping strategies to measure relationship satisfaction regardless of gender, age, education level, relationship length, and nationality (Falconier et al., 2015). Dyadic coping strategies were developed in the 1990s in attempts to increase models of stress and coping within couple interactions (Falconier et al., 2015). Results showed that positive dyadic coping had higher levels of relationship satisfaction than negative (Falconier et al., 2015). Negative dyadic coping included hostile, ambivalent, overprotective buffering (Falconier et al., 2015). Positive dyadic coping consisted of collaborative common, delegated, supportive, and stress communication (Falconier et al., 2015). Relationship satisfaction was also predicted as higher in those who coped by a partner as opposed to self (Falconier et al., 2015). The individuals in this study were predominantly (over 79%) middle-class Europeans (Falconier et al., 2015).

Researchers suggested that a future longitudinal study be completed and also considered psychiatric disorders (Falconier et al., 2015).

The key takeaways in this section included concepts about relationship satisfaction that stated that communication was the chief constituent of relationships (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). Communication methods included a combination of single-mode verbal, nonverbal, and environmental cues (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). Conclusions exhibited that couples were marginally more unified after they contracted on relational modes and variances (Fitzpatrick et al., 1979). In the next study, intimacy, trust, and commitment were factors of relationship satisfaction between men and women (Sobral et al., 2015). The research concentrated on gender dissimilarities in regard to relationship satisfaction and as a result, men tested as having higher fear of intimacy levels in comparison to women (Sobral et al., 2015). The results disclosed that relationship satisfaction sank when companions were incompatible due to one demonstrating FLO and the other, FLS (Sobral et al., 2015). The third study illustrated that dyadic coping strategies (e.g. collaborative common, delegated, supportive, and stress communication) were linked to relationship satisfaction within couple interactions (Falconier et al., 2015). Results indicated that positive dyadic coping increased relationship satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2015). This study illustrated that relationship satisfaction can be measured amongst couples.

### **Stress and Race-Related Stress**

Stress and race-related stress examined gender roles as African Americans/Blacks, classroom stress, and community-based stress. In the classroom, it

was argued that teachers needed to be better trained in understanding the racial tribulations attached to African American/Black students to appropriately address the race-related issues in the classroom (Sehgal et al., 2017). Race-related issues in the classroom included and were not limited to a lacked sense of belonging, the need to be perfect to measure up to White counterparts and bring attention to racialized conversations in the classroom (Sehgal et al., 2017).

Odafe, Salami, and Walker (2017) stated that hopelessness was a stress response to experienced racism and was attached to depression and psychological illness among African Americans/Blacks. Experiencing feelings of hopelessness after a racial encounter was not true for every African American/Black (Odafe et al., 2017). Social support was an effective response to race-related stress (Odafe et al., 2017). In this study, 243 participants completed an assessment that allowed the researchers to examine the correlation between race-related stress and hopelessness amongst African Americans/Blacks (Odafe et al. 2017). Results showed that race-related stress led to hopelessness based on levels of self-esteem and social support (Odafe et al., 2017). Higher levels of self-esteem and social support were linked to lower levels of hopefulness in African Americans/Blacks in regard to race-related stress (Odafe et al., 2017).

Due to stress, in particular race-related stress, African American/Black women's morbidity and mortality rates were rated higher than White women at younger ages (Hall, 2018). Chronic illness in African Americans/Blacks was linked to social and economic stressors (Hall, 2018). African American/Black women faced the same issues as White women with the added stress of being Black (Hall, 2018). In this study, 168 participants

were analyzed who were coping with stress. The results showed that participants utilized socialization and education to minimize symptoms of stress (Hall, 2018).

The key takeaways in this section discussed African Americans/Blacks and race-related stress in the classroom. The study showed that African American/Black students may have experienced a lacked sense of belonging, the need to be perfect to measure up to White counterparts and bring consideration to racialized dialogues in the classroom (Sehgal et al., 2017). Results demonstrated that teachers must improve in understanding the racial distinctiveness amongst African Americans/Blacks to suitably address the race-related issues in the classroom (Sehgal et al., 2017). Odafe, Salami, and Walker (2017) stated that hopelessness was a stress reply to blunt experiences of racism that was linked to depression and psychological disorders among African Americans/Blacks.

Experiencing feelings of hopelessness after a racial happenstance was not factual for every African American/Black (Odafe et al., 2017). Results indicated that race-related stress displayed increased levels of self-esteem and social support were associated with lesser levels of hopefulness in African Americans/Blacks in regard to race-related stress (Odafe et al., 2017). Findings also gathered that African American/Black women's morbidity and mortality rates rated higher than White women at earlier ages and chronic illness in African Americans/Blacks was interconnected to collective and economic stressors (Hall, 2018). Results showed that participants applied socialization and education to reduce indicators of stress (Hall, 2018).

### **Mindfulness, Stress, and Race-Related Stress**

Numerous studies were linked to stress and mindfulness. One study examined 300 students at a historically Black college on mindfulness and stress coping strategies (Womack & Sloan, 2017). The study assessed mindfulness and racial socialization messages' association with coping. African American/Black college students with a higher degree of mindfulness were linked to higher positive coping strategies with stress (Womack et al., 2017).

Conversely, mindfulness tended to be linked to stress and race-related stress alongside a third variable (i.e., substance abuse, high blood pressure, and eating disorders). Polinska (2018) discussed that mindfulness meditation is a relevant tactic to decrease race-related stress. Both the victim and the oppressors benefited from practicing mindfulness tactics (Polinska, 2018). Studies displayed that positive results stemmed from loving-kindness meditation amongst oppressors (Polinska, 2018). Mindfulness techniques were easily accessible, cost-efficient, and reduced stress among African Americans (Polinska, 2018). Studies stated that the women were more self-aware which provided higher stress management skills (Polinska, 2018).

