



## Dispositional mindfulness: A critical review of construct validation research

Holly K. Rau <sup>\*</sup>, Paula G. Williams

University of Utah, USA



### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 4 April 2015

Received in revised form 1 August 2015

Accepted 23 September 2015

Available online 23 October 2015

#### Keywords:

Dispositional mindfulness

Trait mindfulness

Construct validation

Personality

### ABSTRACT

Interest in mindfulness has risen exponentially in recent years, yet it remains unclear whether *dispositional* mindfulness represents a distinct and valid psychological construct. Mapping dispositional mindfulness onto well-established personality constructs is essential for developing and testing theoretical models of mindfulness. The current paper presents a critical review of dispositional mindfulness that examines historical context, operational definitions, measurement, and convergent and discriminant validity across personality domains. It is concluded that dispositional mindfulness: (a) is a multidimensional construct reflecting the *focus* and *quality* of attention, (b) appears to exist independently from other forms of mindfulness, such as learned or cultivated mindfulness, and (c) demonstrates associations with well-established personality traits, such as neuroticism and conscientiousness, yet appears to be conceptually unique. Whether dispositional mindfulness should be considered a basic tendency or a characteristic adaptation is fodder for future research. Additionally, research examining specific mechanisms underlying dispositional mindfulness (e.g., cognitive skills, attitudes) is needed to strengthen ongoing construct validation efforts. Researchers are encouraged to capitalize on the growing evidence base and approach DM as a unique individual difference factor strongly rooted in developmental, cognitive, and personality disciplines.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduced as a simple and intuitive concept with implications for emotional and physical health, the psychological construct of mindfulness – a “basic human quality” characterized by the tendency to attend to and accept present moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2013) – has been met with profound enthusiasm. The volume of mindfulness-related publications has risen exponentially over the past two decades, resulting in nearly 500 new publications in 2012 alone (Black, 2013). These numbers are expected to increase as over 300 clinical trials related to mindfulness begin publishing results. The momentum driving this research is warranted. Numerous psychological and physical health benefits have been linked to both mindfulness training (e.g., Chiesa & Serretti, 2010; Greeson, 2009; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011; Smith, Richardson, Hoffman, & Pilkington, 2005) and dispositional mindfulness (e.g., Coffey & Hartman, 2008; Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007; Howell, Digdon, Buro, & Sheptycki, 2008; Lakey, Campbell, Brown, & Goodie, 2007).

To date, efforts aimed at establishing the validity of mindfulness have involved examining the nomothetic span of various self-report

measures of mindfulness (e.g., Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Baer et al., 2008; Brown & Ryan, 2003), proposing conceptual frameworks and operational definitions of mindfulness (e.g., Bishop et al., 2004; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007), and summarizing empirical associations with mindfulness (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Hofmann et al., 2010; Keng et al., 2011). Notwithstanding the importance of these works for informing our understanding of mindfulness more broadly, several shortcomings have limited our understanding of *dispositional* mindfulness in particular.

First, the implicit assumption that mindfulness interventions “enhance” inherent dispositional tendencies toward mindfulness illustrates a potential misnomer; namely, that all forms of mindfulness are created equal. Without distinguishing between dispositional and cultivated (i.e., trained, practiced) forms of mindfulness, assumptions of construct homogeneity remain unfounded. Examination of the historical and theoretical foundation underlying DM specifically is needed to refine operational definitions and differentiate between related constructs, including other forms of mindfulness.

Second, despite the near-simultaneous introduction of 11 self-report measures of mindfulness nearly a decade ago, researchers have only recently begun to evaluate the conceptual framework and properties of these instruments (e.g., Sauer et al., 2013; Grossman & van Dam 2011). Unfortunately, many critiques focus on only a single measure and fail to address methodological and

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Utah, 380 South 1530 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112, USA.

E-mail address: [holly.rau@psych.utah.edu](mailto:holly.rau@psych.utah.edu) (H.K. Rau).

interpretive considerations relevant to the DM construct more broadly. Examination of the psychometric characteristics, such as factor structure and construct representation, across multiple instruments is necessary to inform current theory.

Third, although numerous investigations of convergent and discriminant validity have been conducted, relatively few of these have been interpreted through the lens of personality theory. Given that the term *disposition* is often used interchangeably with the terms trait and personality to reflect stable and enduring characteristics (Allport, 1961), personality theory is likely to provide a useful framework for understanding individual differences in mindful behaviors and experiences. An examination of DM in relation to well-established models of personality, such as the Five Factor Model (FFM; McCrae & Costa, 2003), could provide important descriptive and predictive information about the nature of DM.

