



“Social psychological insights into mindfulness”

Day: Thursday 12th July 2018 Time: 3:30 – 4:45 pm Track: Working Mechanisms

The general aim of this symposium is to highlight research programmes that integrate mindfulness and social psychological concepts in novel and important ways. The first talk addresses how lay people define mindfulness and assesses the attributes and values that people associate with mindful individuals. The second talk assesses whether an element of mindfulness – decentering – decreases hostile attributions of ambiguous social situations. The third talk examines links between mindfulness and individuals' political orientations, values, and perceptions of societal wealth distributions. The final talk provides evidence that a brief mindfulness manipulation can attenuate negative biases against outgroup members in the context of hiring decisions. Taken together, these talks offer evidence that the continued integration of mindfulness and social psychology can mutually inform both fields.

Symposium overview

- Presenter 1** **Geoffrey Haddock** - What does it mean to be mindful?
- Presenter 2** **Kim Lien van der Schans** - Mindful social inferences: the influence of a decentering instruction on hostile attributions of ambiguous social situations in a lab study
- Presenter 3** **Colin Foad** - Investigating relationships between mindfulness and socio-political constructs.
- Presenter 4** **Lynsey Mahmood** - Same job, different name: Mindfulness attenuates attributional errors of outgroup job seekers
- Chair:** **Tim Hopthrow**



What does it mean to be mindful?

Geoffrey Haddock, Colin Foad

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: While mindfulness is ubiquitous in Western culture, questions abound regarding its meaning. We consider how laypersons construe mindfulness and how they evaluate mindful individuals. In Study 1, participants listed words they thought described mindfulness. In Study 2, participants described someone they knew who was mindful and indicated their perception of that individual's values.

METHOD: Study 1—Participants thought about the mindfulness concept before describing it using five words. Participants then evaluated each word's positivity. They then rated the positivity of other attributes linked with (or not) mindfulness before completing the FFMQ.

Study 2—Participants thought about someone they considered mindful before describing that person using five attributes (and evaluating each attribute's valence). Next, participants completed the attribute favorability task and indicated their perception of the mindful person's values before completing the FFMQ.

RESULTS: Study 1—The most frequently listed terms were thoughtful, calm, and aware. Ratings of the generated terms were significantly more positive than the scale midpoint. Participants with higher FFMQ scores rated their generated terms more positively. On ratings of attributes relevant to (or not) mindfulness, FFMQ scores were positively correlated with evaluations of mindfulness-relevant traits, but not mindfulness-irrelevant traits.

Study 2—The most frequently listed terms were thoughtful, calm, and caring/careful. Ratings of these terms were significantly more positive than the scale midpoint. Participants higher on the Act-Aware and Non-Judgment facets rated their generated traits more positively. FFMQ scores did not impact scores on the attribute favorability task. Regarding values, participants perceived the mindful individual to place more importance on self-transcendence values (e.g., helpfulness, equality) relative to other value types. FFMQ scores were negatively correlated with ascribed self-enhancement ratings - more dispositionally mindful participants rated the mindful individual as less likely to place importance on self-enhancement values (e.g., achievement, power).

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION: Participants provided diverse perceptions of mindfulness; these definitions were positive. They also viewed mindful individuals positively. In many cases, participants' own dispositional mindfulness impacted judgments – more mindful individuals offered more positive judgments of mindfulness and mindful individuals. The results inform lay perceptions of mindfulness in novel and important ways.



Mindful social inferences: the influence of a decentering instruction on hostile attributions of ambiguous social situations in a lab study

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Background: In the current project, we investigated whether mindfulness can benefit social behaviour. Specifically, we assessed whether an element of mindfulness – decentering – decreases hostile attributions of ambiguous social situations. Based on related research in the domain of eating behaviour (Papies, Custers & Barsalou, 2012; Papies et al., 2015), we hypothesized that decentering from experiences – seeing them as mental events that arise and disappear – hampers the development of full blown hostile attributions and urges. Previous research has already indicated that trait mindfulness is negatively related to hostile attributions of ambiguous social situations (Heppner et al., 2008). In the current project, we built on these previous studies by assessing whether a short state decentering instruction in a laboratory setting decreases hostile attributions of ambiguous social situations as presented with vignettes in comparison to an immersion control instruction.

