



# Being Mindful:

## Facilitating Enhanced Personal Integrity and Interpersonal Honesty

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Honesty as a psychological construct is both poorly defined and insufficiently understood. Increasingly, however, honesty as a dynamic in interpersonal relationships has come under closer scrutiny and is recognized as an essential component of healthy and meaningful relationships of all forms.<sup>1</sup> Rogers conceptualizes honesty in terms of the state of congruence in which an individual does not deny himself the feelings being experienced and is willing to express them and be open to others.<sup>2</sup> “During an honest moment, the individual experiences what is available to his awareness.”<sup>1a</sup> In an honest interaction, the experience will be “transparent,” or available to each person’s awareness. Honesty is therefore defined by a close matching of what is being experienced and what is being expressed by the individual.<sup>3</sup> Since honesty plays such a vital role in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, it must be employed in order to foster self-growth and to develop healthy and meaningful relationships. This emphasis on individual experience and awareness of honesty in interpersonal communication has guided the present research in its study of the relationship between mindfulness and various forms of honesty.

Mindfulness is an element of consciousness that is characterized by a heightened state of awareness in which an individual is attentive to being in the present moment. This enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality has been shown to be associated with enhanced self-awareness, self-regulated behaviors, and positive emotional states.<sup>4a</sup>

Robert Sternberg has thoroughly examined the concept of mindfulness, and he considers three possible conceptions of it: 1) that mindfulness should be understood as a cognitive ability—people differ in their capacity to think in a mindful way, much as people differ in memory or intelligence; 2) that mindfulness is a personality trait, and is thus a stable disposition, much as would be extraversion or neuroticism; or 3) that mindfulness is a cognitive style that represents a preferred way of thinking.<sup>5</sup> He concludes that while mindfulness has characteristics of all three, it seems closest to being a cognitive style.<sup>5</sup> However, as Langer and Moldoveanu point out, “a style is not expected to change over time and through different circumstances, whereas the essence of mindfulness is change.”<sup>6a</sup> They further assert that a particular cognitive style cannot be mindful by definition

as sensitivity to the novel, and thus the unexpected, are key components of mindfulness. Sternberg agrees that construct validation is required to address the question of whether mindfulness is more static or unstable in nature.<sup>5</sup> Although many difficulties are associated with classifying the nature of mindfulness, the various measures of well-being associated with mindfulness have been analyzed and shown to be true of both dispositional and state mindfulness.<sup>4b</sup> Therefore, regardless of how one chooses to categorize the construct of mindfulness, it has been found to be associated with well-being.

It has been proposed that the self-endorsed behavior regulation found to be a consequence of mindfulness may be important in disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavior patterns.<sup>7</sup> Dishonesty in one’s interpersonal relationships, for example, is a behavior pattern generally considered to be unhealthy. Overt measures of dishonesty generally examine admissions of dishonest acts, rationalizing dishonest behaviors, being lenient toward others who are dishonest, and believing that most people would engage in dishonest activity.<sup>8</sup> However, dishonesty may manifest itself in a variety of other ways associated with interpersonal relations, including deception both of oneself and of others.

Social desirability is a response style in which individuals tend to present themselves in such a way that makes them look better, or, alternatively, that avoids making them look bad.<sup>9</sup> There appears to be a dichotomy inherent in social desirability responding (SDR) between self-deceptive positivity, which is an honest but overly positive self-presentation, and impression management, which is self-presentation tailored to an audience. Impression management also appears to consist of both the enhancement of good traits as well as the denial of negative ones.<sup>10a</sup>

In the case of self-deception, it has been proposed that “in order to be self-deceived an individual must hold two contradictory beliefs; these beliefs are held simultaneously; one belief is not subject to awareness, and the unawareness of this belief is motivated.”<sup>10b</sup> Although within psychology it is traditionally assumed that people are necessarily aware of their cognitions, the term self-deceptive implicitly prohibits such an assumption.<sup>10c</sup> The lack of awareness associated with self-deception would imply that less mindful individuals would tend to be more self-deceptive.

Awareness and, consequently, mindfulness may be applied to other forms of deception within an interpersonal context. More mindful individuals are generally perceived as being more genuine than less mindful individuals, and this audience reception has been shown to increase positive effect.<sup>6a</sup> Mindfulness in interpersonal communication should ultimately benefit both participants, whereas a lack of mindfulness in communicative practices “often results in misunderstanding and misperceptions among communicators.”<sup>6b</sup> Thus, increasing mindful awareness in interpersonal communication can deepen and broaden social understanding.