This section highlighted African Americans/Blacks, mindfulness, and stress (Womack et al., 2017). The study evaluated mindfulness and racial socialization messages' that were linked to surviving. Results indicated that African American/Black college students with a higher degree of mindfulness were associated with advanced positive coping techniques with stress (Womack et al., 2017). Polinska (2018) showed that mindfulness meditation is a pertinent method to shrink race-related stress. Results

revealed that loving-kindness meditation amongst oppressors was linked to positive stress management skills (Polinska, 2018).

### **Stress, Race-Related Stress, and Relationship Satisfaction**

According to Awosan et al., (2017), a qualitative study was completed on the social components that contributed to relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who experienced race-related stress. In this study, African Americans/Blacks couples shared race-related stress encounters and described it as good and bad, considering the double stress (Awosan et al., 2017). The research that exists discovered that relationship satisfaction decreased in couples who had issues with positively addressing racial oppression (Awosan et al., 2017). Results showed that the higher levels of relationship satisfaction were based on how couples dealt with race-related stress in a positive way (Awosan et al., 2017).

Another study observed 344 couples who experienced racial discrimination, relationship satisfaction, and relationship instability (Lavner, Barton, Bryant, & Beach, 2018). Reports showed that men who experienced higher levels of racial discrimination displayed higher levels of psychological aggression toward their female partners, resulting in higher levels of instability (Lavner et al., 2018). Women who experienced higher levels of racial discrimination displayed higher levels of physical aggression toward their male partners, resulting in higher levels of instability (Lavner et al., 2018). There was no significant difference in the relationship between racial discrimination and relationship satisfaction in this study (Lavner et al., 2018). Results stated that in the rural

south, racial discrimination was negatively associated with relationship functioning in African American/Black couples (Lavner et al., 2018).

In one study, African Americans/Blacks couples shared race-related stress encounters and described it as good and bad, given the dual stress (Awosan et al., 2017). Results disclosed that the advanced levels of relationship satisfaction were centered on how couples functioned with race-related stress in a progressive manner (Awosan et al., 2017). This section illustrated studies on racial discrimination, relationship satisfaction, and relationship instability (Lavner et al., 2018). There was no significant difference in the relationship between racial discrimination and relationship satisfaction in this study (Lavner et al., 2018). Results stated that in the countryside, racial discrimination is destructively connected with relationship operations in African American/Black couples (Lavner et al., 2018).

### **Relationship satisfaction and Mindfulness**

According to Atkinson (2013), a number of studies found correlations between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Consideration of a partner's view, perspective taking, empathetic concern, effective communication, and adaptive response skills were all positive components that couples possessed in dealing with relational stress (Atkinson, 2013). Studies also discovered that a high level of self-regulation and empathy was a necessity to possess as an individual who desired relationship satisfaction (Atkinson, 2013). For any relationship, each party needed to have the capability to react effectively when feeling upset (Atkinson, 2013). This produced the act of handling a situation with

respect and genuine care. Results showed that relationship satisfaction was linked to higher levels of mindfulness (Atkinson, 2013).

Maher and Cordova (2019) recruited 185 participants from meditation groups via email. Researchers measured the relationship between mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, and equanimity (Maher et al., 2019). Meditation was positively correlated with an equanimity which led to relationship satisfaction and intimate safety (Maher et al., 2019). Results confirmed that relationship satisfaction was higher as meditation levels grew higher (Maher et al., 2019).

The key takeaways from this section were that it provided studies on mindfulness, relationship satisfaction amongst couples. These couples incorporated a companion's outlook, compassionate concern, effective communication, and adaptive reply skills were all positive mechanisms that couples possessed in allocating with relational stress (Atkinson, 2013). Results showed that a high level of self-regulation and empathy was a necessity to possess as an individual who desired relationship satisfaction (Atkinson, 2013). Additionally, this section highlighted the measures of mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, and equanimity (Maher et al., 2019). Results confirmed with higher levels of mindfulness which were linked to higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Maher et al. 2019).

### **Relationship Satisfaction and African Americans**

According to Awosan et al. (2017), the literature did not provide a massive amount of qualitative research on the social components that contributed to relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Existing research focused on Whites or



the comparison of Whites versus African Americans/Blacks (Awosan et al., 2017). This research specifically targeted never-married heterosexual coupling relationships (Awosan et al., 2017). The research that did exist discovered that relationship satisfaction occurs amongst African American/Black couples when they had an unspoken bond, shared trials and tribulations and considered one another a place of refuge (Awosan et al., 2017). On the other hand, relationships that lack great communication skills did not withstand (Awosan et al., 2017).

A study consisted of 40 African American/Black undergraduate college students (Tinsley, 2016). Students completed a questionnaire that measured attachment style, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction (Tinsley, 2016). The research examined the effects of attachment style on African American/Black relationship satisfaction levels (Tinsley, 2016). There was no significant relation between relationship satisfaction and self-esteem (Tinsley, 2016). Results showed that secure attachment was related to positive self-esteem and current relationship satisfaction (Tinsley, 2016).

The key takeaways from this section highlighted that there was research on African Americans/Blacks and relationship satisfaction. This research precisely targeted never-married heterosexual coupling relationships (Awosan et al., 2017). Results showed that unspoken bonds (e.g., race-related stress) were linked to higher levels of satisfaction (Awosan et al., 2017). The other study was completed on African Americans, relationship satisfaction, attachment style, and self-esteem (Tinsley, 2016). Results indicated that secure attachment styles were interrelated to positive self-esteem and existing relationship satisfaction (Tinsley, 2016).

## Summary

In this chapter, I provided information on the relationship between various notions that included the history of meditation, mindfulness, race-related stress, relationship satisfaction, neuroplasticity, theoretical frameworks, and African Americans/Blacks. These philosophies were essential to expressing the influence of mindfulness in relation to African American/Black intimate relationships in a vast arena of paradigms and the lack thereof.

