MINDFULNESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STRESS AS A PARENT: A LOOK INTO THE FIVE FACETS OF MINDFULNESS

by

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A THESIS

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Mindfulness has been regarded as highly effective in the prediction and reduction of stress in a variety of populations. The integration of mindfulness into a parenting framework has been of special interest as new parents are exposed to a variety of stressors. It is thus important to examine factors predictive of decreased parental stress. Mindfulness is broken down into measurable facets by the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) which is a validated self-report questionnaire for measuring dispositional mindfulness. The purpose of this study was to investigate how the five facets of mindfulness predicted parental stress, as reported by the Parental Stress Scales (PSS), in a sample of 87 mothers of healthy 12-week-old infants. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the *non-judgement of inner experience* facet of mindfulness significantly predicted parental stress. The facets of mindfulness and the role of non-judgement in the appraisal of parental stress are discussed alongside future directions for research.

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Introduction

One can never be truly prepared for the journey into parenthood. In a society plagued by concerns of money and career achievement, the most stressful responsibility in the world may not exist within a corporate office, on a deep-sea fishing expedition, or on the field of combat. Perhaps the most challenging, demanding, and at times unrewarding occupation, is also beautifully and amazingly complex. Before becoming a mother, a woman cannot truly understand the profound experience she will have after giving birth to a baby (Barrett & Fleming, 2011). Parents play a central role in their offspring's development. Yet those who become parents often do so with little training or preparation, without formal guidance, and without support and security beyond their own mental prowess (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat Zinn, 1997). The way one mentally navigates stress is often the most important protective factor in the turbulent sea of stressors when transitioning into motherhood and taking on the decades-long task which follows. A look into the structure by which parents bring present attention to and cultivate these protective faculties against parental stress is needed. This framework is known as mindfulness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as the "intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts, and sensations occurring in the present moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). As a relatively novel discipline in Western culture and the field of psychology, mindfulness finds its origins in Eastern philosophy and Buddhist tradition (Grossman et al., 2004). Mindfulness is cultivated by bringing conscious attention to things that many people normally neglect and is often contrasted

with automaticity or “going through the motions” in which attention is focused elsewhere—to the anxieties, plans, preoccupations, and fantasies in everyday life.

Mindfulness is both a state of mind and a practice. As a state of mind, mindfulness is the careful, considerate, and compassionate attention that is centered not on *doing*, but on *simply being*: that is, accepting the present as it unfolds rather than analyzing it. Those who practice mindfulness are able to look deeply and introspectively within themselves in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). It has been shown that clear attention to and awareness of experiences occurring in the present moment—central aspects of mindfulness—can also be utilized in effective, healthy parenting (Duncan et al., 2009).

Until recently, parenting has often been studied in terms of two dimensions: *parental warmth* and *parental control,* within a single parenting style such as *authoritative* parenting, *authoritarian* parenting, and *permissive* parenting (Baumrind, 1991). *Parental warmth* refers to the degree to which parents are accepting and responsive to their children. *Parental control* is the degree to which parents manage their children and can range anywhere from very controlling to having very few boundaries and rules (Baumrind, 1991). For example, a parent who is considered unresponsive and prone to rejecting their children would be considered low in *parental warmth*. This same parent may then be high in *parental control* with restrictive, punishment-heavy parenting style. This parent would be considered an *authoritarian* parent.

“Parenting style” has encompassed the majority of developmental parenting research, yet this dual-dimension and classification approach gives little insight into the

mechanisms by which parents manage their parenting role subjectively. Studying only one parental behavior or dual-dimensional construct may thus limit the consideration of a higher-order framework of parenting. Instead, parenting should encompass multiple dimensions regarding the subjective perception of being a parent, which extends interpersonally in the practice of parenting. These dimensions may include parental beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as personal, dispositional characteristics that influence how parents may perceive stress (Duncan, 2007). Studying these higher-order perceptions is not only important in the study of parents, but by extension their children. Examining these multidimensional constructs may then facilitate a better understanding of the parenting experience.

