



Brief Empirical Reports

A brief, interpersonally oriented mindfulness intervention incorporating Functional Analytic Psychotherapy's model of awareness, courage and love



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ABSTRACT

A brief, group mindfulness intervention targeting both state mindfulness and social connectedness was developed based on Functional Analytic Psychotherapy's model of awareness, courage, and love. A total of 114 college students were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) a nature video control, (2) a traditional intrapersonal mindfulness intervention focused on awareness of breath and private stimuli such as bodily sensations, thoughts, and feelings, or (3) an interpersonal mindfulness intervention that emphasized (a) expanding awareness from private internal to external public stimuli associated with the presence of others, (b) a contemplation of common humanity and risks participants could take to improve a specific relationship, and (c) a brief small group interaction involving courageous sharing of these risks. Results indicated significant benefits of all three conditions with respect to state mindfulness with both mindfulness conditions outperforming the nature video, and significant benefits of both mindfulness conditions with respect to social connectedness, with the interpersonal mindfulness condition outperforming the intrapersonal condition. Limitations include no follow-up data to explore the maintenance of gains over time.

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1. Introduction

Social connectedness is fundamental to human nature (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). When experienced at adequate levels, it has a large effect on life expectancy comparable in size to quitting smoking and exceeding the effect sizes of well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Interventions to help individuals experience and achieve more social connectedness in their lives, therefore, have significant public health value.

There has been increased interest in mindfulness interventions, which have been shown to have a variety of positive intrapersonal effects, including stress reduction, reduced psychiatric symptoms of depression and anxiety, increased psychological well-being, and improved emotion regulation, attention and cognitive control (Chang et al., 2004; Chambers, Lo, & Allen, 2008; Ramel, Goldin,

Carmona, & McQuaid, 2004). These interventions have been delivered in a variety of formats (e.g., group, individual, and online self-paced) and lengths (e.g., from brief single session trainings to daily sessions extended over weeks, months or years) and have included a variety of mindfulness components (Atkinson, 2013; Baer, 2011; Chiesa, 2013). A general goal of these interventions is to cultivate, through meditative practice and experiencing, a state of attention that is purposeful, non-judgmental, non-reactive, and attuned to the present moment, typically with respect to feelings, thoughts, bodily sensations, and other private internal experiences. Given its emphasis on awareness of private stimuli, we will broadly refer to this traditional type of mindfulness as “intrapersonal mindfulness”.

Some studies suggest that traditional intrapersonal mindfulness interventions do improve interpersonal outcomes (reviewed by Atkinson (2013)). A paucity of research exists, however, on mindfulness interventions specifically structured to improve interpersonal relating. An exception is Carson, Carson, Gil and Baucom (2004) who explicitly incorporated a mindfulness intervention involving a structured couples yoga exercise in which mindfulness was integrated into the interpersonal interaction.

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Because many mindfulness interventions are delivered in group formats, it is possible to structure the intervention to capitalize on the opportunity provided by the public interpersonal, features of the group environment. Further, brief, group mindfulness interventions may have public health value as easy-to-disseminate mechanisms to produce both the intrapersonal benefits described above and possible interpersonal benefits related to improved social connectedness. In addition, longer, traditional intrapersonal mindfulness interventions with participants who are members of a couple (e.g., 8 weeks involving daily practice) have shown positive results with respect to relationship satisfaction (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). These benefits may accrue due to increased empathy and perspective-taking, improved emotion regulation, emotional attunement in the present moment to the other person, and present-moment awareness of intimacy-related feelings (Atkinson, 2013). Increased openness and awareness, in turn, facilitate important intimacy-related actions that, when responded well by the partner, lead to improvements in the relationship.

In this report, we used a contextual behavioral theory of mindfulness (Sisti, Stewart, Tsai, Kohlenberg, & Kohlenberg, 2014; Tsai et al., 2009) and a therapeutic model of social connection derived from Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP; Kohlenberg & Tsai, 1991) to capitalize on the group format of a brief (1-h) traditional group intra-personal mindfulness meditation by extending the meditation practice into the inter-personal domain and adding a group interaction involving intimacy-related self-disclosure. We explored the effects of this intervention on both intrapersonal processes (i.e., state mindfulness) and interpersonal processes (i.e., social connectedness).

