

Attachment and Mindfulness: A Systematic Review and Meta- analysis

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Overview

- ▶ Background - why look at attachment and mindfulness?
- ▶ Systematic review - how the literature was gathered
- ▶ Meta-analysis - statistical analyses and results
- ▶ Conclusions - what does it all mean?

Background - Mindfulness

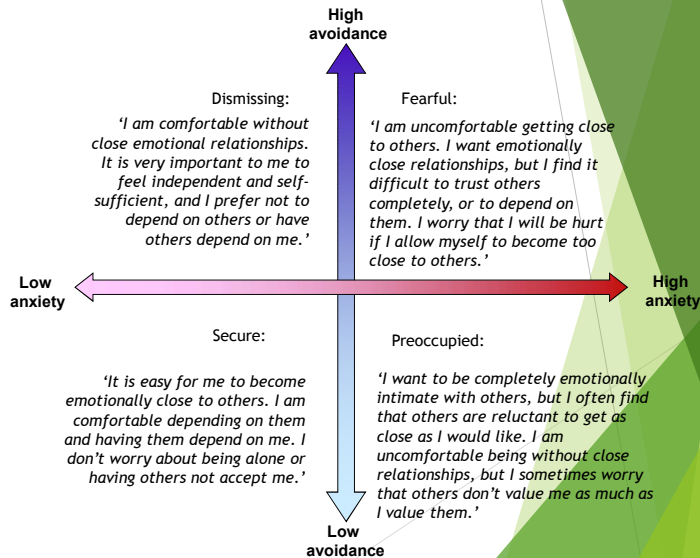
1. A particular state of awareness (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2013)
 2. A psychological trait (**dispositional or trait mindfulness**)
 3. A contemplative practice (such as mindfulness meditation and mindfulness stress reduction techniques)
- ▶ A distinctive state of consciousness compared typical cognitive processing:
 - ▶ sensory input is allowed and merely noticed rather than compared or evaluated or ruminated about (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007)
 - ▶ Deliberate self-regulation of attention and non-evaluative acceptance of one's immediate experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)
 - ▶ Mindfulness cultivates understanding and insight to reality and provide a greater sense of compassion and kindness for oneself and others (Neff, 2012)

Background - Mindfulness

- ▶ Positive benefits of mindfulness practice on mental, emotional, and physical health (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011)
- ▶ Associated with reduced stress, lower emotional reactivity, increased well-being (Farb et al., 2010; Ortner et al., 2007; Carmody & Baer, 2008)
- ▶ Trait mindfulness is measured using the following five subscales - non-judging, non-reacting, act with awareness, observe, describe, (Baer et al., 2006)
- ▶ Researchers (understandably) want to know what predicts mindfulness, how it develops, ultimately in order to be able to promote/increase it
- ▶ Along with many other aspects of adaptive functioning, when considering the antecedents of mindfulness, researchers have highlighted the utility of a social context
- ▶ Specifically, attachment theory provides the most appropriate social conceptual framework (Shaver, Lavy, Saron, & Mikulincer, 2007)

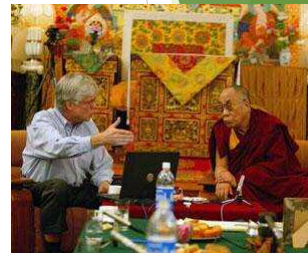
Background - Attachment Theory

- ▶ Adult attachment style develops as a reflection of the sum total of experiences of being cared for in close relationships, and defines our strategies of affect regulation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007)
- ▶ Taking a social-cognitive / personality perspective, attachment style is measured on two dimensions of attachment insecurity: anxiety about abandonment and avoidance of intimacy (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)



Points of Contact between Attachment Theory & Mindfulness

- ▶ First identified by Ryan, Brown, and Creswell (2007), and subsequently expanded upon by Shaver et al. (2007)
- 1. Both constructs share similar positive effects on a range of outcomes related to wellbeing (positive outcomes regarding mental and physical health, more successful relationships, adaptive coping, higher self-esteem, and increased self-regulation)
- 2. Similarities between secure attachment experiences and Buddhist forms of mindfulness in terms of accessing mental representations of security:
 - ▶ Buddhist practice can involve accessing representations of acceptance by a loving Buddha, their teachings, and a community of fellow Buddhists, which is conceptually similar to attachment theory's notions of secure base and safe haven provided by security-enhancing attachment figures (Shaver et al., 2007)

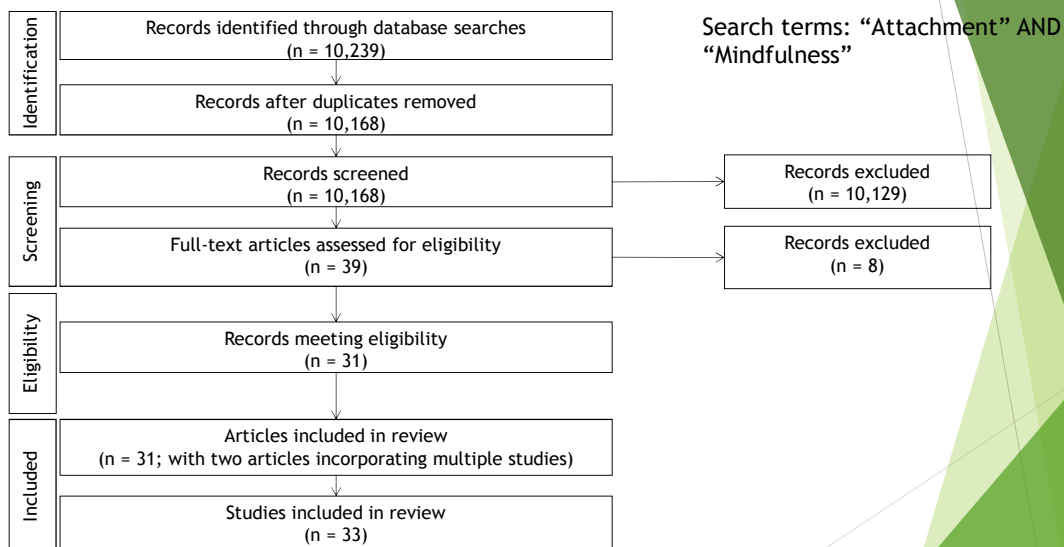


Phil Shaver talks with the Dalai Lama in 2004:
<https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/visit-dalai-lama-informs-researcher%E2%80%99s-work/>

