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Mindfulness skills and interpersonal behaviour

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Abstract

We discuss the multidimensional nature of mindfulness and its relation to interpersonal feelings and performance. We examined the factor structure and internal reliability of a self-report measure of mindfulness, the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS; Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004), in Dutch speaking Psychology students ($n = 113$) and parents ($n = 246$). We replicated the four factors proposed by Baer et al. (2004): Observe, Describe, Act With Awareness and Accept Without Judgement. The Dutch KIMS and all elements of mindfulness appeared invariant across samples. All elements of mindfulness were positively associated with expressing oneself in various social situations. A greater tendency for mindful observation was associated with more engagement in empathy. Mindful description, acting with awareness, and non-judgemental acceptance were associated with better identification and description of feelings, more body satisfaction, less social anxiety, and less distress contagion.

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1. Introduction

Mindfulness has been defined as a state of mind in which one focuses on experience in the present moment in a non-judgemental way (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999). Based on their experience with mindfulness exercises, (Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003; Linehan, 1993) have discriminated four mindfulness skills that can be taught or practiced: Mindful *observation* is the careful attending to internal and external phenomena (e.g., thoughts, emotions, sounds, smells, or proprioceptive sensations). To *act* with awareness is to fully engage in a current activity with undivided attention. To *accept* without judgement is to be non-evaluative about ones experiences in the present moment. Mindful *description* or experiential expression is the immediate, non-judgemental labelling of observations, without conceptual analysis.

Although most mindfulness measures are one-dimensional self-reports, an exploratory factor analysis of their items supports multifaceted conceptions of mindfulness (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). One of the earliest measures of mindfulness was the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003), which measures the extent to which one acts with awareness in daily life. Baer et al. (2004) have developed a multidimensional self-report questionnaire in line with the theory of Dimidjian and Linehan (2003): the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS). Factor analyses revealed a four-factor solution reflecting the four mindfulness skills that the scales were designed to measure (Baer et al., 2004): Observe (OBS), Describe (DES), Act With Awareness (ACT), and Accept Without Judgement (ACC).

1.1. Interpersonal behaviour

Mindfulness has always been associated with interpersonal development, both in traditional Bhuddism (Wallace, 2001) and in Western therapies (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Linehan, 1993). Mindful individuals are supposed to be more capable of installing and maintaining satisfying relationships (Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005). On the other hand, particular forms of interaction may support or inhibit mindful awareness (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000; Claxton, 2005). We offer a brief review of research findings that relate mindfulness to interpersonal behaviour, focusing on three themes: interpersonal reactivity, social anxiety and performance, and body satisfaction. Researchers of mindfulness and interpersonal behaviour have consistently employed the MAAS, which has been shown to measure the same construct as the ACT subscale (Baer et al., 2006). Using the KIMS, we were able to: (1) assess previous findings on the association of a tendency for mindful action with variables of interpersonal behaviour, and (2) extend these findings to other elements of mindfulness.

1.1.1. Interpersonal reactivity

Increased levels of engagement in empathic identification (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998) and empathic ability (Lesh, 1970) have been observed in students after meditation training. However, Galantino, Baime, Maguire, Szaparay, & Farrar (2005) failed to observe effects of a mindfulness-based stress management course on the interpersonal reactivity of health-care professionals. Davis (1980) has conceptualized sensitivity to others' experiences in the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), a scale with two higher order dimensions: Empathy or the emotional and cognitive understanding of others, and Personal Distress or feelings of discomfort when con-

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