An alternative approach to studying “parenting style” is to examine mindfulness within a parenting framework or *mindful parenting* in which mindfulness is integrated into parents' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) defined mindful parenting as ‘‘paying attention to your child and your parenting in a particular way: intentionally, here and now, and non-judgmentally.’’ The conceptualization of mindful parenting involves the multifaceted embodiment of affective, cognitive, and dispositional mindfulness that is the interior landscape of our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. This internal, dispositional process of mindfulness then extends outward to the interpersonal parent-child interactions within parenting (Duncan et al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn 1997; e.g Bögels et al., 2013). The conceptualization of mindfulness as a dispositional, multifaceted concept has been supported through the research of Baer and colleagues (2006) who have identified five dimensions of dispositional mindfulness: *observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of*

inner experience, and *non-reactivity to inner experience*. *Dispositional mindfulness* is a set of qualities or traits that exist naturally within an individual to varying degrees and, in practice, is the tendency for mindful responding in daily life (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Recent research has indicated that individual differences in dispositional mindfulness may originate through experiences in early childhood (Pepping & Duvenage, 2016). Dispositional mindfulness has been found to be positively associated with mental health, self-esteem, optimism, openness, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction (Baer et al. 2004; Baer et al., 2006; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Truijens et al. 2015). Results from studies investigating the cultivation of mindfulness skills have also shown positive psychological functioning in those who practice mindfulness (Harrington et al., 2014), with long-term benefits including enhanced emotional processing, coping with the effects of chronic illness and life-stress, improved self-efficacy, and control of one's mental faculties (Baer et al., 2008; Grossman et al., 2004). Furthermore, dispositional mindfulness is associated with higher levels of mindful parenting practice, which is inversely correlated with dysfunctional parenting (Bruin et al., 2014) and long-term problematic internalizing in children and adolescence (Geurtzen et al., 2015).

Dispositionally mindful individuals are less psychologically hindered by exposure to stressors, as mindfulness has been shown to cultivate cognitive and emotional skills that are protective against stress (de Frias & Whyne, 2014). There is also evidence of an inverse relationship between dispositional mindfulness and levels of perceived stress (Prakash et al., 2015). When evaluating the potential for mitigating parental stress, it may be important to consider mindfulness as a more multifaceted

construct than basic stress prediction and reduction for parents. Much research has focused on negative predictors of parental stress (e.g. anxiety, depression, etc.) but little research has focused on positive dimensions. Focusing on the multiple dimensions of dispositional mindfulness as a predictor of parental stress will allow researchers and intervention scientists to examine positive parenting characteristics and outcomes.

Parental Stress

When confronted with stressors in the caregiving role, parents' own skills and mental abilities are crucial for the formation and maintenance of healthy coping as well as emotion and thought regulation (Duncan et al., 2009). According to Deater-Deckard (1998), *parenting stress* is an aversive psychological reaction to the demands of parenthood and can be experienced as negative feelings toward oneself and one's children. This form of stress can also be brought about by social and environmental circumstances in addition to childrearing responsibilities (Cronin et al., 2015). Folkman's (1997) Stress and Coping Theory outlines that when the appraisal of an event, such as the transition to parenthood, is seen as stressful and not met with adaptive coping, parents may experience distress that poses a risk to their well-being and to their developing child (Folkman, 1997).

The mother-infant bond, seen as fundamental to the human condition, also facilitates the exchange of stress between mother and infant. Biologically, mothers are more sensitive and receptive to cries of their newborn infants than fathers (De Pisapia et al., 2013). Infant stimuli have been shown to activate basal forebrain regions crucial for the regulation of brain circuits that are related to specific nurturing and caregiving responses, which then activates more general circuitry for handling emotions,

motivation, attention, and empathy (Swain et al., 2007). This indicates that the neural mechanisms for parenting and the perception of infants' distress are biologically tied to the well-being of the mother. Stressful life experiences during pregnancy have also been associated with psychopathology as well as cognitive and behavioral problems in offspring (Betts et al., 2014; Buitelaar et al., 2003; Dorrington et al., 2013). It is thus unsurprising that a smooth transition into parenthood followed by low maternal stress levels is viewed by most clinicians as critically important to positive parent and child outcomes (Deater-Deckard, 1998).

