



Review

Dispositional mindfulness and rejection sensitivity: The critical role of nonjudgment



Jessica R. Peters^{a,b,*}, Tory A. Eisenlohr-Moul^c, Laura M. Smart^a

^a University of Kentucky, Department of Psychology, United States

^b Alpert Medical School of Brown University, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, United States

^c University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Department of Psychiatry, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 March 2015

Received in revised form 4 June 2015

Accepted 15 June 2015

Available online 26 June 2015

Keywords:

Mindfulness

Rejection sensitivity

Nonjudgment

Awareness

Negative affect

ABSTRACT

The pain of rejection is a crucial component of normal social functioning; however, heightened sensitivity to rejection can be impairing in numerous ways. Mindfulness-based interventions have been effective with several populations characterized by elevated sensitivity to rejection; however, the relationship between mindfulness and rejection sensitivity has been largely unstudied. The present study examines associations between rejection sensitivity and multiple dimensions of dispositional mindfulness, with the hypothesis that a nonjudgmental orientation to inner experiences would be both associated with decreased rejection sensitivity and attenuate the impact of sensitivity to rejection on general negative affect. A cross-sectional sample of undergraduates ($n = 451$) completed self-report measures of rejection sensitivity, dispositional mindfulness, and trait-level negative affect. Significant zero-order correlations and independent effects were observed between most facets of dispositional mindfulness and rejection sensitivity, with nonjudging demonstrating the largest effects. As predicted, rejection sensitivity was associated with negative affectivity for people low in nonjudging ($\beta = .27$, $t = 5.12$, $p < .001$) but not for people high in nonjudging ($\beta = .06$, $t = .99$, $p = .324$). These findings provide preliminary support for mindfulness, specifically the nonjudging dimension, as a protective factor against rejection sensitivity and its effects on affect.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Feeling rejected is an adaptive part of the human experience, motivating the individual to perceive changes to their social support networks and to counteract such damage by either repairing damaged relationships or seeking out new ones (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004), ensuring that the one has adequate social support. However, some individuals demonstrate increased sensitivity to rejection, including heightened anticipation of potential social rejection and increased reactivity to perceived rejection (Downey, Feldman, Khuri, & Friedman, 1994; Feldman & Downey, 1994). High levels of rejection sensitivity are associated with many problems, including problems with relationships (Downey & Feldman, 1996), distress, and psychopathology. Rejection sensitivity is a defining characteristic of several psychological disorders, including borderline personality disorder (BPD; Staebler, Helbing, Rosenbach, & Renneberg, 2010), avoidant personality disorder (Posternak & Zimmerman, 2002), depression (Ayduk, Downey, & Kim, 2001), and social anxiety (Liebowitz, Gorman, Fyer, & Klein, 1985). Rejection sensitivity may be linked to these problems through difficulties regulating emotion (Peters, Smart, & Baer, 2015), increased negative

affectivity and distress (Gilbert, Irons, Olsen, Gilbert, & McEwan, 2006), more intense aggressive behavior (Ayduk, Gyurak, & Luerssen, 2008), and heightened physiological responses to social experiences (Slavich, Way, Eisenberger, & Taylor, 2010).

Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to be effective in treating disorders characterized by rejection sensitivity, including social anxiety (Goldin & Gross, 2010) and BPD (Linehan et al., 2006). Mindfulness is a multifaceted construct, typically defined as purposeful, nonjudgmental, and nonreactive awareness of and attention to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Several of these dimensions of mindfulness could contribute to reduced sensitivity to rejection. The ability to approach experiences in a *nonjudgmental*, nonevaluative way may reduce the likelihood of becoming fused with catastrophic thoughts regarding the likelihood and consequences of rejection. The ability to exercise *nonreactivity* to one's experience may reduce automatic, reflexive responses to rejection in favor of more reflective, adaptive responses. Increased *attentional awareness* could facilitate present-centered focus, decreasing worry and rumination. Finally, the ability to *describe* one's experiences may reduce biases in social situations, promoting more balanced interpretations of the context. These mindfulness facets demonstrate both stable, between-person variance (i.e., *dispositional mindfulness*) and within-person fluctuations around one's typical levels (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Eisenlohr-Moul, Peters, Chamberlain, & Rodriguez, under review). Furthermore,

* Corresponding author at: University of Kentucky, Department of Psychology, 111-J Kastle Hall, Lexington, KY 40506, United States.

E-mail address: jrpeters@gmail.com (J.R. Peters).

mindfulness training and associated use of mindfulness skills lead to relatively more permanent within-person changes in functioning (e.g., Carlson, Speca, Faris, & Patel, 2007).

In addition to affecting the degree of rejection sensitivity experienced by individuals, mindfulness could alter the impact of sensitivity to rejection on mood and other outcomes (Heppner et al., 2008). A nonjudgmental approach in particular might allow individuals to experience thoughts and feelings relating to rejection without engaging in self-critical, secondary elaborative processes about having those experiences (Roemer & Orsillo, 2010). While the perceived rejection causes pain, the added self-judgments that one is stupid, weak, or otherwise wrong or bad for having those feelings or having cared about the relationship in question likely amplifies distress considerably. In contrast, individuals sensitive to rejection who can accept the occurrence of painful rejection-related thoughts and feelings without judgment may be able to recover more quickly and experience less lasting impact on mood and functioning.