FAP's model of social connection incorporates three constructs—awareness, courage, and love (Tsai et al., 2009; Tsai, Callaghan, & Kohlenberg, 2013)—in an interactional sequence. Awareness is the nonjudgmental, present-moment attention to one's internal experiences (e.g., private sensations, thoughts, feelings, and values), to how the other person in the interaction might be feeling, and to how the interaction is going. Courage involves expressing authentically what is meaningful in that moment (i.e., what one has become aware of that might be difficult to express), and love involves responding with openness, empathy, understanding, validation, and caring to the

other's expressions. This contextual behavioral model parallels findings from social-cognitive psychology, particularly Reis and Shaver's (1988) well-researched model involving a transactional pattern of vulnerable self-disclosure (“courage” in the FAP model) and responsiveness (“love” in the FAP model) in a relational dyad as fundamental to the development of intimacy.

Results from an initial pilot study (Bowen, Haworth, Grow, Tsai, & Kohlenberg, 2012) led to the development of a brief (approximately one hour long) FAP-informed mindfulness intervention which included components related to awareness, courage, and love. Phase I of the intervention incorporated a traditional eyes-closed intrapersonal mindfulness sequence and it was predicted that Phase I alone would primarily produce intrapersonal benefits (specifically, improvements in state mindfulness) but not interpersonal benefits. Phase II of the intervention gradually shifted the focus to an interpersonal mindfulness sequence that included (a) expanding awareness from private/internal to public/external stimuli associated with the presence of others, (b) a contemplation of common humanity and the specific risks participants could take to improve their relationship with a “target” person with whom they have regular contact, (c) a brief small group interaction involving courageous, mindful sharing with group members of the risks they would like to take with the target person, and (d) being attentive, accepting and kind (loving) in response to what was shared. It was predicted that the full FAP-informed mindfulness intervention (Phases I and II) would produce both intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits related to social connectedness.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 114 undergraduates recruited through a departmental online subject pool at the University of Washington. All participants were at least 18 years of age and received extra course credit for participation. For a detailed description of participant characteristics, see Table 1.

Table 1
Sample characteristics.

	Control (n=34)	Interpersonal (n=37)	Intrapersonal (n=43)	Total sample (n=114)
Age M (SD)	18.59 (0.82)	18.68 (0.82)	18.63 (1.25)	18.63 (1.00)
Gender (frequency)				
Male	41.18% (14)	37.84% (14)	25.58% (11)	34.21% (39)
Female	58.82% (20)	62.16% (23)	74.42% (32)	65.79% (75)
Ethnicity (frequency)				
Caucasian	25.53% (8)	27.03% (10)	30.23% (13)	27.19% (31)
African-American	0.00% (0)	5.41% (2)	0.00% (0)	1.75% (2)
Latino/a	0.00% (0)	2.70% (1)	4.65% (2)	2.63% (3)
Asian-American	47.06% (16)	37.84% (14)	25.58% (11)	35.96% (41)
Native American	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	4.65% (2)	1.75% (2)
Other	29.41% (10)	27.03% (10)	34.88% (15)	30.70% (35)
Relationship status				
Single	67.65% (23)	81.08% (30)	72.09% (31)	73.68% (84)
In a relationship	32.35% (11)	18.92% (7)	27.91% (12)	26.32% (30)
Mindfulness experience				
Historical experience				
Yes	11.76% (4)	5.41% (2)	6.98% (3)	7.89% (9)
No	88.24% (30)	94.59% (35)	93.02% (40)	92.11% (105)
Current experience				
Yes	11.76% (4)	5.41% (2)	13.95% (6)	10.53% (12)
No	88.24% (30)	94.59% (35)	86.05% (37)	89.47% (102)

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