Application

The purpose of the present study was to investigate if dispositional mindfulness facets—*observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience,* and *non-reactivity to inner experience*—predict parental stress. Above all, the intention of this research is to highlight important predictors of maternal perceptions of stress. As stated previously, parenthood is perhaps the most challenging, yet often underappreciated role in society. The mother-infant bond is critically important to future outcomes for both mother and child. Much focus in the field of parental mental health has been on negative predictors (e.g., anxiety, depression, socioeconomic status, etc.) with very few studies examining the benefits of positive parenting dispositions. Furthermore, the scientific application of mindfulness has, for the most part, centered on the development of mindfulness-based interventions and studies demonstrating the effects of practicing mindfulness, while the extent to which dispositional mindfulness relates to stress within mother-infant relationships has not been

explored in depth on the facet level. Focusing on the multiple dimensions of dispositional mindfulness as a predictor of parental stress will allow researchers and interventionist programs to examine positive parenting characteristics and outcomes within the framework of mindfulness. Since mindfulness has been found to be related to maternal mental well-being, it is hypothesized that the five facets of mindfulness will predict parental stress. Significant mindfulness measures should be negatively associated with perceived parental stress, such that those who are high in mindfulness facets should report lower perceptions of stress.

By isolating predictive mindfulness facets, future research can more narrowly focus on these facets in this, and other contexts in which stress is present. This research will be used to illuminate the relation of dispositional mindfulness to stress in an interpersonal context. In addition, this thesis will be used to make the case for mindfulness-based intervention in stressed parents and bring attention to a crucial issue within modern American culture.

Methods

Participants

Participants in the study were mothers of healthy 12-week-old infants recruited for a longitudinal study conducted at the University of Oregon via flyers and in-person presentations at the Lane County Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC), which serves low-income families at risk for stress-related problems. Based on the statistical power needed to test study hypotheses, 100 mothers participated in the larger longitudinal study. However, only 87 fully completed the measures used in the present study. Mothers were at least 18-years-old and English speaking.

The average age of participants was 27 years old (*SD* = 5.43). Most mothers described their race/ethnic background as Caucasian (78.2%), which is reflective of the region's demographics. Most reported their current relationship status as married (46.0 %) or that they were living with someone (34.5%). A smaller percentage indicated that they were in a legal/registered domestic partnership (4.6%), single (4.6%), dating (9.2%), and as separated (1.1%). The majority of the mothers reported the relationship was with the biological father of their infant (93.5%). Most of the mothers (47.1%) reported attending some college (without graduation or two-year post high school degree) while 25.3% reported attaining a high school education/equivalent. Regarding annual household income of the families, 32.2% earned less than $5,000, 5.7% between $5,000-$9,999, 9.2% between $10,000 - $19,999, and 21.8% between $20,000 - $29,999. The remaining four income brackets of $30,000 - $39,999, $40,000 - $49,999, $50,000 - $74,999 and $75,000 - $99,999 encompassed less than 30% of the participants.

Procedure

Participating mothers completed a total of four postnatal assessments in a longitudinal study at 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, and 18 months. After giving informed consent and permission for their infant to take part in the study, mothers were given the Time 1 (T1) Questionnaire for mothers of 12-week-old infants, which included the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ, Baer et al., 2006) and the Parental Stress Scale (PSS, Berry & Jones, 1995) among several other measures of maternal and infant adjustment. The T1 Questionnaires were completed by mothers in their own homes online via Qualtrics software and typically took 1-1.5 hours to complete.

Measures

Parental Stress

The 18-item Parental Stress Scale (PSS, Berry & Jones, 1995) examines the degree to which parenting situations are perceived as stressful. Using a 5-point Likert scale, mothers indicated how "strongly" they agree or disagree with statements such as "Caring for my child sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give" and "I enjoy spending time with my child" (reverse scored) (Berry & Jones, 1995). The PSS measures how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloading parents find their lives. The PSS was chosen for its ability to isolate and examine stress as a result of parenthood without confounding results with financial, marital, or other general life stress. The PSS is the most widely used psychological test that measures the perception of parenting stress specifically. Overall possible scores range from 18-90. This scale was used as an outcome measure in this study with higher scores indicating high levels

of parenting stress. The reliability of the PSS was close to the acceptable range (α = .68).