Indeed, mindful individuals have been found to be more competent in conversational interaction. Studies by Waldron and colleagues showed that in conversing with a reluctant partner, competent interaction was characterized by using a “proactive and flexible approach that epitomizes mindfulness. Competent interactants were found to use more extensive and creative planning processes as they contemplated conversational moves.”<sup>11a</sup> This included looking further into the conversational future, anticipating more developed alternative partner responses and being more responsive to the immediate context as they constructed conversational plans. This enhanced cognitive engagement tended to put conversational partners at ease and facilitated the achievement of information-seeking goals.<sup>11b</sup> This shows that greater mindfulness in planning and executing conversational goals may enhance genuineness in social interaction and lead to substantial benefits in practical interpersonal communication contexts.

The various positive outcomes associated with mindfulness as it relates to individual integrity, honesty, and the enhancement of effective and genuine communication with others leads the present study to predict that mindfulness will also be related to differential measures of honesty. This will be manifest in mindful individuals being less self-deceptive, less likely to respond in a socially desirable manner, and more likely to be honest in interpersonal communications. To test these hypotheses, various measures of self-deception, social desirability responding, and interpersonal honesty in communication will be implemented.

Participants in this study were selected from a general pool of psychology undergraduates at the University of Rochester on a volunteer basis. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 23 (mean age = 19.17), with a total of 94 subjects, 58 of whom were female and 36 of whom were male. Upon completing the surveys, participants were compensated with chits redeemable for extra credit in their respective undergraduate psychology courses.

To operationalize the experiment’s variables, five survey measures were used. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) is a 15-item, 5-point likert scale ( $\alpha = .8125$ ) designed to measure one’s level of mindfulness as demonstrated through one’s attention and awareness to the present moment.<sup>4a</sup> To test for social desirability responding, the Marlowe-Crowne scale (1960), a 33-question true-false measure, was implemented ( $\alpha = .6585$ ). Two tests designed to assess honesty were also used. The Honesty in Interpersonal Relationships (HIP) scale designed by Snyder (1996) focuses on interpersonal honesty in different social contexts ( $\alpha = .8113$ ), and a 10-item subsection of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) scale by was adapted for the current study ( $\alpha = .8307$ ) to measure

honesty and personal integrity.<sup>2</sup>

Surveys were completed as part of a packet compiled and distributed by Dr. Kirk Warren Brown, which included several questionnaires of other Research Methods students, for their respective studies. Groups of participants were run in a room at the University of Rochester designated for the purpose through the Psychology department. Questionnaires were filled out via Scantron format with paper and pencil.

Descriptive statistics for the four measures employed are summarized in Table 1. Running a series of bivariate correlations with this data revealed, as predicted, a statistically significant correlation between mindfulness as determined by the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale and the two honesty measures, Honesty in Interpersonal Relationships, and the VIA-IS subsection Honesty/Integrity (HI) scale. However, there was no significant correlation between mindfulness and social desirability as measured by the Marlowe-Crowne scale. All correlations performed are shown in Table 2.

The HIP scale and the VIA-IS HI scales were both correlated with the MAAS. The strength of these relationships is demonstrated in a moderate correlation of .279 ( $p < .01$ ) for mindfulness and interpersonal honesty, and a slightly smaller correlation of .217 ( $p < .05$ ) for mindfulness and honesty/integrity. The similarity of these patterns of relationships and the fact that the values are very close statistically suggest that the scales may in fact be measuring the same trait, and that honesty and integrity may be linked. Further statistical analyses showed a strong significant correlation between interpersonal honesty and honesty/integrity, with a correlation value of .307 ( $p < .01$ ). This correlation and the analogous results of the two scales provide an indication of the internal validity of the scales employed, as the scales appeared to measure the traits for which they were intended.

These results indicate that a heightened attention and awareness of the present moment as operationalized by the MAAS measure of mindfulness is strongly associated with higher levels of self-reported interpersonal honesty and

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MCMEAN	.12	.70	.3861	.12991
HIPMEAN	2.90	4.50	3.7550	.31071
HIMEAN	1.00	5.00	3.9645	.58726
MASMEAN	2.07	5.53	3.8369	.65480

Valid N (listwise) 94

**Table 2. Pearson Correlations**

	HIMEAN	MCMEAN	MAASMEAN	HIPMEAN
HIMEAN	1	.172	.217*	.307**
MCMEAN	.172	1	.161	.178
MAASMEAN	.217*	.161	1	.279**
HIPMEAN	.307**	.178	.279**	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
 \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

attitudes regarding honesty and personal integrity. Social desirability as measured by the Marlowe-Crowne scale was not found to be correlated with mindfulness ( $r = .161$ ). Further analyses determined that the Marlowe-Crowne scale was also not significantly correlated with either interpersonal honesty ( $r = .178$ ) or honesty/integrity ( $r = .172$ ) as measured in this study. This lack of correlation between the Marlowe-Crowne scale and these other measures of honesty suggest that social desirability is a separate phenomenon than honesty and integrity, which appear to be linked.