Somewhat surprisingly, there are currently no reviews that have integrated theoretical, methodological, and empirical work exclusive to DM. The relatively recent introduction of DM into the psychological lexicon, combined with a rapidly growing literature base, makes this an opportune time to examine the state of the science for this construct. The goal of this integrative review, therefore, was to initiate a formal examination of construct validity informed exclusively by research examining *dispositional* mindfulness. Specifically, we evaluated theory specification (i.e., history, definition of mindfulness), measurement (i.e., psychometric considerations), and hypothesis testing (i.e., convergent and discriminant validity).

## 1. Theory specification: historical context and current definitions

Historical context is especially important for understanding current definitions of dispositional mindfulness (DM), which are squarely rooted in Eastern religion and directly influenced by Western philosophy and culture. The *Abhidhamma*, one of three collections in the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism (see Bodhi (2000)), contains the Buddhist philosophy most relevant to the psychological construct of mindfulness. Importantly, the fourth and least discussed text of the *Abhidhamma*—the *Puggalapanatti* (Descriptions of Individuals)—acknowledges innate individual differences in mindfulness. Analogous to modern personality typologies, the *Puggalapanatti* classifies individuals according to stages on the Buddhist path, with some characterized as *upatthitasati*, or “alert” and able to sustain mindfulness (“*Abhidhammapitake Puggalapanattipali*,” 2000, p.77), and others characterized by “unmindfulness” (p. 64). In other words, early teachings recognized mindfulness as an innate individual difference *and* a set of skills that require training and practice.

### 1.1. From East to West

Although recently elevated to iconic status in popular Western culture, the concept of mindfulness is far from novel. American interest in Buddhist philosophy stems from the Transcendentalist movement of the early 19th century (Versluis, 1993), which emphasized individualism and subjectivism over rationalism and objectivism. Interest in Buddhist philosophy resurfaced during the Beat Era and a variety of Buddhist establishments were introduced into the American landscape (McCown & Micozzi, 2011). Over time, these establishments became increasingly westernized, giving rise to a non-religious form of Buddhist psychology that was eventually popularized under the unassuming heading of the Stress Reduction Clinic, founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979. Housed within the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and designed to help medical patients manage symptoms of chronic illness, the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program (later called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction; MBSR) incorporated Buddhist teachings and exercises learned during Kabat-Zinn’s training in Zen Buddhism. Central to the initial success of this program was Kabat-Zinn’s secularized representation of mindfulness as an “internal

resource” (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2013) which allowed mindfulness to capture a broad multidisciplinary audience.

### 1.2. Definition of mindfulness

Kabat-Zinn’s early conceptualizations of mindfulness, which emphasized non-elaborative observation of present-moment experiences, dominated the scientific language and formed an irrevocable bedrock for Western scientific investigations into mindfulness—a foundation that many are now calling into question. Some have argued that mindfulness cannot easily be understood in isolation from theoretically-related Buddhist concepts (Bodhi, 1984; Gunaratana, 2001) and that removing mindfulness from its larger philosophical context may have “denatured and decontextualized” the original construct in unintentional yet significant ways (Grossman, 2011). Consequently, concepts such as compassion (Birnie, Speca, & Carlson, 2010; Germer, 2009), altruism (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007; Wallmark, Safarzadeh, Daukantaite, & Maddux, 2013), and moral responsibility (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011) have increasingly become incorporated into the repertoire of mindfulness language.

Debate over semantics and nomological expanse calls into question exactly what Western psychology hopes to gain from mindfulness. As stated by Schmidt (2011): “A wish for self-regulation or coping with chronic pain is quite different from embarking on a spiritual path to achieve self-transformation” (p.35). One possibility is that Westerners may be shifting their expectations of mindfulness, such that an interest in self-regulation has expanded into an interest in self-transformation (Shapiro, 1992). Regardless of the moral, ethical, and spiritual potential, drawing a clear boundary around mindfulness is necessary to establish theoretical coherence. This boundary has been acknowledged by traditional Buddhist texts indicating that mindfulness alone is a necessary starting point for the development of wisdom, but far from sufficient on its own (A. B. Wallace & Bodhi, 2006). Expecting mindfulness to represent the full range of experiences involved with the development of insight is likely asking too much. Instead, the field of psychology has much to gain from better understanding the essential components of mindfulness and developing a concise, testable definition. One such definition, resulting from a 2004 consensus meeting, provides a helpful background for examining construct validity:

“The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 232).

## 2. Measurement: instruments and psychometric considerations

As interest in mindfulness exploded at the turn of the millennium, so did the number of instruments designed to measure mindfulness. During a five year period, eight self-report measures of dispositional mindfulness were introduced: Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003); Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS; Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004); Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI; Walach, Buchheld, Buittenmuller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006); Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS; Lau et al., 2006; TMS-Trait Version: K. M. Davis, Lau, & Cairns, 2009); Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006); Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale—Revised (CAMS-R; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007); Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PHLMS; Cardaciotto, Herbert, Forman, Moitra, & Farrow, 2008); and Southampton Mindfulness Questionnaire

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889760>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889760>

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