Mindfulness

The 39-item Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006) assesses mindfulness qualities and characteristics in day-to-day life using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "never or rarely true" to 5 = "very often or always true"). The FFMQ comprises the following subscales: *Observing, Describing, Acting with awareness, Non-judging of inner experience, and Non-reactivity to inner experience. Observing* (α = .83) measures the tendency to notice or bring attention to sensations, cognitions, and emotions characteristic of internal experience as well as external experiences such as signs, sounds, and smells. *Describing* (α = .47) measures the ability to verbally put experiences into words. *Acting with awareness* (α = .87) measures the ability to bring full, present moment awareness and focus to daily experiences and activities. *Non-reactivity to inner experience* (α = .82) measures the propensity to let thoughts and feelings flow through the present moment without becoming distracted, or getting "carried away" by them. *Non-judging of inner experience* (α = .88) measures one's ability to be non-evaluative in the thoughts and feelings occurring in the present moment (Baer et al. 2006). Internal consistency of the FFMQ has been investigated extensively with adequate to good Cronbach's Alphas (Baer et al., 2006, 2008).

Example items for each of the facets are:

1. Observing —*"I notice the smells and aromas of things"*
2. Describing— *"I am good at finding words to describe my feelings"*
3. Acting with awareness— *"I find myself doing things without paying attention"* (R)

4. Non-reactivity to inner experience—*"I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them"*

5. Non-judging of inner experience—*"I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I should not feel them"* (R)

(Items indicated with (R) are reverse-scored) (Baer et al., 2006).

For all but the *non-reactivity to inner experience* facet, possible scores range from 8-40 for *observing, describing, acting with awareness,* and *non-judging of inner experience.* For *non-reactivity to inner experience,* scores range from 7-35.

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using IBM's SPSS® version 23. Descriptive analyses were conducted using demographic information provided by mothers. Further, descriptive analyses were also performed for the PSS, the FFMQ, and FFMQ subscales to assess means and standard deviations. In addition, Pearson intercorrelations among the PSS and mindfulness subscales were obtained. Multiple regression models tested FFMQ subscales: *observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience,* and *non-reactivity to inner experience* as predictors of parental stress (PSS).

Results

Mean scores on FFMQ subscales were as follows: *Observing*, *M* = 26.08 (*SD* = 7.04); *Describing*, *M* = 29.58 (*SD* = 7.04); *Acting with Awareness M* = 32.19 (*SD* = 5.77); *Non-judging*, *M* =32.55 (*SD* = 6.25); and *Non-reacting M* = 20.93 (*SD* =6.09). Mothers had a mean PSS score of *M* = 31.89 (*SD* = 7.19) in parental stress.

Intercorrelations for the five facets of mindfulness are shown in Table 1. Overall, the facets show modest correlations with each other with the exception of the *non-judging* facet, only shows a significant positive association with *acting with awareness*.

A multiple regression analysis was used to test if the five facets of mindfulness (as measured by the FFMQ), significantly predicted parent's ratings of stress (measured by the PSS). All facets were entered as simultaneous predictors with results indicating that mindfulness significantly explained 16.8% of the variance in parental stress ($F(5,81)= 3.260$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .168$). Participants' predicted parental stress is equal to 50.280 - .218(OBS) - .234 (DES) +.013 (AA) -.320 (NJ) +.202 (NR). Parents' stress decreased $\beta = 0.28$ ($b = 0.32$) units as *non-judging* increased by 1. *Non-judging* was the only facet to significantly predict parental stress. This effect was moderate, but significant.