The present study assessed the prediction that mindfulness operationalized by the MAAS would be related to various measures of honesty. The results showed that, as predicted, mindfulness appears to be related to personal honesty and integrity as well as interpersonal honesty. However, inconsistent with the hypothesis, there was no clear relationship between mindfulness and social desirability responding as measured by the Marlowe-Crowne SDR scale. This suggests that mindful individuals are aware and attentive to the present moment and their emotional states, and that this heightened awareness facilitates honest and genuine interactions with others. The interpersonal experience is thus more likely to be “transparent” to the individuals involved and there will be a close matching between what a mindful individual experiences and what is expressed to the conversational partner, as Rogers has proposed.<sup>3</sup>

This finding is supported by studies done by Waldron and colleagues in which it was found that competent conversational individuals, or those who were best able to obtain sensitive information from reluctant partners in a manner that minimizes social discomfort, tended to be “more responsive to the immediate context as they constructed conversation plans,” employing a “proactive and flexible approach, which epitomizes mindfulness.”<sup>11c</sup> The authors concluded that “greater mindfulness prior to and during communication can accrue substantial benefits in a variety of important practical communication contexts,” and one of these benefits appears to be an increase in interpersonal honesty.<sup>11d</sup>

The reason that mindfulness would be associated with honesty but not social desirability is not immediately apparent; intuitively, self-deception and impression management would seem to be inherently linked with forms of dishonesty. However, there are several possible explanations for these findings. One possible reason is that while the Honesty in Interpersonal Relationships and the Honesty/Integrity scales were both measuring the same trait (ostensibly, honesty), the Marlowe-Crowne measure of social desirability responding addresses a completely different phenomenon; that is, honesty and SDR are not related as had been assumed.

Another possibility involves the fact that honesty is a difficult concept to measure. Actual honest interactions were not definitively measured by any of the scales employed. Only “what was perceived to be true by the participants” and self-reported as such was available for analysis. “The definition of honesty was therefore left to the participants.”<sup>1b</sup> What one individual may have considered honest may have been very different from another’s idea of honesty, and therefore validity may have been compromised. It was essentially left

to the individual to personally define “honesty,” and as a result, the scales measuring honesty (Honesty in Interpersonal Relationships and Honesty/Integrity scales) may have made it much more salient to participants what was being assessed than the other scales.

Conversely, the Marlowe-Crowne scale, measuring SDR, a less salient form of dishonesty, may have facilitated participants answering more genuinely. Though a weak trend, the results for the Marlowe-Crowne scale ( $M = .3861$ ) showed that individuals generally tended not to respond in a socially desirable manner, which suggests that they were in fact being honest. It is difficult to separate the implications of these results from those of the honesty measures. If individuals were not responding in a socially desirable way, this suggests that they were probably being honest in self-produced reports on the other scales. Additional research with different measures of honesty and SDR will be essential in further exploration of this relationship.

Because no statistical relationship between mindfulness and social desirability was found in the present study, this could be a topic of further research. Perhaps the use of a different scale of social desirability responding could help to further explore the relationship between mindfulness and various types of honesty. The Marlowe-Crowne scale, although widely used and well validated, may not tap into the aspects of social desirability that were the initial target of study. The Marlowe-Crowne scale is designed to focus on impression management, or the tailoring of one’s behavior for an audience.<sup>9</sup> However, a different measure of SDR, the Balanced Inventory of Desirability Responding,<sup>9</sup> is divided into three subscales, assessing self-deception, impression management, and self-deceptive denial. Self-deception is especially of interest, both because of its association with a lack of awareness<sup>10a</sup> and because it is a much less salient form of dishonesty than the more overt measures present in some of the other scale. It was hypothesized that a mindful individual, by nature, would be more aware of himself, the present moment, and his experience and feelings about the present, and thus would be unlikely to employ self-deception. It is not clear that the Marlowe-Crowne scale properly tapped into this phenomenon. Although research analyses have indicated that the Marlowe-Crowne and BID-R measure the same construct (SDR), the partitioning of the different forms of social desirability may prove fruitful in getting at the true relationship between mindfulness and different forms of honesty and dishonesty.

This study has provided a valuable insight into an implication of mindfulness that had previously been unknown. This research has demonstrated the existence of a link between the quality of mindfulness and honesty, though much room is left for further exploration of this relationship. As individuals apply mindfulness to their lives, including how they perceive themselves and how they present themselves to and interact with others, we may be able to gain a deeper understanding of human nature. Though generally recognized as self-awareness, the concept of mindfulness could be applied to one’s awareness of the reality of social interaction. By practicing mindfulness in their daily interactions, people could learn to be more honest and genuine both with themselves and with others.

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