Research findings showed that positive thoughts and experiences elevated attention to negative data that was targeted toward self (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, eating disorders, and more) (Reed & Aspinwall, 1998). Mindfulness was a useful coping method used to decrease the levels of these events. Mindfulness practices positively increased the action of lowering levels of stress, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and more (Edwards, 2013; Gard et al., 2012). Mindfulness techniques reduced symptoms that were directly related to stress, depression, eating disorders, anxiety, and more (Edwards, 2013; Gard et al., 2012). Additionally, meditation-based techniques enabled individuals to reprogram their mental states, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which promoted relationship satisfaction (Dixon et al., 2018; Long, 2006; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Knowles et al., 2015; McMillan et al., 2011). The information in the literature demonstrated that many different studies incorporated mindfulness-based practices for multiple things. The literature also showed that becoming aware of oneself in a non-judging way was an initial step used to overcome unwarranted feelings and behaviors. Studies indicated that these practices were correlated with happiness, long life, good

health, fulfilling relationships, high income, and work performance (Gard et al., 2012). The key concepts in this chapter concentrated on the different types of meditation, the history, theoretical frameworks, highlights of brain functioning, race-related stress, African Americans/Blacks, and relationship satisfaction.

The previous research filled the gap pertaining to the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the literature review can be used to extend the knowledge in this discipline by helping doctors in a clinical setting incorporate mindfulness more for countless treatments in a cost-efficient manner. Also, relationship therapy would benefit from this study for the same reasons. According to Conn (2011), certain mindfulness treatments do not carry a massive financial burden on health care facilities or patients. In treatment programs, medicines are administered and tend to carry no side effects and meditation has no adverse properties (Conn, 2011).

There was still a gap in the literature that pertained to the measures of the relationship between mindfulness, African Americans/Blacks, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction. In Chapter 3, I provided the specifics on the research design, methodology, selection criteria, data analysis plan that I chose to perform this study to increase the knowledge in this discipline concerning the African American/Black solitary experience. Threats to validity and a summary were included, as well.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this quantitative nonexperimental study using multiple regression analysis was to investigate the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the quantitative research design and rationale. This includes the independent and dependent variables, the study design, and the design's connection to the research. In the methods section, I provide the sampling and sampling procedures for other researchers to replicate the study. Additional procedures include the style of recruitment, participation, and data collection. This chapter also includes a description of the instruments and the process of defining measurement paradigms and their level of internal and external validity. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations and a summary.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Quantitative methods are used to obtain a prediction paradigm (Creswell, 2013). A quantitative research question consists of interrogative statements that raise questions about the relationships among variables that the researcher seeks to answer (Creswell, 2013). Questions can be formed through inferential perspectives (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), inferential questions or hypotheses relate variables or compare groups in terms of variables so that inferences can be drawn from the sample to a population. Quantitative studies are conducted frequently in social science research, especially survey studies (Creswell, 2013). There are four types of quantitative designs: descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental.

For the current study, I chose a quantitative nonexperimental correlational design. The quantitative method was selected to make a prediction. The nonexperimental correlational design was cost-efficient and took less time than a laboratory experiment due to the internet speed of an online survey. Also, this study was less likely to be biased due to the lack of physical contact with any of the participants, thereby advancing the knowledge in this discipline.

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

The population that I targeted for this study was male and female African Americans/Blacks in the United States in a romantic relationship. As of July 1, 2019, the U.S. population was estimated at 328,239,523, and African Americans/Blacks made up 13.4% of that population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) (Warf, 2010). In this study, African Americans/Blacks who acknowledged being in a romantic relationship of any kind were eligible to participate (see Dixon & Overall, 2018). I excluded any person who was not involved in a romantic relationship. I also excluded any person who was not of African American/Black descent. The targeted population consisted of African American/Black men and women who acknowledged being in a romantic relationship. The sampling frame was from online social media platforms.

### **Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

The inclusion criteria for this study were African Americans/Blacks who were at least 18 years of age who acknowledged being in a romantic relationship. The participants listed their demographic data (i.e., level of income, education, and age) in the

provided survey. Participants had to be involved in a romantic relationship to participate in this study (see Dixon & Overall, 2018). Participants who were not in a romantic relationship, who were under 18 years of age, and who were not of African American/Black descent were excluded from this study. A power analysis was used to calculate the appropriate sample size of this study. The power of analysis calculation for this study was tested through regression analysis. I used a medium effect size of  $R^2 = .25$ , which indicated that a minimum sample size of 42 was necessary, assuming a statistical power of .80, two-tailed, and alpha .05 (see Faul et al., 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Additionally, to account for potential data quality issues, I sought to include up to 100 participants. I exceeded 42 participants and remained under 100. Other studies were conducted in the field of relationship satisfaction and mindfulness with fewer than 73 participants (see Dixon & Overall, 2018).

### **Recruitment and Participation**

The procedures for recruitment were through online engagement. The participants were notified by a post stating that there was a survey for a doctoral study (see Appendix). After reviewing the post invitation, the participants were prompted to click a link that directed them to the survey. After clicking the link, the participants were informed that this process was completely voluntary (informed consent) and they were able to discontinue the survey at any time (see Dixon & Overall, 2018).

### **Data Collection**

I used SurveyMonkey to collect the data. A profile on SurveyMonkey was purchased at \$99 per month to set up the research questions for the study in the online

system. Through SurveyMonkey, the research questions were addressed based on the selected and permission-approved instrumentation. On SurveyMonkey, the first 10 questions were free of charge. I was allowed to choose how participants would provide feedback. Through the provided options, each question was listed separately and was multiple choice. For each question, participants were able to select only one answer. To complete the study, participants were required to answer every question in the survey. Once the minimum required number of tests was completed and submitted, the data were reviewed and reported.

Procedures for recruitment were through online engagement in online platforms (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). The participants were notified by a post stating that there was a survey for a doctoral study regarding African Americans/Blacks in romantic relationships. A link to SurveyMonkey was provided. The link was available until the desired sample size was reached. Once participants clicked the link and reviewed the consent form, the survey collected their age, ethnicity (African American/Black was a requirement), and socioeconomic status. Each person who completed the survey answered the questionnaires from three scales: the RAS, MAAS, and IRRS.