Methods: At the start of the experiment, participants were asked to fill out a premeasure of hostile attribution as measured with vignettes of ambiguous social situations. Subsequently, they were randomly assigned to the immersion control versus decentering condition. They first listened to instructions about the decentering or immersion control manner of relating to their thoughts after which they were asked to practice this perspective on two social situations. Hereafter, participants completed the main measure of hostile attribution with vignettes of ambiguous social situations.

Results: Results from a pilot study and a high-powered study suggest a strong effect of experimental instruction on hostile attributions; on average participants from the decentering condition score lower on hostile attribution as compared to the immersion control condition while controlling for the premeasure of hostile attribution. Moreover, the effect of condition was moderated by ruminative disposition. There was a positive correlation between ruminative disposition and hostile attribution in the control condition but not in the decentering condition.

Discussion and Conclusion: These studies suggest that decentering can decrease hostile attribution in response to ambiguous social vignettes. Furthermore, decentering may buffer the relation between ruminative disposition and hostile attributions. Theoretical implications and next steps will be discussed.



Investigating relationships between mindfulness and socio-political constructs.

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES: Dispositional mindfulness has been shown to correlate with several outcomes relating to personal wellbeing. However, less is known about how individual differences in mindfulness relate to socio-political constructs that form the basis of people's judgements of what a positively functioning society should look like. For example, does money bring happiness, or would society work better if resources were distributed more evenly? In two studies, we sought to begin answering these questions by looking at the relationships between mindfulness, preferences for wealth equality and a number of related measures.

METHOD: Study 1 – Participants from the USA completed two measures of dispositional mindfulness (MAAS; FFMQ), items that tested their attitudes towards wealth inequality, and measures of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), Belief in a Just World (BJW) and the Prediction of Future Events Scale. Study 2 – Participants from the UK completed two measures of mindfulness (MAAS; FFMQ), a different set of tasks that tested their attitudes towards wealth inequality, and measures of values, SDO, BJW and empathy (Interpersonal Reactivity Index).

RESULTS: Study 1 – No significant relationship was found between mindfulness and political orientation. Participants higher in mindfulness were found to have greater preferences for a more equal distribution of wealth. This effect was independent of the relationships between wealth inequality preferences and political orientation, SDO and BJW. Additionally, participants higher in mindfulness were found to have less belief in the idea that money and happiness are related, again this effect was independent of political orientation, SDO and BJW.

Study 2 – Again, no significant relationship was found between mindfulness and political orientation. The UK sample provided less evidence for the relationship between mindfulness and wealth equality preferences, though Factor 2 of the FFMQ did show significant effects in the predicted direction. The FFMQ did marginally predict perceptions of nations' actual wealth equality, independent of effects of SDO, BJW and empathy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: The methodological differences and results across the studies will be discussed. However, the data show provocative preliminary evidence for outlining where relationships exist between mindfulness and broader socio-political constructs.



Same job, different name: Mindfulness attenuates attributional errors of outgroup job seekers

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Background and objectives: Minority group members may be disadvantaged in job applications due to automatic and unconscious bias in evaluations. In particular, attributions of causality can lead to job candidates being negatively evaluated based on stereotypes of the racial group to which they belong. This could help to explain a consistent trend in unemployment rates whereby double the number of Black individuals face unemployment compared to White individuals.

Methods: MTurk workers (N= 391), first completed a 5-minute mindfulness body scan manipulation. Following this they read a scenario that manipulated group membership using stereotypically Black vs. White sounding names (Experiment 1 & 2), and the perspective with which they should read the scenario (Experiment 2). Participants were asked to rate locus of attribution for the target's position (situational vs. dispositional), and suggest possible reasons for their position.

Results: Across two experiments, we found that a brief mindfulness manipulation attenuated attribution bias for outgroup targets. Furthermore, there was an interaction with perspective taking that showed attribution bias when taking the other person perspective, but attenuated when taking a self-focused perspective among mindful participants. Experiment 1 also highlighted that participants who completed the mindfulness manipulation were over five times more likely to suggest situational attributions for the outgroup target's behaviour than for the ingroup target.

Discussion and conclusion: This has implications for hiring situations and training that organisations may put in place to increase equality in person evaluations for job seekers. The findings provide positive evidence for an attenuating effect of mindfulness that could benefit job seekers, especially those who are considered members of an outgroup.