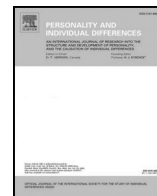




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Being present in the moment: Event-level relationships between mindfulness and stress, positivity, and importance

John B. Nezlek^{a,b,*}, Paweł Holas^c, Marzena Rusanowska^d, Izabela Krejtz^e

^a College of William & Mary, United States

^b SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Poznań, Poland

^c University of Warsaw, Poland

^d Jagiellonian University, Poland

^e SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland

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ABSTRACT

Each day for two weeks, participants (psychologically healthy adults residing in the community) described the events that happened to them. These descriptions included how attentive to the present moment they were during the event, and how stressful, positive, and important the event was. Three-level MLM analyses (events nested within days, days nested within persons) found that dispositional (trait) mindfulness was positively related to event-level mindfulness (presence), positivity, and importance, and was negatively related to event-level stress. At the event-level, presence was positively related to how positive and important events were and was positively related to how stressful events were. Moreover, these event-level relationships did not vary as a function of trait mindfulness. These results suggest that although more mindful people may experience less stress, when stress occurs, people tend to become more mindful.

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1. Introduction

Although definitions of mindfulness vary, there is broad agreement that mindfulness is an attentional style (or way of paying attention) that originated in contemplative traditions such as Buddhism. One of the most commonly cited definitions of mindfulness describes it as “paying attention in particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Similarly, other definitions emphasize that mindfulness involves maintaining awareness to the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Although major conceptualizations of mindfulness (e.g., Bishop et al., 2004; Shapiro, Carlson, Austin, & Freedman, 2006) include other components than attention, such as awareness, intention, and/or acceptance, most definitions of mindfulness involve sustained consciousness/awareness of external events and internal experiences as they occur (Jankowski & Holas, 2014).

The primary focus of the present study was the relationship between mindfulness and stress. A considerable body of research has found that mindfulness is negatively related to stress at the trait level. More mindful people experience less stress (e.g., Nyklíček & Kuijpers, 2008), and they react to stress more adaptively than the less mindful (e.g., Bränström, Kvillemo, Brandberg, & Moskowitz, 2010). Similarly,

mindfulness and stress have been found to be negatively related at the within-person level. For example, in an experience sampling study, Weinstein, Brown, and Ryan (2009) found that daily mindfulness was negatively related to daily stress.

Nevertheless, despite the growing body of research on mindfulness and the fact that definitions of mindfulness emphasize “being in the moment” (what we refer to as *presence*), we know of no study that has examined people’s presence during everyday events. To address this issue, we conducted a study in which participants described the events they experienced each day, including their attention to the present moment. We also measured trait-level mindfulness. Together, these data allowed us to examine how mindfulness, conceptualized in terms of basic awareness of present moment, varied at both the state (event) and trait (dispositional) levels.

1.1. Mindfulness as a disposition

Research on mindfulness has its roots in clinical psychology, and within this context, increasing mindfulness is seen as a means to increase well-being, and the existing research supports such a conclusion. Mindfulness training has been found to have a variety of positive effects, including increased well-being, reduced psychopathology and emotional reactivity, and improved behavioral regulation (e.g., Khoury et al., 2013). Consistent with these results, naturally occurring differences in mindfulness have been found to be positively related to measures of well-being such as life satisfaction and self-esteem (e.g., Brown &

* Corresponding author at: College of William & Mary, Department of Psychology, PO Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795, United States.
E-mail address: jbnzl@wm.edu (J.B. Nezlek).