Factors Affecting the Experience of Mindfulness
Morgan Levy, Melissa Stiksma, and Dr. Laura Vernon
Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University

Does openness to experience influence the ability to experience mindfulness?

Does religiosity influence one’s level of mindfulness during a meditation session?

Introduction

- Mindfulness refers to the ability to think in the present moment. Meditation and psychoeducation have been shown to increase levels of mindfulness (Schoormans & Nydick, 2011).
- Religiosity can be defined as one’s level of commitment to a religion or denomination. One study found that participants attending 8 weekly 2.5 hour meditation classes reported significant increases in religiosity/spirituality (Carmony, Reed, Krister, & Meriam, 2007).
- Openness to experience is defined as being receptive to one’s own inner feelings and emotions (McCrae & Costa, 1997). A previous study found that there was no link between mindfulness and openness to experience among experienced meditators (Sahdra et al., 2011). The current study examines the relationship between mindfulness and openness to experience among new meditators.
- This experiment was designed to test the following hypotheses:
  1. Mindfulness will increase immediately following the treatment session and will be maintained one week later.
  2. Openness to experience will be positively correlated with dispositional mindfulness, mindfulness experienced during the session, and mindfulness experienced one week later.
  3. Religiosity will be positively correlated with dispositional mindfulness, mindfulness experienced during the session, and mindfulness experienced one week later.

Method

Participants
- 104 undergraduate students from the Wilkes Honors College at FAU
  - Ages 18-25 (M = 19.69 years)
  - 69 female, 34 male

Materials

Mindfulness
- Participants completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006) to measure dispositional mindfulness, and the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS; Lau et al., 2006) to measure state mindfulness at pre- and post-treatment, and one week follow up.

Openness to Experience
- Openness to experience was measured using the subscale from the personality inventory, the NEO (Costa & McCrae, 1997).

Religiosity
- To determine religiosity, participants completed the Religious Background and Behaviors Questionnaire (RBBQ; Connors, Tonigan, and Miller, 1996).

Procedure
1. Pre treatment: Participants completed questionnaire measures of mindfulness, personality, and religiosity.
2. Treatment: Participants underwent a 40 minute experiential and psychoeducation session about mindfulness and meditation. Individuals participated in a body relaxation meditation, a gratitude meditation, nature meditation, and a guided imagery meditation.
3. Post treatment: Participants completed post treatment questionnaires measuring mindfulness.
4. Follow up: One week later participants completed online questionnaire measures of mindfulness, religiosity, and personality.

Results

Correlations with Openness to Experience
- There was a significant correlation between dispositional mindfulness and openness to experience (r=.34, p<.01).
- Openness to experience was significantly related to mindful curiosity during the session (r=.27, p<.01), but not objectivity of experience.
- Openness to experience was significantly related to mindful curiosity in the week following the session (r=.27, p<.01) and objectivity of experience in the week following the session (r=.32, p<.01). Overall, openness to experience was significantly related to mindfulness in the week following the session (r=.30, p<.01).
- When dispositional mindfulness is controlled for, openness to experience remains significantly related to mindfulness experienced one week later (r=.25, p<.01), but not mindfulness experienced the session.

Correlations with Religiosity
- Religiosity was not significantly related to dispositional mindfulness (r=-.11, ns).
- Religiosity was significantly related to mindful curiosity experienced during the session (r=.20, p<.05), but not objectivity of experience.
- Religiosity was significantly related to mindful curiosity (r=.20, p<.05) and objectivity of experience (r=.25, p<.05) in the week following the session. Overall, religiosity was significantly related to mindfulness in the week following the session (r=.23, p<.05).
- When dispositional mindfulness is controlled for, religiosity was significantly related to mindfulness experienced one week later (r=.22, p<.05), but not mindfulness experienced during the session.

Discussion

1. The findings of this study suggest that openness to experience and religiosity do influence the ability to experience mindfulness. Specifically, openness to experience and religiosity are correlated with one’s level of curiosity during a mindfulness meditation session.
2. If dispositional mindfulness is controlled for, openness to experience and religiosity are only significantly related to mindfulness in the week following the session. This could imply that participants with a high level of openness to experience and religiosity may benefit from time to allow the information to sink in and explore it for themselves.
3. Further investigation of the state components of mindfulness (curiosity and objectivity) is needed. Both openness to experience and religiosity are significantly correlated with mindfulness, but not with objectivity of experience. Openness to experience and religiosity might only be related to certain factors of mindfulness.

References