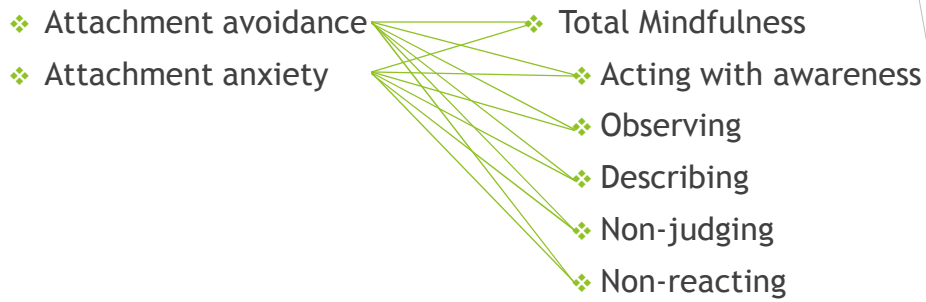
Points of Contact between Attachment Theory & Mindfulness

3. Incompatibility between insecurity (avoidance or anxiety) and effective mindfulness practice:
 - ▶ Mindfulness = open and accepting outlook with direct observations and a removed or decentered approach to thoughts and feelings
 - ▶ Attachment anxiety = feeling unworthy, hypervigilance, hypersensitivity to rejection, and rumination (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998)
 - ▶ Attachment avoidance = thought suppression, avoidance of feelings (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003)
 4. There may be a bidirectional relationship:
 - ▶ Security-enhancing relationship experiences are likely to increase a person's capacity for mindfulness
 - ▶ Mindfulness meditation is likely to increase a person's capacity for secure relationships
- ▶ Caveat: Current literature does not allow us to establish directionality!!

PRISMA diagram



Meta-analyses



= 12 meta-analyses all together

Meta-analyses

- ▶ Conducted using STATA (version 12), based on random effects models
 - ▶ Assumes that the effect size of the relationship between the attachment and mindfulness variables in each of the studies varies as a function of differences in study characteristics as well as sampling error
 - ▶ Effect sizes were computed using Pearson's r , SEs (calculated according to the specifications of Lipsey and Wilson, 2001) were used to weight each effect size

Sample-weighted average effect size of the relationship between adult attachment and mindfulness variables

Relationship measured	r_+	k	n	95% CI	χ^2	I^2
Adult attachment anxiety						
Total Mindfulness	-0.360***	22	5964	-0.40, -0.32	60.92***	65.5%
Act with awareness	-0.332***	12	5637	-0.38, -0.29	26.27**	58.1%
Observe	0.013	10	2279	-0.07, 0.10	37.95***	76.3%
Describe	-0.169***	10	2279	-0.26, -0.08	42.86***	79%
Non-judging	-0.451***	10	2279	-0.51, -0.40	19.20**	53.1%
Non-reacting	-0.258***	8	1542	-0.35, -0.16	25.90**	73%
Adult attachment avoidance						
Total Mindfulness	-0.281***	21	5844	-0.33, -0.23	73.21***	72.7%
Act with awareness	-0.258***	12	5637	-0.31, -0.20	42.60***	74.2%
Observe	-0.091*	10	2279	-0.17, -0.02	28.03**	67.9%
Describe	-0.285***	10	2279	-0.37, -0.20	36.65***	75.4%
Non-judging	-0.275***	10	2279	-0.32, -0.21	22.92**	60.7%
Non-reacting	-0.162**	8	1542	-0.27, -0.05	33.83***	79.3%

Note. CI = confidence interval, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Conclusions

- ▶ Attachment insecurity on either dimension is associated with reduced capacity for mindfulness overall
 - ▶ This seems to be underpinned by reduced abilities for all subscales of mindfulness except Observing (where 2 studies found a positive correlation)
- ▶ The 3 biggest effects are for attachment anxiety and:
 - ▶ Non-judging
 - ▶ Total Mindfulness
 - ▶ Acting with Awareness
- ▶ Anxious individuals' hypervigilance to threat, negative views of self, and emotional reactivity may account for these findings

Conclusions

- ▶ The 3 biggest effects for attachment avoidance were for the sub-dimensions:
 - ▶ Describing
 - ▶ Total Mindfulness
 - ▶ Non-judging
- ▶ Avoidant individuals' deactivating affect regulation strategies, negative views of self, and emotional cut off may account for these findings

Conclusions

- ▶ The vast majority of the literature we found was cross sectional
 - ▶ More research needed to establish causality
 - ▶ Which develops first over time?
 - ▶ Does intervening to boost one also have positive effects on the other?
 - ▶ We had hoped to examine this but only found 2 studies that manipulated both constructs. One found no evidence of crossover, and the other only looked at the effect in one direction, and not neatly (for our purposes)!
 - ▶ Moderator analyses - stats indicated considerable variability in findings as a function of factors other than sampling error, but the studies are too heterogeneous to conduct meta-analyses looking at potential moderators (we need more research!)

▶ Thanks for listening!

▶ Questions?