

Mindfulness and Ambiguity Tolerance: Fostering resilience in an ambiguous world

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Background: Experiencing ambiguous situations (i.e. novel and complex situations open to more than one interpretation) is an inevitable part of life. How an individual interprets and reacts in these situations is predicted by one's ambiguity tolerance (AT). While some may view ambiguity as desirable (high AT), others may interpret such situations to be threatening or distressing (low AT). Researchers have suggested AT carries important social implications on behaviour, decision making, and prejudice. While higher AT correlates with creativity and emotional intelligence, lower AT correlates with ethnic prejudice and authoritarianism. AT can develop passively over experience and time, but learning how to cultivate AT is a promising area of study; especially in student populations. Previous correlational studies have found that those with higher mindfulness also have higher AT. However, no quantitative study has yet to explore whether mindfulness can be used to increase AT. Therefore, the current study examines the effect of mindfulness inductions on AT in undergraduate students.

Methods: Participants (N = 60; ongoing recruitment) were asked to complete one of four induction tasks (1 Langer Mindfulness, 1 Meditative Mindfulness, and 2 corresponding control tasks) followed by questionnaire and behavioural tasks examining their AT and judgment certainty. Pre-post measures of state mindfulness were used to confirm induction.

Results: A multivariate analysis of variance will be used, and it is predicted those who underwent the mindfulness induction will have higher AT and lower judgment certainty than the control participants.

Discussion/Conclusions: With increased globalization, technological change, and economic uncertainty, the ability to not only live, but thrive in ambiguity is desirable. Supporting practical applications for integrating AT discussion into classes can help students learn to cope with an increasingly ambiguous world. Furthermore, higher AT is desired for many careers; especially in healthcare as ambiguity is inherent. For novice practitioners, learning to manage ambiguity can be a very difficult process. Through understanding the impact of mindfulness on AT, new strategies for supporting young clinicians in enhancing their AT can be found. This may not only affect their perceived level of competence, but also influence the clinical outcomes of their patients.