



## Does mindfulness prepare adolescents for value-behavior concordance? Examining the role of value content



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### ABSTRACT

Great thinkers throughout history advocated living one's values, yet little research has examined factors that contribute to adolescents' value-behavior concordance (VBC). Mindfulness may foster VBC via heightened awareness of values, but VBC for intrinsic values may be more adaptive than VBC for extrinsic values. To situate mindfulness in developmental context, we examined age and attachment security as predictors of mindfulness. We collected self- and parent-report data from 299 families ( $M_{age-adolescents} = 14.45$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ; 51% female) from 42 US states to test these ideas. Results indicated that mindfulness was positively associated with intrinsic VBC but was negatively linked with extrinsic VBC, and both kinds of VBC partially mediated the link from mindfulness to meaning (but not life satisfaction). Attachment security was associated with higher mindfulness. Overall, mindfulness may deliver its benefits by helping young people avoid behaviors that align with extrinsic values.

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Aristotle, Shakespeare, Gandhi, and others suggested a life well lived involves behaving in line with one's values, and doing so may hold special developmental significance for adolescents as they integrate their values into their forming identities (cf. [Hitlin, 2003](#); [S. J. Schwartz, Luyckx, & Crocetti, 2015](#)). Values are guiding principles that coordinate action ([Rokeach, 1973](#)), yet values and the behaviors that express them are only modestly associated (e.g., [Bardi & Schwartz, 2003](#)), suggesting the need to identify factors that bridge this divide. We propose that mindfulness—receptive awareness of internal experiences and external events as they unfold in the present moment ([Brown & Ryan, 2003](#))—gives youth increased access to their values and helps them identify behaviors out of step with their values.

Research on self-determination theory (SDT) finds that intrinsic values (e.g., affiliation, community feeling) show positive associations with well-being (e.g., [Brown & Kasser, 2005](#)), whereas extrinsic values (e.g., financial success, social recognition) show negative links to well-being (e.g., [Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols, & Ferguson, 2010](#)). The extent to which value-consistent living is adaptive may also depend on which values are held. We collected data from a national sample of parents and adolescents to examine the role of mindfulness in behaving in accord with intrinsic and extrinsic values, and we test whether value-behavior concordance explains why mindful adolescents experience greater meaning and life satisfaction. In addition, given that little research has examined mindfulness from a developmental perspective, we explored the role of age and attachment security to better understand the development of mindfulness in adolescence.

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## Value-behavior concordance (VBC) and mindfulness

Values are guiding principles that vary in importance (Rokeach, 1973) and form the core of personal identity (Hitlin, 2003). During identity formation, adolescents explore behaviors that align with their parents' and peers' values and express commitment (in part through behaviors) to the values they internalize. Thus, value-behavior concordance (VBC) seems to be an instantiation of the exploration and commitment aspects of identity development. Moreover, eudaimonic identity theory posits that ideal development occurs when youth pursue activities that express their identities (Waterman, 2004), and research confirms that youth who act on their values experience greater life satisfaction (Lundgren, Luoma, Dahl, Strosahl, & Melin, 2012).

Values serve as blueprints for behavior, yet research shows only modest associations between values and the behaviors that express them (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Finlay, Wray-Lake, Warren, & Maggs, 2015), suggesting scope for identifying factors that bridge this divide. According to moral personality theory, frequent cognitive activation of moral schemas leads to prosocial behavior by making moral information salient and accessible (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004), and research shows that mentally activating adolescents' values through writing exercises and value primes increases value-expressive behaviors (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Maio, Pakizeh, Cheung, & Rees, 2009).

Through similar processes, mindfulness—receptive attention to one's thoughts, emotions, environment, and behaviors (Brown & Ryan, 2003)—may help bridge the value-behavior divide by giving youth more frequent access to their values, increased awareness of behaviors inconsistent with values, and helping identify value-relevant behavioral opportunities. Initial evidence supports this view as mindful adolescents exhibited less problematic internet use (Gámez-Guadix & Calvete, 2016), and mindful adults exhibited less impulsive eating (Jordan, Wang, Donatoni, & Meier, 2014). From a developmental perspective, adolescents are assumed to exhibit individual differences in mindfulness based on individual factors and contextual experiences (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Tan & Martin, 2016). We extend previous findings linking mindfulness to value-consistent behaviors by directly examining mindfulness and by testing VBC across a range of values.

### Intrinsic versus extrinsic values

Schwartz values theory (S. H. Schwartz, 1994; S. H. Schwartz et al., 2012) holds that the spectrum of human values is structured according to conflicts and compatibilities in their underlying motivations. For example, self-transcendent values that focus on benevolence and universal respect conflict with self-enhancement values that emphasize exerting power and acquiring money (S. H. Schwartz, 1994). SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) similarly distinguishes values and posits two major categories: intrinsic values (e.g., self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling) that align with one's basic psychological needs, and extrinsic values (e.g., financial success, attractive appearance, social recognition) that indirectly address one's needs. We used S. H. Schwartz et al. (2012)'s values framework to consider a range of human values while also selecting subsets that align with SDT's intrinsic and extrinsic categories.

While mindful youth may have greater access to whichever values are important to them, and would exhibit greater VBC for both intrinsic and extrinsic values, the consequences of VBC may depend on which values they endorse. Based on a large body of research showing the benefits of intrinsic values and the hazards of extrinsic values (e.g., Brown & Kasser, 2005; Sheldon et al., 2010), VBC for intrinsic values likely fosters meaning and life satisfaction whereas VBC for extrinsic values likely opposes these indicators of thriving.

### Development of mindfulness

A growing body of research examines mindfulness in school-based meditation interventions (for review see Felver, Celis-de Hoyos, Tezanos, & Singh, 2016), but little research has examined the development of mindfulness in normative, everyday contexts. The weight of evidence supporting the value of mindfulness in positive youth development (e.g., Felver et al., 2016) implies that understanding the conditions under which mindfulness develops is an important endeavor. Certainly, there are individual differences in adolescents' mindfulness, based on a wide range of individual emotional and sociocognitive capacities as well as contextual experiences and opportunities (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Roeser & Eccles, 2015; Tan & Martin, 2016). Given age-graded increases in self-regulation (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011), perspective-taking skills (Vartanian & Powlishta, 1996), and other competencies that may support mindfulness, mindfulness may increase with age for many youth as part of normative development. However, to date the research shows mixed results in associations between age and mindfulness (e.g., Ciesla, Reilly, Dickson, Emanuel, & Updegraff, 2012; de Bruin, Zijlstra, van de Weijer-Bergsma, & Bögels, 2011), suggesting that mindfulness may not develop in an age-graded way.

Complex dynamics may underlie the link between age and mindfulness. Adolescents' heightened sensitivity and arousal in response to stress (Chein, Albert, O'Brien, Uckert, & Steinberg, 2011; Grose-Fifer, Rodrigues, Hoover, & Zottoli, 2013) would work against mindfulness by undermining control processes and fueling ruminative thoughts. On the other hand, normative increases in self-regulation (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011) may help youth redirect ruminative thoughts and bring receptive awareness to the present moment. Youth with protective factors that buffer against the effects of stress, such as attachment security (Beijersbergen, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2008), may be most prepared to exhibit mindfulness as requisite socio-cognitive competencies develop. Given the known link between mindfulness and attachment security (Shaver, Lavy, Saron, & Mikulincer, 2007), perhaps older youth are only more mindful if they are securely attached to their

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