



SPECIAL ARTICLE

# An empirical investigation into the cognitive and relational dynamics of mindfulness: Adult attachment security mediates the relationship between mindfulness and naïve dialecticalism



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**Abstract** Both researchers on mindfulness, as well as proponents of therapy modalities that incorporate mindfulness-based skill building, typically conceptualize the stress reducing benefits of mindfulness primarily to its ability to modulate maladaptive cognitive or attentional patterns. Naïve dialecticalism (i.e., a less synthesized and integrated tolerance of apparently contradictory or ambivalent beliefs) represents an approach to cognition that is associated with greater self-criticism and inconsistency within one's global self-concept and is thus theorized to be negatively related to mindfulness. The present study investigated whether the beneficial effects of mindfulness on cognition (i.e., lower levels of naïve dialectical thinking) are in fact accounted for via the beneficial effects of mindfulness on one's relationships (i.e., enhanced perceptions of adult attachment security). Structural equation modeling demonstrated that adult attachment security in fact fully mediated the negative relationship between naïve dialectical thinking and mindfulness. These results highlight an understanding of mindfulness meditation as a practice that cultivates not only harmonious affect and cognition, but also harmonious relationships with others.

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Mindfulness;  
Apego;  
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**Una investigación empírica sobre las dinámicas cognitiva y relacional del mindfulness: la seguridad del apego adulto media la relación entre el mindfulness y el dialectalismo ingenuo**

**Resumen** Tanto los investigadores sobre el *mindfulness* como los defensores de modalidades de terapia que incorporan el desarrollo de destrezas basado en el *mindfulness* suelen conceptualizar el estrés principalmente como reductor de los beneficios del *mindfulness* a su capacidad

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de modular los patrones mal adaptativos cognitivos o atencionales. El dialectalismo ingenuo (es decir, una tolerancia menos sintetizada e integrada de creencias aparentemente contradictorias o ambivalentes) representa un acercamiento a la cognición que está asociado con mayor autocrítica e incongruencia en el autoconcepto global y, por tanto, se teoriza como relacionado negativamente con el *mindfulness*. El presente estudio analizó si los efectos beneficiosos del *mindfulness* sobre la cognición (es decir, niveles más bajos de pensamiento dialéctico ingenuo) se explican en realidad a través de los efectos beneficiosos del *mindfulness* en las relaciones personales (p. ej., mejores percepciones de la seguridad del apego adulto). El modelado de la ecuación estructural demostró que la seguridad del apego adulto de hecho medió completamente la relación negativa entre el pensamiento dialéctico ingenuo y el *mindfulness*. Estos resultados ponen de relieve una comprensión de la meditación del *mindfulness* como una práctica que no solo cultiva el afecto armonioso y la cognición, sino también las relaciones armoniosas con los demás.

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Drawn from centuries-old Buddhist meditative practices, mindfulness represents a particular set of qualities of attention and awareness that can be cultivated and developed through meditation (Bear, 2003). Mindfulness has been described as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). As such, the construct of mindfulness incorporates both a cognitive-attentional component whereby one’s conscious awareness is sustained to what is immediately occurring in the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003) as well as an affectionate, compassionate, intrapersonal quality within the attending, whereby one sustains a sense of open-hearted, friendly presence and interest (Bishop et al., 2004; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Mindfulness has been associated with several indicators of psychological health, such as enhanced quality of life (Grossman et al., 2010), greater self-esteem and empathy (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen, & Dewulf, 2008), and reduced negativity bias and maladaptive ruminative thinking (Heerssen & Philippot, 2011; Kiken & Shook, 2011). These findings suggest that mindfulness helps people to be more open to, and capable of effectively coping with, a broad range of available context-relevant and self-relevant information in the present moment, including both positive and negative self-relevant feedback and emotions (Goetz, Spencer-Rodgers, & Peng, 2008). Mindfulness training is thought to enhance metacognitive awareness, which is the ability to re-perceive or decenter oneself from one’s thoughts and emotions, and instead to view these experiences as temporal and passing mental events rather than as accurate or static representations of reality (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Although mindfulness has been effectively applied and adapted onto a Western mental health context, with previous studies confirming its relationship with various positive outcomes from the perspective of Western mental health, its original Eastern/Buddhist conceptualization viewed its practice against the psychological backdrop of

reflecting on and contemplating key aspects of Buddhist teaching, which included themes relating to impermanence, nonself, and suffering (Keng et al., 2011). Thus, in addition to examining mindfulness alongside constructs such as self-esteem, negativity bias, and ruminative thinking, it may also be helpful to examine mindfulness alongside constructs more closely related to its original Eastern/Buddhist cultural context. To this end, the present study will examine the relationship of mindfulness and one particular aspect of cognition known as naïve dialecticalism—a way of thinking that stems from Buddhist teachings on impermanence and nonself.

### Naïve dialecticalism

Naïve dialecticalism refers to the tolerance of apparently contradictory or ambivalent beliefs, a cognitive tendency that tends to be more common in (though is not exclusive to) East Asian cultures (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Dialectical thinking can be distilled into three core principles: the *principle of contradiction* holds that two opposing propositions may both be true; the *principle of change* proposes that the universe is in flux and is constantly changing; and the *principle of holism* accepts that all things are inter-related (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Within this tradition, dialectically oriented individuals tend to exhibit greater emotional complexity—that is, they are more likely to exhibit the co-occurrence of both positive and negative affect (Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, & Wang, 2010). They also tend to see the nature of the world in such a way where traits like masculinity and femininity, strength and weakness, and good and bad concurrently exist in the same object or event, and that such duality be regarded as both normative and adaptive (Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Mori, Wang, & Peng, 2009). Of note, these scholars earlier observed that “Western dialectical thinking is fundamentally consistent with the laws of formal logic ... in the sense that contradiction requires synthesis rather than acceptance [whereas] ... naïve dialecticism does not regard contradiction as illogical and tends to

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