Discussion

The present study tested five dispositional mindfulness facets as predictors of parental stress. The results showed that only *non-judging of inner experience* significantly predicted parental stress levels within the present sample of mothers. Moreover, mothers with higher levels of *non-judging of inner experience* showed less parenting stress. This finding partially confirms the hypothesis that mindfulness facets predict lower parental stress. Taken together, dispositional mindfulness facets explained 16.8% of the variance in parental stress. The results of this study offer a foundation for further exploration of the dispositional characteristic of non-judgment in the appraisal of parental stress.

Consistent with other facet-related mindfulness research, the present study found *non-judging of inner experience* to be a significant predictor of low parental stress. Baer et al. (2006) found *non-judging* to be the most predictive of lower scores measuring negative psychological symptoms such as neuroticism, thought suppression, poor emotional regulation, and experiential avoidance. Similarly, Cash and Whittingham (2010) also performed multiple regression analyses on the five facets finding a similar effect for *non-judging* in the prediction of depression, anxiety, and stress. Results of facet-related mindfulness studies have also shown *non-judging*, specifically, *non-judgmental acceptance of parental functioning*, to be negatively associated with adolescents' internalizing problems. Another study by Geurtzen et al. (2014) used the Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting scale (IM-P; Duncan, 2007), which directly measures mindful parenting as opposed to dispositional mindfulness. Their findings indicated that the children of parents who reported high levels of non-judgmental

acceptance of their own behavior and functioning as a parent reported fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety. Connecting this with the present study's findings, it is possible that being more non-judgmental in the parental role provides an advantage in the ability to handle parental stress.

It is possible those who are non-judgmental in disposition (i.e., in the appraisal of stress) are also mindful parents consistent with criterion of the IM-P. As shown in de Bruin et al. (2014), dispositional mindfulness (as measured by the FFMQ and FMI) is associated with higher levels of mindful parenting (IM-P). This indicates that while these scales for measuring mindfulness have different nuances, they may tap a common core characteristic.

Duncan's (2007) facet of *non-judgmental acceptance of parental functioning* encompasses openness and non-judgmental receptivity to a child's articulation of thoughts and emotions (e.g., "I am good at listening carefully to my child´s ideas, even when I disagree with them."). She notes that this facet is rooted in the *acceptance* of present moment experience (Duncan, 2007; Duncan et al. 2009). Brown & Ryan (2004) argued that *acceptance* is a crucial component of mindfulness included in non-judgmental observation. Yet, the findings of Baer et al. (2006) and Brown and Ryan (2004) indicated that the inclusion of *acceptance* within mindfulness questionnaires yielded no advantage in the prediction of criterion measures when creating the FFMQ. According to Baer et al. (2006), items using the term *accept*, may have been less useful in the clarification of the facets of mindfulness due to the ambiguity of the term and the fact that some respondents may associate acceptance with approval of undesirable conditions or with passive resignation. Yet, the findings of these researchers suggest

that *non-reactivity* and *non-judging of inner experience* operationalize acceptance as useful and valid measures. For example, to *accept* an experience, such as feeling stressed, might include refraining from harsh judgments or self-criticism. Perhaps acceptance may then act a core component of *non-judging* in the appraisal of parental stress.

Mindfulness as measured by the FFMQ, according to Corthorn & Milicic (2015), was more consistently related to general and personal aspects of the mother's own mental health, while mindful parenting according to the IM-P was predictive of stress specific to a mother's role as a mother as well as parent-child interactions and judgments about their child. Moreover, these researchers found that the *non-judgmental acceptance of parental functioning* subscale of the IM-P was highly correlated with the FFMQ's subscale *non-judging of inner experience* consistent with the results of de Bruin et al. (2014). Furthermore, both subscales were found to be the most predictive of parental stress, depression, anxiety, and general stress. When interpreting exactly why *non-judging of inner experience* predicts lower parental stress, past results indicate that a general, dispositional ability to be non-judgmental in the appraisal of one's own inner experience may be related to less judgment in a mother's interpersonal role as a parent when confronted with parental stress.

The above discussion highlights research congruent with the results in the present study. The facet of *non-judging of inner experience* significantly predicts lower levels of parental stress and is consistent with similarly operationalized definitions and associations between mindfulness and stress in parents. The aforementioned research supports the results of this paper and further indicates that future research into the

dispositional facet of *non-judging* and *acceptance* to both inner and interpersonal experiences may be beneficial for this population and others in the context of parental stress.

