Eating Disorder Symptomatology and Mindfulness: are they related and what is their influence on Body Image, Identity, Personality and Quality of Life?

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B Science (Hons)

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The University of Newcastle, November 2011, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Clinical Psychology.
The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.
Chapter 2 of this thesis is in the form of a journal article which has been submitted and accepted for review by the journal Eating Disorders:

(Under Review). Eating Disorder Symptomatology and Mindfulness: are they related, what is their influence on Body Image, Identity, Personality and Quality of Life, and what does this mean for Clinical Intervention? *Eating Disorders*.

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ABSTRACT

Scope: The current study was designed to investigate the relationship between mindfulness and eating disordered symptom to inform treatment. Additionally, underlying factors including body image, self control, sense of self, identity, negative affect and distress, personality and quality of life, were also investigated in order to increase understanding about eating disorders and the interaction of these factors with the individuals’ capacity to be mindful.

Purpose: There has been increasing interest in the use of mindfulness and acceptance based therapies in treating various disorders and conditions, however evidence to support the application of mindfulness-based treatments for eating disorders is limited. The theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness-based approaches focus on underlying issues rather than eating behaviour itself. The importance of the research included in this thesis is highlighted by the serious health risks associated with eating disorders, as well as the inadequacies recognised with CBT as a psychological intervention for eating disorders.

Methodology: This research consisted of two studies. In Study 1 a battery of questionnaires including: the Eating Disorder Examination – Questionnaire, Kentucky Mindfulness Inventory, the Body Image Acceptance and Action Questionnaire, the Ego Identity Processes Questionnaire, Sense of Self Inventory and a measure of the Big 5 traits of personality; was administered online to first year psychology students at an Australian University (N=411). In Study 2 people diagnosed with an eating disorder presenting to a specialist service in NSW, Australia for treatment (N=10) completed the battery.

Results: Study 1 results in the student sample indicated a strong negative relationship between eating disorder symptoms and acceptance of body image. Observing alone as a
mindfulness skill was related to higher reported eating disorder symptoms, however the
mindfulness skills acceptance without judgment and action with awareness were related
to lower eating disorder symptoms. Body image Study 2 results also provided further
evidence for this relationship, with the clinical population producing a lower than
average capacity for Mindfulness. Further, findings in Studies 1 and 2 provided
evidence of an association between eating disorder symptomatology and additional
factors including body image, sense of self, self compassion, personality, self control
and quality of life, as well as high co-morbidity with other Axis I and Axis II mental
health disorders.

**General Conclusions and Implications:** These findings are consistent with theory that
certain aspects of Mindfulness (especially acceptance without judgment and action with
awareness) play a role in reducing distress, providing some support for a possible role
of mindfulness based interventions in treating Eating Disorders and additional evidence
for the application of Mindfulness based treatment approaches in this population.
Moreover, relationships with additional factors as well as high levels of co-morbidity
highlight the need for thorough assessment and support the holistic psychological
treatment approaches, focusing on the whole person rather than specifically targeting
eating disordered thoughts and behaviour.
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