

STUDENT RESEARCH WEEK

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The effects of mindfulness on social cognitive biases

Poster

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to see if the construct of mindfulness has an effect on different social cognitive biases. The concept of mindfulness can be seen in many cultures but it is the increased interests of eastern philosophies like Buddhism and yogic practices that has brought mindfulness to the attention of many in the western world. With the increased interest and prominence of mindfulness in the western world it is important to research the possible benefits or hidden side effects of mindfulness. Mindfulness claims to be a state of mind that allows one to see the world in an unbiased way. However, there has been a surprising lack of research on how, or if, mindfulness affects social cognitive biases. We hypothesize that people high in mindfulness will be less affected by biases. To test this we designed the study to test four different biases; anchoring, loss aversion, false polarization; and awareness of bias. Participants are randomly assigned to one of three conditions. The control condition consists of participants answering questionnaires along with measures of mindfulness and personality. In the experimental conditions participants are either assigned to listen to a brief mindfulness recording, or a brief relaxation recording. We added the relaxation condition to control for the possibility that people are simply relaxed by mindfulness the mindfulness recording and that relaxation is the cause of reduced biases, not mindfulness. Following the recording both experimental groups are required to complete the same questionnaires the control group completed. If our hypothesis is correct and mindfulness is useful at reducing biases it could further validate an exercise that was thought to be pseudoscience only a few decades ago.