The present cross-sectional study utilized a non-meditating sample to investigate the relationships between these facets of dispositional mindfulness and rejection sensitivity. First, we hypothesized that nonjudging, nonreactivity, acting with awareness, and describing would all be negatively associated with rejection sensitivity. Nonjudging was predicted to have the strongest independent effect. Second, we hypothesized that the association between rejection sensitivity and trait negative affect would be attenuated among individuals who report a higher nonjudgmental orientation to experiences.

2. Methods

The present study utilized a cross-sectional, correlational, between-person design to examine associations between self-reported rejection sensitivity, mindfulness, and negative affect, as well as potential moderation of the association between rejection sensitivity and negative affect by the nonjudging facet of mindfulness.

2.1. Participants

Participants were 451 psychology students who completed an online survey of self-report measures as part of a larger study (see Peters et al., 2015). Measures relevant to the present study are listed below (see Measures). In addition to these, participants completed the BPD features subscale of Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI-BOR; Morey, 2007), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004), the Anger Rumination Scale (Sukhodolsky, Golub, & Cromwell, 2001), and the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992). Informed consent was obtained from all participants and all study procedures were approved by the institution's IRB. Due to the relatively well-adjusted nature of most student samples, participant recruitment was designed to ensure that a wide range of rejection sensitivity, mindfulness, and negative affect would be represented. In order to accomplish this, participants were recruited in two ways. All students in the research pool were able to sign up for the study. In addition, recruitment emails were specifically sent to students who had, on a previous screening battery, scored in the clinically elevated range ($T \geq 70$) on the PAI-BOR. Individuals in this range comprised 18.3% of the final sample. Previous research has demonstrated that BPD features are highly related to rejection sensitivity (Staebler et al., 2010), mindfulness (Wupperman, Neumann, & Axelrod, 2008), and negative affect (Salsman & Linehan, 2012).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Rejection sensitivity

The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ; Downey & Feldman, 1996) is an 18-item measure of the tendency to experience anxiety or concern about the possibility of being rejected and the extent to which an individual expects to be rejected. Respondents are provided

18 brief scenarios and are asked to what degree they think it is likely that they will be rejected (1 = very unlikely to 6 = very likely) and how concerned they are about the potential rejection (1 = very unconcerned to 6 = very concerned), providing two scores for each scenario. Scores from each question are averaged across scenarios to create two subscale scores, which were then averaged together to create a single mean score. The RSQ has been shown to have good internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$; Downey & Feldman, 1996).

2.2.2. Dispositional mindfulness

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006) is a 39-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess five facets of mindfulness. Sample items include: *acting with awareness* ("I rush through activities without being really attentive to them"—reverse scored); *nonjudging of inner experiences* ("I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas"—reverse scored); *nonreactivity to inner experiences* ("I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them"); *describing* ("I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings"); and *observing* ("I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing"). The FFMQ was created through factor-analysis of five pre-existing measures of mindfulness. Participants are asked to rate the degree to which each statement applies to them on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 = *never or very rarely true*, 5 = *almost always or always true*), providing a rating of the participant's general tendency to be mindful. The FFMQ facets have demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency in previous research ($\alpha = .75-.91$; Baer et al., 2006).

The FFMQ has been validated in student samples; however, the observing subscale often does not show theoretically consistent associations in samples without meditation experience, sometimes even predicting increased rumination and poorer psychological health (e.g. Baer, Smith, Lykins, & Button, 2008; Barnhofer, Duggan, & Griffith, 2011; Bowlin & Baer, 2012; Peters, Erisman, Upton, Baer, & Roemer, 2011; Peters et al., in press). One possible explanation for this inconsistency is that while experienced meditators may interpret observing items to mean noticing to their experiences in a nonjudgmental and nonreactive way, nonmeditators may not imbue observing items with such mindful qualities of attention (Baer, 2011; Baer et al., 2006). In contrast, the other four FFMQ facets perform consistently regardless of meditation experience level, demonstrating consistent associations in expected directions (Baer et al., 2006, 2008).

2.2.3. Negative affect

The Positive and Negative Affect Scale – Expanded Form (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1999) is a 60-item measure that asks respondents to rate their experiences of a variety of emotions on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 = *very slightly*, 5 = *extremely*). Multiple time frames can be used with this instrument; in the present study, participants were asked to rate their experiences of negative mood "in general," thus providing a measure of trait-level affect. The PANAS-X was utilized in order to provide more comprehensive coverage of the construct of negative affect than the briefer, 10-item negative affect scale in the original PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The negative affect scale, comprised of the hostility (6 items), sadness (5 items), guilt (6 items), and fear (6 items) subscales, was used in the present study. This scale has demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency across several validation samples ($\alpha = .83-.90$; Watson & Clark, 1999).

2.3. Data analysis

Correlations were computed for all study variables. Each facet of the FFMQ, with the exception of observing due to previously mentioned validity concerns, was entered into a regression model predicting the RSQ to determine independent associations with rejection sensitivity. To test the effect of nonjudging on the relationship between rejection sensitivity and negative affectivity, both the FFMQ and RSQ variables

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889774>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889774>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)