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Relationship Assessment Scale***

The RAS (Hendrick, 1988) was used to measure relationship satisfaction. The scale is a 7-item assessment that focuses on relationship satisfaction and is one of the most widely used relationship satisfaction assessments (Maroufizadeh et al., 2018). This scale consists of 7 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not well*) to 5 (*very*

*well*). High scores were interpreted as high levels of satisfaction. The scale has been shown to have good reliability in previous research with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 (Renshaw et al., 2011).

### ***Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale***

The MAAS was used to measure the level of mindfulness (see Brown & Ryan, 2003). This scale consists of 15 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost always*) to 6 (*almost never*). High scores are associated with higher levels of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The scale's reliability was confirmed through a test-retest as .81 ( $p < .0001$ ; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

### ***Index of Race-Related Stress***

The IRRS addresses experiences and indicates the degree of the stressfulness of the incidents (Atkins, 2015). The IRRS is a 46-item shorter version of the original IRRS that measures race-related stress experienced by African Americans daily (Atkins, 2015). This scale consists of 46 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The global score ranges from 0 to 184, and higher scores signify more race-related stress (Atkins, 2015). The coefficient alphas for the four subscales are (a) Cultural Racism (.87), (b) Institutional Racism (.85), (c) Individual Racism (.84) and (d) Collective Racism (.79; Atkins, 2015). Coefficient alphas for factors were adequate to demonstrate reliability (Atkins, 2015).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I tested the research hypotheses with hierarchical moderation regression analysis. There are three types of multiple regressions including standard, sequential, and



statistical. In standard multiple regressions, the predictors or independent variables are entered simultaneously (Creswell, 2013). In sequential regression, the independent variables are entered based on the researcher's preselected order, and statistical regression is constructed on statistical criteria (Creswell, 2013). For RQ1, mindfulness was the independent variable, and relationship satisfaction was the dependent variable. For RQ2, race-related stress was the independent variable, and relationship satisfaction was the dependent variable. Both of the independent variables (mindfulness and race-related stress) were placed in Step 1. In Step 2, mindfulness scores were multiplied by race-related scores to determine the predictors to answer RQ3. I used race-related stress as a predictor to determine whether there were variations in mindfulness and relationship satisfaction levels among African Americans/Blacks in romantic relationships in RQ3.

I took the raw data from Survey Monkey and transferred it to IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to determine the results. The analysis was constructed to answer these RQs:

RQ1: To what extent does mindfulness, as measured by MAAS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

$H_01$ : Mindfulness is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

$H_a1$ : Mindfulness is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

RQ2: To what extent does race-related stress, as measured by IRRS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: Race-related stress is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: Race-related stress is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

RQ3: Does race-related stress moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>0</sub>3*: Race-related stress does not moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a</sub>3*: Race-related stress moderates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

### **Threats to Validity**

Creswell (2009) noted that external validity is the degree to which the study can be generalized and applicable to other groups. Threats to external validity include participant characteristics, timing, and setting (Creswell, 2009). I developed this study to examine African Americans/Blacks and targeted only African Americans/Blacks, which limited the threat to external validity. Previous studies had addressed other ethnicities and their relation to mindfulness and relationship satisfaction.

Internal validity is necessary for a study to assert that a relationship exists between independent and dependent variables. Internal validity threats are measures, handlings, or involvements of the participants that threaten the researcher's ability to complete the study (Creswell, 2009). In the current study, Confounding factors, maturation, and testing were limited as threats to internal validity due to the survey being

available to participants only through a survey and submission online. Participation selection was considered as a potential threat due to the study targeting only African Americans/Blacks and no other ethnicities. Attrition was another possible threat because participants could discontinue the study at any time during the survey. There was only one test, meaning that regression toward the mean was not a threat. During the study, changes in measurement did not occur, which minimized instrumentation threats.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Creswell (2009), it is crucial for participants to understand every detail of the study. Researchers need to consider vulnerable populations such as minors, victims, pregnant women and fetuses, prisoners, mentally incompetent, persons with neurological impairments, and individuals with AIDS (Creswell, 2009). In these cases, informed consent forms need to be issued to each participant before any engagement in the study. According to IRB regulations, consent by child and adult is mandatory. Informed consent forms include and are not limited to identifications of the researcher, identification of sponsor, the indication of the participant selection process, the purpose of research, benefits of participation, level and type of participant involvement, risks to participant, confidentiality guarantee, an option of withdrawal at any time, emergency contact, and information contact (Creswell, 2009).

In this study, I minimized risks and maximized the benefits for participants to cover beneficence by not focusing on vulnerable populations. I made sure that participants were treated fairly and received justice by remaining contactless during the process. In this case, the directions were concise, and I ensured that language was

suitable through the Walden University IRB application approval process. The language was not biased. Race, gender, ethnicity, disability, and age were not considered useful facets of this study that were discussed in a biased fashion (Creswell, 2009). Each participant will remain anonymous and will not have access to anyone else who participated in the study. The dissertation committee reviewed the results of the study before publication. Participants were notified at the beginning of the study that the findings would be published and that their identities would be confidential and not available to the public.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I spotlighted the methodology for this study on race-related stress regarding African Americans/Blacks, relationship satisfaction, and mindfulness through a quantitative research approach and rationale. The research design and rationale for the design, population, data collection, instrumentation validity, and reliability were provided. Threats to validity and ethical considerations were discussed, as well. In Chapter 4, I discussed the analysis of the data set, findings, and a summation of the results for the research questions.