Limitations

Demographically, the population studied does not represent the general population. Descriptive statistics have indicated that the majority of our sample was Caucasian, which should be taken into account, as future research would benefit from sampling a more ethnically diverse population. Because this study took part in Lane County where, as of 2014, the population of people identifying as Caucasian was 90.1% and for Oregon in general, 87.9% (U.S. Census Bureau), the demographics of this sample were representative of this particular region.

It should be addressed that the place of recruitment, the Lane County Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC) was chosen not only because of its access to expecting mothers but also because it serves low-income families at risk for stress-related problems. Research has indicated that depressive symptoms, economic hardship and low socioeconomic status, are unique predictors of increased parenting stress (Mortensen & Barnett, 2015; Mcloyd 1990). Socioeconomic status (SES) has been shown to be a significant factor in the way parents rear their children largely in response to the different circumstances in which they live and interact with the world and their children (Hoff-Ginsberg et al. 1995). Further, postnatal parental stress has been found to influence child development by inhibiting parental involvement and nurturance particularly in those in low-SES thresholds (Hackman et al. 2010). Typically, adolescents and children from low-SES households show higher cortisol levels (the

stress hormone) than children from middle to high-SES households. Furthermore, regardless of the children's SES later in adulthood, cortisol output has been shown to be permanently altered by mother's SES related stress in their infancy (Clearfield et al., 2014).

According to the descriptive statistic of average annual household income, over 70% of participants within this study reported income below $29,999 USD with the largest group (32.3%) reporting under $5,000 annually. 2015 Oregon federal poverty guidelines have indicated a gross yearly income of $24,250 and below for a family of four as the poverty threshold (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2015). It appears that much of the population sampled falls into this financial range.

Further limitations include reliability of the parenting stress measure. As a general rule in statistics, an alpha coefficient below $\alpha = .70$ is considered questionable or poor reliability. The PSS had a reliability score of $\alpha = .68$, which fell below the acceptable benchmark. While the prediction of parental stress by *non-judging* is consistent with past research, perhaps future research would reexamine the PSS in this context as research has previously demonstrated good internal consistency for this scale (Berry & Jones, 1995; Mortensen & Barnet, 2015). It is postulated that the low internal reliability of this scale may stem from the small question bank (18 items) or the size of the present sample.

Most subscales demonstrated good internal consistency with the exception of *describing*. Baer et al. (2006) cautioned that the FFMQ "requires extensive additional validation in a range of samples," for this sample, it is apparent that *describing* falls short in terms of construct validity. Interestingly enough, *describing* has been criticized

as conceptually different from other frequently used definitions of mindfulness (Grossman, 2008). Further use of the FFMQ in in a variety of samples may provide insight to why this result occurred.

Future Directions

Because the purpose of this paper was to investigate whether the five facets of mindfulness according to the FFMQ (Baer et al., 2006) were predictive of parental stress, mindfulness was only measured using the FFMQ. Future research on this population would benefit from the cross examination of Duncan's (2007) Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting scale (IM-P) which directly measures mindful parenting, as opposed to the FFMQ focus on dispositional mindfulness in broader audiences. The FFMQ scale was chosen in this study for its wide usage and applicability. Future research into mindfulness in parents would benefit from investigating the FFMQ with the IM-P, as Bruin et al. (2014) and Corthorn and Milicic (2015) did. Mindful parenting and dispositional mindfulness in parents were used interchangeably in this research, and it is possible that there is inconsistency between these operationalizations of mindfulness. Based on the findings of Bruin et al. (2014) and Corthorn and Milicic (2015) discussed earlier, an assumption that non-judgment more generally applies to non-judgment in parenting seems warranted. However, future research would benefit from replicating the findings of past research and determining what functions similarly and what functions differently in these two scales.