## Chapter 4: Results

Research showed positive correlations between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness among White couples (Atkinson 2013; Don, 2018; Khaddouma et al., 2015). However, researchers had not examined the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who had experienced race-related stress. Race-related stress affects African Americans/Blacks in their daily lives and relationships (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The purpose of this quantitative nonexperimental study using multiple regression analysis was to investigate the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationships among African Americans/Blacks. The RQs and hypotheses were as follows:

RQ1: To what extent does mindfulness, as measured by MAAS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>0</sub>1*: Mindfulness is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a</sub>1*: Mindfulness is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

RQ2: To what extent does race-related stress, as measured by IRRS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: Race-related stress is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: Race-related stress is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

RQ3: Does race-related stress moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>03</sub>*: Race-related stress does not moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a3</sub>*: Race-related stress moderates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

In this chapter, I describe the time allotted to participants, participants, and data collection process. I also present the multiple regression analysis that addressed the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. This chapter includes the results of hypothesis testing for all three research questions.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data through SurveyMonkey. Walden University's IRB approved the SurveyMonkey link that was placed on multiple social media platforms for African Americans/Blacks who were in a romantic relationship of any kind. The participants were at least 18 years of age. The power analysis calculation for this study was conducted for regression analysis. I used a medium effect size of  $R^2 = .25$ , which indicated that a minimum sample size of 42 was needed, assuming statistical power of .80, two-tailed, and alpha .05 (see Faul et al., 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A total of 51 participants completed the survey. Prior to completing the survey, participants were informed to review the consent form. All participants remained anonymous in this study; they were informed that participation was completely voluntary. No personal identifying

information was collected. I used a survey including questions from the RAS, MAAS, and IRRS. Demographic data were collected, as well. There were 76 questions, and SurveyMonkey calculated an estimated completion time of 25 minutes or fewer. The link was available on social media platforms from December 19, 2021, to January 4, 2022. There were no incentives offered to complete the survey.

### **Demographic Data**

In the study, both males and females responded. The results showed that 11 (21.57%) were male and 40 (78.43%) were female. The results displayed the socioeconomic status of the participants. Income levels were presented (see Table 1). Education levels were also included in the results. Seven (13.73%) participants completed high school, nine (17.65%) completed some college, 17 (33.33%) completed college, and 18 (35.29%) completed graduate school. Additionally, the results showed that participants fell into multiple age categories. Six (11.76%) participants were 18–25 years old, 26 (50.98%) were 26–38 years old, 14 (27.45%) were 39–50 years old, and five (9.8%) were 50+ years old. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics.

**Table 1***Frequencies and Percentages of Participant Demographics*

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender ( $N = 51$ )	Male	11	21.5%
	Female	40	78.4%
Income level ( $N = 51$ )	Under \$15,000	3	5.8%
	\$15,000 to \$29,000	6	11.8%
	\$30,000 to \$49,999	8	15.7
	\$50,000 to \$74,000	20	39.2%
	\$75,000 to \$99,999	6	11.8%
	\$100,000 to \$150,000	6	11.8%
	Over \$150,000	2	3.9%
Education level ( $N = 51$ )	High school	7	13.7%
	Some college	9	17.7%
	College	17	33.3%
	Graduate school	18	35.2%
	None of the above	0	0%
Age ( $N = 51$ )	18–25	6	11.8%
	26–38	26	57%
	39–50	14	27.5
	50+	5	9.8%

**Data Analysis**

I ran a hierarchical multiple regression to answer all three questions to test the research hypotheses, I conducted a moderated hierarchical regression analysis. In RQ1, the independent variable was mindfulness, and the dependent variable was relationship satisfaction. Prior to the analysis, I analyzed the data regarding the statistical assumptions to conduct a multiple regression. In this process, there was an assumed continuous dependent variable. The continuous dependent variable in this study was relationship satisfaction measured by the RAS (Hendrick, 1988). In a multiple regression, it is expected that there should be two or more predictors. These predictors can be



dichotomous or continuous. In the current study, there were two predictors: (a) mindfulness and (b) race-related stress. All three variables were continuous as measured by the RAS scale, MAAS scale, and IRRS scale. According to Warner (2013), in a multiple regression, one case does not impact the other cases, meaning that the observations are considered separate. In the current study, a violation of this assumption was dismissed due to each participant working independently. Additionally, I centered the means of both independent variables (mindfulness and race-related stress) and then created an interaction term MAAS x IRRS to assess the moderation effects (see Aiken & West, 1991).

#### **Absence of Multicollinearity**

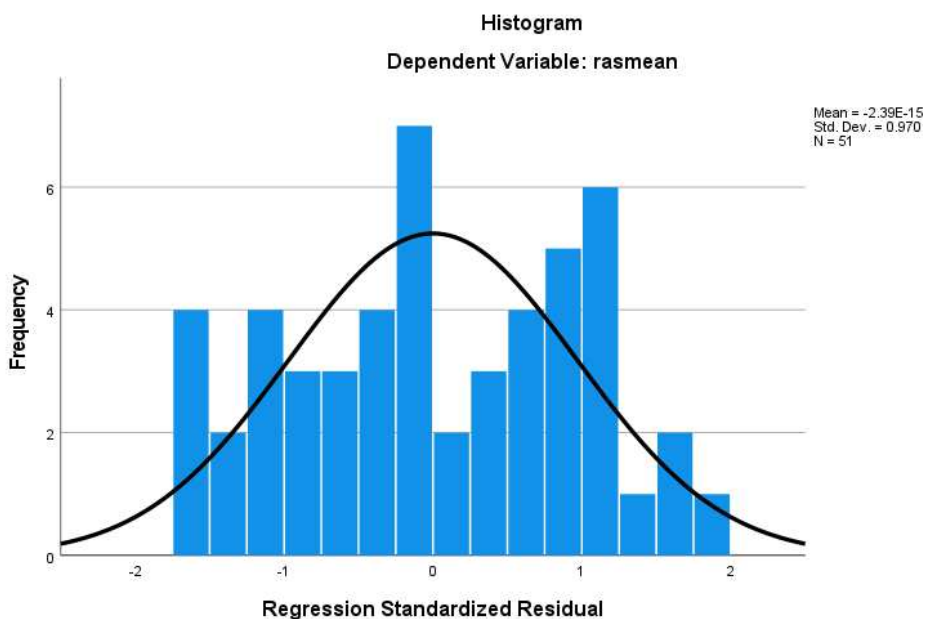
First, I calculated the relationship between predictor variables to evaluate multicollinearity. If the value in the correlation among predictors is above .7, then the variables are multicollinear (Aiken & West, 1991). Current results demonstrated that all of the values were lower than .7. Mindfulness ( $r = .334$ ) and race-related stress ( $r = .527$ ) demonstrated that none of the variables were multicollinear. Next, I calculated the tolerance values for all the predictors to evaluate multicollinearity. Tolerance values indicate the ratio of variance in each predictor, which is not clarified by other predictors in the model (Aiken & West, 1991). Tolerance values lower than .10 suggest multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Tolerance values in the current study for predictors ranged from .903 (mindfulness) to .958 (race-related stress). This indicated that no multicollinearity was found in the data.

### Normally Distributed Residuals

In multiple regression analysis, residuals, which are the variation among actual and projected scores, should be normally distributed. Figure 1 is a frequency histogram of the residuals from the multiple regression. The plot (see Figure 1) shows that there is a normal curve, this means that it was flat at the end which shows deviation and minimal lopsidedness. A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was found significant and indicated a deviation from a normal distribution, S-W, .970,  $df$ , 47  $p < .000$ .

**Figure 1**

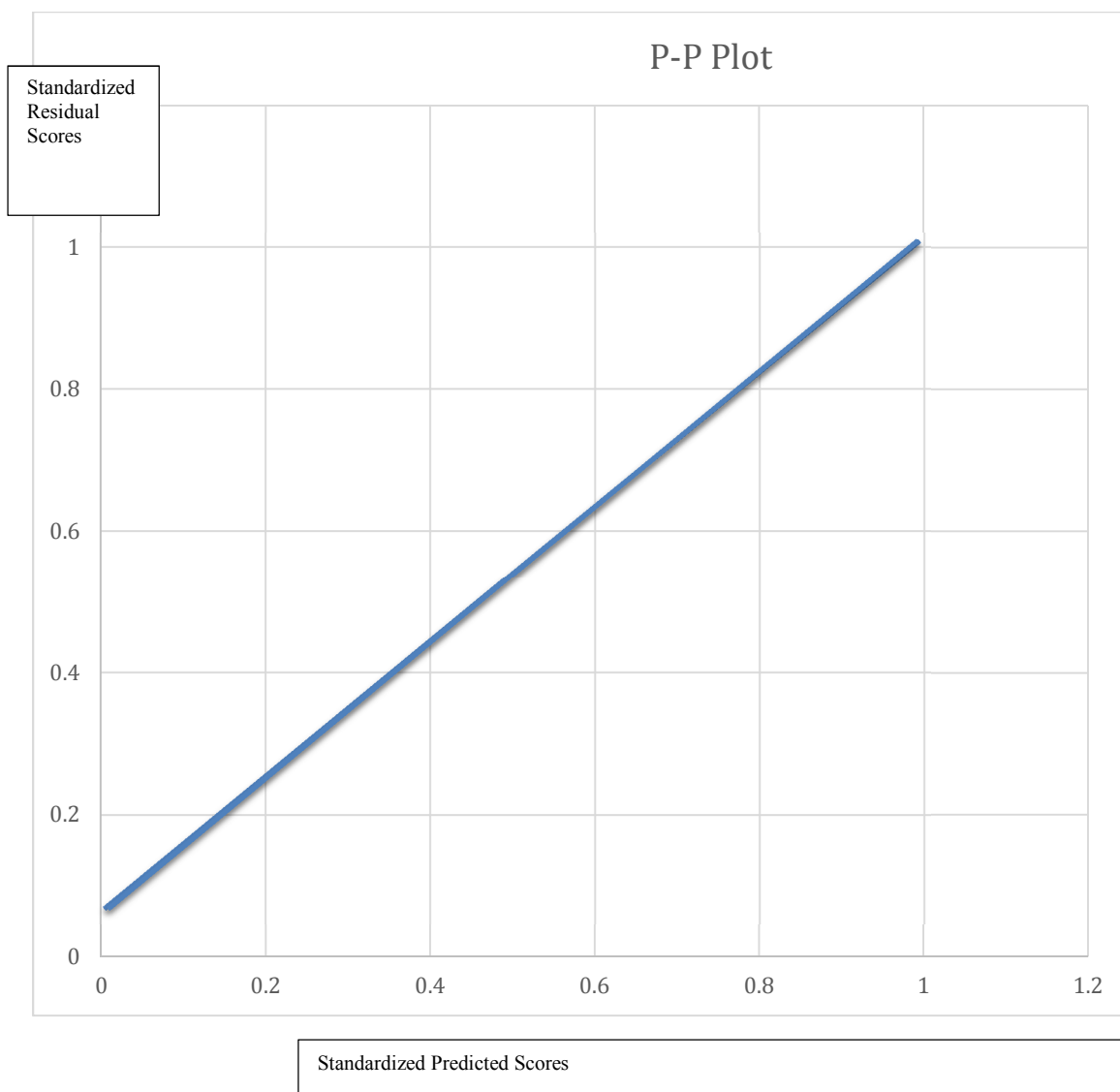
*Histogram of Results*



### Homoscedasticity of Residuals

Multiple regression analysis presumes that the variability of predictor errors is nearly the same for all predicted values. According to Tabachnick (2013), in a bivariate regression analysis, this is demonstrated through almost equal scattering of points near

the regression line in a scatterplot. Figure 2 shows a plot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values in a multiple regression analysis. The points on the plot are very close to the line and form a vertical upward scatter. The scatter of points flows across the entire plot horizontally in an upward scatter. This shows that there was approximately equal variability of residuals for all predicted values. This examination of points on the plot satisfied the assumption of homoscedasticity of residuals (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