All participants studied were mothers and were the biological parent to their infants. Future research would benefit from examining the infant's relationship with fathers and the perception of parental stress in fathers. The Parental Stress Scale (PSS;

Berry & Jones, 1995) was developed to examine the degree to which both mothers and fathers appraised their parenting interactions as stressful. Fathers also significantly contribute to the healthy development of children and co-parenting support for mothers. Fathers would be an insightful population to study in regard to the perception of parental stress in mothers with fathers as co-parents and in fathers themselves using the same measures in this study.

Intervention

In the field of mindfulness, programs have developed to build and apply mindful awareness qualities tapped by scales such as the FFMQ. Existing empirical evidence has suggested that mindfulness-based interventions such as *Mindfulness- Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR, Kabat-Zinn,1991) and *Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting* (MBCP, Duncan & Bardacke, 2009) can mitigate parental and pre-parental stress, improve psychological well-being, alleviate anxiety and depression, and improve interpersonal relationships between mother and child (Duncan & Bardacke, 2009; Grossman et al. 2004).

According to Bögels et al. (2013), parents who are taught mindfulness skills are more likely to experience reduced impulsivity and parental stress while noticing improvement in marital relationships and co-parenting skills. These researchers evaluated the acceptability and effects of Mindful Parenting Intervention in a mental health care setting, finding that the course improved both child's and the parents' internalizing and externalizing psychopathology symptoms, with improvements maintained after follow-up. The PSS can be used as a before and after measure to assess changes in parental stress levels for mothers/parents who have accessed targeted

support such as family support, parenting courses, and mindfulness-based interventions such as *Mindfulness- Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) and *Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting* (MBCP) among others. Furthermore, since *non-judging* has been found to be associated with low parental stress, future research and intervention should focus on building this particular quality. It may also be valuable to screen mothers who score low on mindfulness measures in order to target them for mindfulness-based intervention during early pregnancy or in early periods of motherhood.

Concluding Thoughts

It has been suggested that the cultivation of day-to-day, every day, dispositional mindfulness in the context of parenting and the preparation for parenthood is one approach for the future of stress intervention. The results discussed in this study highlight the importance of *non-judgment* in mothers' perception of stress as a parent. It is my hope that this research not only leads to future exploration into *non-judgment* and *acceptance* in regard to parental stress.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Parental Stress Scale (PSS)

The following statements describe feelings and perceptions about the experience of being a parent. Think of each of the items in terms of how your relationship with your child or children typically is. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following items by placing the appropriate number in the space provided.
1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Undecided 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

____ 1. I am happy in my role as a parent.
____ 2. There is little or nothing I wouldn't do for my child(ren) if it was necessary.
____ 3. Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give.
____ 4. I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child(ren).
____ 5. I feel close to my child(ren).
____ 6. I enjoy spending time with my child(ren).
____ 7. My child(ren) is an important source of affection for me.
____ 8. Having child(ren) gives me a more certain and optimistic view for the future.
____ 9. The major source of stress in my life is my child(ren).
____ 10. Having child(ren) leaves little time and flexibility in my life.
____ 11. Having child(ren) has been a financial burden.
____ 12. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child(ren).
____ 13. The behavior of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me.
____ 14. If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have child(ren).
____ 15. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent.
____ 16. Having child(ren) has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life.
____ 17. I am satisfied as a parent.
____ 18. I find my child(ren) enjoyable.

Scoring: To compute the parental stress score, items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18 should be reverse scored as follows: (1=5) (2=4) (3=3) (4=2) (5=1). The item scores are then summed.

Reference: Berry, J. O., & Jones, W. H. (1995). The Parental Stress Scale: Initial psychometric evidence. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12,* 463-472.

Appendix 2: Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)
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Please rate each of the following statements using the scale provided. Write the number in the blank that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you.

1	2	3	4	5
never or very rarely true	rarely true	sometimes true	often true	very often or always true

_____ 1. When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving.
_____ 2. I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings.
_____ 3. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions.
_____ 4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them.
_____ 5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted.
_____ 6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.
_____ 7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words.
_____ 8. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.
_____ 9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.
_____ 10. I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling.
_____ 11. I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions.
_____ 12. It's hard for me to find the words to describe what I'm thinking.
_____ 13. I am easily distracted.
_____ 14. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.
_____ 15. I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face.
_____ 16. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things
_____ 17. I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad.
_____ 18. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
_____ 19. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it.
_____ 20. I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing.
_____ 21. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting.