**Figure 2***P-P Plot*

## Results

In this study, I set the probability to  $p < .05$  which is the original value used to reject the null hypothesis for significant statistical results (Tellez, Garcia, & Verdugo, 2015). On a sample of ( $N = 51$ ), the final analysis was performed by a hierarchical moderated regression analyses and a two-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to examine all research questions. The model of this study, research questions, and hypotheses are in the next section:

RQ1: To what extent does mindfulness, as measured by MAAS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

$H_01$ : Mindfulness is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

$H_a1$ : Mindfulness is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

In the first step (Model 1), a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed, and mindfulness was used to predict relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks. The results indicated that mindfulness significantly predicts relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks,  $\beta = .336$ ,  $t(48)2.43$ ,  $p=.002$ . The null hypothesis was rejected which perceived that mindfulness is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Results are shown in Table 2.

RQ2: To what extent does race-related stress, as measured by IRRS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: Race-related stress is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: Race-related stress is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

Additionally in the first step (Model 1), a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed, and race-related stress was used to predict relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks. The results indicated that race-related does not significantly predict relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks,  $\beta = .014$ ,  $t(48).098$   $p=.002$ . The null hypothesis was not rejected which perceived that race-related stress is not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Results are shown in Table 2.

RQ3: Does race-related stress moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks?

*H<sub>0</sub>3*: Race-related stress is not moderated by the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

*H<sub>a</sub>3*: Race-related stress moderates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks.

To test the hypothesis that race-related stress moderates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with moderation was conducted (Table 2). In the first step, two variables were included, mindfulness and race-related stress to predict relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks. This was done to reduce any

effects of multicollinearity. I did not violate the assumptions of typical regression analysis. In the second step, the interaction term between MAAS x IRRS, was significant,  $R^2 = .278$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .167$ ,  $F(3, 47)$ , 10.9,  $p = .002$ . The results showed that after adding the interaction term, MAASxIRRS at step 2,  $\Delta R^2$  was increased by .167, F-change (3,47), 10.9,  $p = .002$  bringing the overall  $R^2$  at step 2 to .278. This indicated that model 2, MAASxIRRS explains a significant unique portion of variance in relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks. See Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Model of Unstandardized Coefficients and Standardized Coefficients*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	* <i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	$\Delta F$
1 (Constant)	2.118	.040		53.256	.02	.111	.111	3.0	.019	.059
MAAS	.119	.049	.336	2.431						
IRRS	.005	.054	.014	.098						
2 (Constant)	2.100	.037		57.337	.92	.278	.167	10.9	.922	.002
MAAS	.078	.046	.221	1.697						
IRRS	.025	.050	.063	.495						
Interaction	-.172	.052	-.429	-3.294						

*Note.* Dependent variable: RAS. Predictors: (Constant), IRRS, MAAS. Predictors:

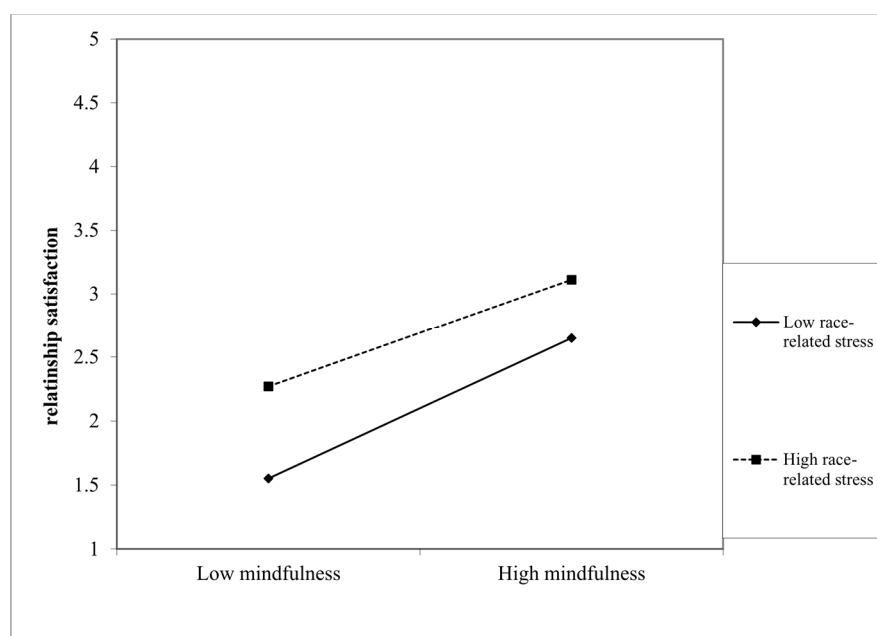
(Constant), IRRS, MAAS, interaction

The results in Table 2 indicate that there was statistically significant perceived MAAS x IRRS interaction  $\beta = -.429$ ,  $t(3,47)$ , -3.29,  $p = .92$ , which indicates that race-related stress moderates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction amongst African Americans/Blacks, and the null hypotheses was not recalled. The analysis was furthered to conduct the relationship between race-related stress and relationship satisfaction through an interaction plot. The plot showed that the interaction

shows the biggest change where there is low mindfulness and low race-related stress being the least satisfied in a relationship. High mindfulness and low race-related stress demonstrated the biggest improvement. The improvement for low mindfulness to high mindfulness for those who were high in race-related stress is not as big of an improvement and the relationship satisfaction is slightly higher. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Interaction Plot*



### Summary

In this chapter, I spotlighted the results for this study on race-related stress regarding African Americans/Blacks, relationship satisfaction, and mindfulness through a quantitative research approach and rationale. The analysis of the data set, findings, and a summation of the results for the research questions were discussed. This concludes the



data results for all three questions. In chapter 5, I discussed the findings, implications for practice, the importance of population, future research, and final thoughts.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Many studies addressed relationship satisfaction (Atkinson, 2013; Falconier et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Maher & Cordova, 2019; Sobral et al., 2015). Researchers explored varying angles of this broad field of study, and each addressed some but not all of the facets of relationship satisfaction (Atkinson, 2013; Falconier et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Maher & Cordova, 2019; Sobral et al., 2015). The gap in the literature was limited research on the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who had experienced race-related stress (Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Greer, 2011; Hwang & Chan, 2019). African American/Black leaders in the field of psychology stated that all studies needed to include race-related stress as a variable if African Americans/Blacks were being examined (Awosan & Hardy, 2017; Charon, 2007; Hudson-Weems, 2008). European theorists have posited their theories to influence the understanding and behaviors of other cultures including African Americans/Blacks (Hudson-Weems, 1997). Due to the effects of 400 years of slavery, the African American/Black experience is contrary to their White counterparts, and studies need to address them separately with this in mind (Hudson-Weems, 1997). According to Franklin (2019), Dr. White suggested that the Black experience needed to be addressed through Black lenses. Franklin specified that theories and interventions for African Americans/Blacks should be grounded in the Black lived experience as opposed to using

White theories to define them. I investigated the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, implications for social change, and a conclusion.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Results indicated that race-related stress was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Awosan and Hardy (2017) conducted a qualitative study of relationship building and maintenance among African American/Black men and women to test the Africana womanism theory position that race-related stress has a negative impact on African American/Black relationships. Results indicated that African American/Black couples struggle with constant racial assaults and stereotypes encountered in society, disrupting their aims to maintain relationship satisfaction. Communication was considered a positive strategy for addressing the negative impact of race-related stress in the relationship, but couples still reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction because of the race-related stress. The results in the current study indicated that high mindfulness impacted relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks with high and low levels of race-related stress. This could be a result of individuals practicing better communication and actively using mindfulness as a solution to increase relationship satisfaction. Based on this study, mindfulness was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. In the first chapter, I described the theoretical models, including one that suggested that mindfulness results in more positive relationship responses to what

might normally be negative relationship interactions. Researchers showed that in relationships, mindfulness guided partners to have more awareness and attention to their own emotions during challenging interactions (Karremans et al., 2009). This allowed for greater regulation of their own negative emotions and produced more effective responses between partners in romantic relationships (Karremans et al., 2009). The results of the current study confirmed this theory for African Americans/Blacks in congruence with their White counterparts.

Results from the hierarchical moderation regression analyses revealed that race-related stress was a moderator for mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. This is noteworthy considering that African American/Black researchers stated that research regarding the African American/Black community should include race-related stress as a variable. Current results confirmed what African American/Black researchers presumed: Race-related stress should be used as a variable to measure African Americans/Blacks.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of this study was that the sample size was small ( $N = 51$ ). The minimum sample size was 42, and the study did not have to exceed 100 participants. This study was also limited because it was open only to individuals who accepted the terms and agreement through online platforms. The findings could have been different if the study had been conducted at physical locations (i.e., churches, banks, coffee shops, malls). The study was also limited because I examined only relationship satisfaction, and

responses may have been biased if participants were not honest about personal details of their relationship. The study was limited to individuals who were at least 18 years old.

### **Recommendations**

Researchers could increase the sample size to obtain a broader response from African Americans/Blacks. Another suggestion is to replace relationship satisfaction with other dependent variables such as military career choice, emergency room doctors' decision-making process, or lawyers' decision-making process regarding African Americans/Blacks to determine whether race-related stress has an impact in these areas. Additionally, a qualitative study could provide a more detailed exploration of participants' experiences. The study could be completed in both the United States and Africa to compare findings. Also, quantitative, and qualitative methods could be used to examine whether race-related stress is higher, lower, and the same.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. The findings may impact social change because this study demonstrated that race-related stress is not a significant factor in relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Current findings support the need for more research on factors that increase relationship satisfaction among African American/Blacks. The results of this study may contribute to the discipline of social psychology by providing information that may be used to facilitate continued exploration of patterns of behavior, social perceptions, and social interactions related to mindfulness, race-related stress, and

relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who acknowledge being in a romantic relationship. The findings may lead to positive social change through investigation of the application of mindfulness promotion to increase relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Findings may be used in therapy groups including African American/Black couples. The findings may also be implemented in schools, African American studies programs at universities, and African American/Black marriage counselors to promote positive social change among these populations.

### **Conclusion**

Previous research showed positive correlations between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness among White couples (Atkinson, 2013; Don, 2018; Khaddouma et al., 2015). However, researchers had not examined the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks who had experienced race-related stress. Race-related stress affects African Americans/Blacks in their daily lives and relationships (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. I ran statistical analyses to answer three research questions and address their related hypotheses:

RQ1: To what extent does mindfulness, as measured by MAAS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

RQ2: To what extent does race-related stress, as measured by IRRS, relate to relationship satisfaction, as measured by RAS, among African Americans/Blacks?

RQ3: Does race-related stress moderate the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks?

This research was limited, and results may differ in future studies based on sample size, data collection procedures, and accessibility to completed studies. Overall, findings supported race-related stress as a moderator when it was measured individually against relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. Findings also supported mindfulness as a positive component of relationship satisfaction among African Americans/Blacks. The interaction confirmed that low mindfulness and low race-related stress demonstrated the least satisfaction in relationships. High mindfulness and low race-related stress demonstrated the biggest improvement. The improvement for low mindfulness to high mindfulness for those who were high in race-related stress was not as big, and the relationship satisfaction was slightly higher.

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## Appendix: Social Media Post

IT'S A STUDY!! PLEASE READ  
BELOW!!



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# THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR VOICE

My name is LeShai Hunt and I am conducting a study about Mindfulness, race-related stress, and relationship satisfaction among African American/Black couples. If you're interested in participating please review consent form and complete the survey by clicking the link attached to this post.

Thank you