1	2	3	4	5
never or very rarely true	rarely true	sometimes true	often true	very often or always true

_____ 22. When I have a sensation in my body, it's difficult for me to describe it because I can't find the right words.

_____ 23. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.

_____ 24. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after.

_____ 25. I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking.

_____ 26. I notice the smells and aromas of things.

_____ 27. Even when I'm feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words.

_____ 28. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

_____ 29. When I have distressing thoughts or images I am able just to notice them without reacting.

_____ 30. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them.

_____ 31. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colors, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow.

_____ 32. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words.

_____ 33. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go.

_____ 34. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing.

_____ 35. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad, depending what the thought/image is about.

_____ 36. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior.

_____ 37. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail.

_____ 38. I find myself doing things without paying attention.

_____ 39. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas.

FFMQ Scoring instructions

For all items marked "R" the scoring must be reversed. Change 1 to 5, 2 to 4, 4 to 2, and 5 to 1 (3 stays unchanged). Then sum the scores for each subscale.

Observing

1, 6, 11, 15, 20, 26, 31, 36

Describing

2, 7, 12R, 16R, 22R, 27, 32, 37

Acting with awareness

5R, 8R, 13R, 18R, 23R, 28R, 34R, 38R

Nonjudging of inner experience

3R, 10R, 14R, 17R, 25R, 30R, 35R, 39R

Nonreactivity to inner experience

4, 9, 19, 21, 24, 29, 33

Reference: Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Hopkins, J., Krietemeyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment*, 13, 27- 45.

Appendix 3: SPSS Data

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
Parental Stress	87	36.00	31.8966	7.19017
Observe	87	29.00	26.0805	7.04011
Describe	87	28.00	29.5862	7.15696
Acting Aware	87	23.00	32.1954	5.77452
Nonjudging	87	31.00	32.5517	6.25943
Nonreacting	87	26.00	20.9310	6.09383
Total FFMQ	87	79.00	141.3448	20.50798

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Parental_Stress	87	19.00	55.00	31.8966	7.19017
FFM_OBS	87	11.00	40.00	26.0805	7.04011
FFM_DES	87	12.00	40.00	29.5862	7.15696
FFM_AA	87	17.00	40.00	32.1954	5.77452
FFM_NJ	87	9.00	40.00	32.5517	6.25943
FFM_NR	87	9.00	35.00	20.9310	6.09383
TOTAL_FFM	87	104.00	183.00	141.3448	20.50798
Valid N (listwise)	87				

Table I. Intercorrelations of the Five Mindfulness Facets of the FFMQ

Facet	Nonjudging	Describing	Nonreacting	Acting With Awareness	Observing
Nonjudging	x	.050	.183	.375**	-.166
Describing	.050	x	.350**	.315**	.550**
Nonreacting	.183	.350**	x	.250*	.435**
Acting with awareness	.375**	.315**	.250*	x	.153
Observing	-.166	.550**	.435**	.153	x

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

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

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.409[a]	.168	.116	6.75985	.168	3.260	5	81	.010	2.041

a. Predictors: (Constant), FFM_NR, FFM_NJ, FFM_DES, FFM_AA, FFM_OBS

b. Dependent Variable: Parental_Stress

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	50.280	5.584		9.005	.000					
OBS	-.218	.137	-.213	-1.590	.116	-.219	-.174	-.161	.571	1.752
NR	.202	.140	.171	1.445	.152	-.051	.159	.146	.731	1.367
DES	-.234	.128	-.233	-1.830	.071	-.301	-.199	-.186	.636	1.572
AA	.013	.145	.010	.088	.930	-.157	.010	.009	.763	1.311
NJ	-.320	.133	-.279	-2.405	.018	-.220	-.258	-.244	.765	1.307

a. Dependent Variable: Parental Stress

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