Effects of Brief Mindfulness Exercise on Employment Interview Performance: An Exploratory Investigation

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Over the past decade, an interest in mindfulness research and practice has emerged within industrial-organizational psychology. Recent studies have indicated the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation for employee engagement, performance, health, and well-being (e.g., Dane & Brummel, 2014; Karlin, 2018; Reb, Narayanan, & Ho, 2015). In the current study, we investigated the effects of brief mindfulness-meditation exposure on interviewee performance in responding to interview questions in an employment interview. Participants were randomly exposed to either a guided mindfulness meditation or a lecture on nutritional benefits of various food sources before participating in a role play that involved reviewing a job description and answering structured interview questions. Participant responses to interview questions were scored by trained raters. Results suggest that participants exposed to brief mindfulness meditation performed better on the interview than those exposed to the nutrition lecture. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Mindfulness has been described as one's ability to focus on the present moment by paying non-judgmental attention to and awareness of one's current environment (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). It requires a deliberate and non-judgmental attitude and patience (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindful cognitive processing involves noticing sensory inputs rather than comparing, evaluating, or ruminating on those inputs (Bellinger, DeCaro, & Ralston, 2015). Research on the effects of mindfulness-meditation practice within clinical populations has revealed links between mindfulness and improved physical health symptoms as well as relief from stress, anxiety, depression, or psychological distress. Mindfulness meditation has also been associated with improvement in short-term life satisfaction and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Baer, 2003; Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2011).

During the past few years, an interest in mindfulness research and practice has emerged within the field of industrial-organizational psychology (Hyland, Lee, & Mills, 2015). For example, several recent studies have indicated the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation for employee performance (Karlin, 2018; Dane & Brummel, 2014; Zhang, Ding, Li, & Wu, 2013), employee engagement (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013; Malinowski & Lim, 2015) as well as employee health and well-being (Allen & Kiburz, 2012; Marzuq & Drach-Zahavy, 2012). Because of these potential benefits of mindfulness in the workplace, many organizations (e.g., Google, Aetna, Bank of America) have started implementing mindfulness-based training programs as a part of employee wellness initiatives (Reb & Atkins, 2015).

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While this research has focused primarily on health outcomes, there has been no research on the possible benefits of mindfulness meditation on applicant performance in selection contexts. Based on prior research on the effects of mindfulness-meditation training on student academic performance (e.g., Mrazek, Franklin, Phillips, Baird, & Schooler, 2013; Zeidan, Gordon, & Goolkasian, 2009) the current study proposes that applicant performance on employment tests, such as the employment interview, may be enhanced by practicing or participating in mindfulness meditation. Specifically, the objective of this study is to explore the effects of brief mindfulness-meditation exposure on interviewee performance in an employment interview.

Factors influencing Employment Interview Performance

One of the most common methods of assessing job candidates is the employment interview (Macan, 2009). Interviews serve several purposes for organizations, including attracting applicants to the organization, determining their fit with the job and the organization, and predicting their job performance (Chapman & Rowe, 2002). Prior research suggests that interviews can most commonly be differentiated based on the way information is collected from the applicants. For example, structured interviews involve the use of systematic procedures (e.g., asking a set of standard questions across all candidates and using scoring guides for interview responses) for eliciting job-related information from the candidates in order to evaluate applicants and make hiring decisions (Motowidlo et al., 1992). On the other hand, unstructured interviews collect information from applicants in a less systematic manner without any formalized scoring guide, and applicants are not necessarily asked the same set of questions (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994). Research on interview validity has consistently indicated that as compared with unstructured interviews, structured interviews have high criterion-related validity (McDaniel et al., 1994), have less adverse impact (Huffcut & Roth, 1998), and generally are perceived positively by candidates (Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004).

However, reviews of interview literature have suggested that despite decades of research on employment interviews, there is a scarcity of information regarding the factors that influence interviewee performance and how that performance is rated by the interviewer (Huffcut, Van Iddekinge, & Roth, 2011; Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000). To this end, Huffcut et al. (2011) proposed a theoretical model to better understand performance in selection interviews. According to this model, the relationship

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between interviewee attributes (e.g., mental ability, personality, qualifications, procedural skills and knowledge) and interviewer ratings is mediated by interviewee performance. The model further includes subgroups of factors that could influence interviewee performance (e.g., general attributes, qualifications), interviewer ratings (e.g., memory, biases, and errors), or both (see Huffcut et al., 2011, for a full review of the model). In the sections that follow we briefly review part of the model, discussing only the factors influencing interviewee performance.

Interviewee performance includes behaviors of applicants during the interview such as the manner in which they answer questions, non-verbal behaviors such as posture, as well as their articulation of responses to interview questions (Huffcut et al., 2011). According to Huffcut et al. (2011), in addition to general attributes and core qualifications, interviewee performance in an interview can be influenced by five broad groups of factors. These include *interviewer-interviewee dynamics*, *supplemental preparation*, *interview design considerations*, *demographic and personal characteristics,* and *interview-state influences*.

Given that an interview involves an interpersonal interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, Huffcut et al. (2011) propose that a number of *interviewer-interviewee* dynamics could influence this interaction. For example, social effectiveness tactics such as impression-management strategies (Higgins & Judge, 2004), social and political skills (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001) have been found to improve interview outcomes for interviewees (Levashina & Campion, 2007). On the other hand, interviewer personality may also influence interviewee performance. For example, research has indicated that extraverted and agreeable interviewers may elicit positive reactions from candidates, thus improving their overall performance (Graves, 1993).

Supplemental preparation pertains to additional training (e.g., interview coaching) that can help interviewees in self-presentation and prepare them to handle the interpersonal aspects of an interview. Prior research has indicated that interview training and interviewing experience increase an interviewee's supplemental preparation. For example, Tross and Maurer (2008) found that interview coaching increased an applicant's ability to answer difficult questions through well-structured organized responses. Similarly, interview experience may help interviewees develop basic interviewing skills, thus lowering their anxiety in an interview situation and positively influencing their performance (Fishman & Franks, 1992). Thus, Huffcut et al., (2011) propose that prior interview experience and current employment status may affect an applicant's level of motivation, level of self-efficacy, and level of anxiety, which may in turn influence their interview performance. For example, an applicant's interview performance may decrease due to lack of confidence and engagement if the applicant has not received job offers from previous interviews.

Interview design considerations are factors associated with the format of the interview (e.g., structure). Structured interviews have predeter-

mined content and rating mechanisms to reduce rater bias and errors (Motowidlo et al., 1992). When structured interviews are developed from a job analysis, it can be beneficial to employees in presenting their job-relevant skills (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997). However, because interviewees have less chance of influencing the content or direction of the interview discussion during a structured interview, these interviews are often perceived negatively by interviewees (Chapman & Rowe, 2002).

Demographic/personal characteristics include *interviewee attributes* (such as cultural background) that do not directly influence their ability to present their qualifications but may have an influence on their performance (Huffcut et al., 2011). For example, self-promotion is discouraged in collectivistic cultures that emphasize maintaining workgroup harmony, which is not the case in individualistic cultures that emphasize personal goals and self-promotion (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, an interviewee with a collectivistic background may not perform well in an individualistic cultural setting.

Interviewee state influences relate to the mindset of the interviewee coming into the interview including level of anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy. Huffcut et al. (2011) propose that interview-specific self-efficacy may be different from general self-efficacy as it may be dependent on the applicants' employment status or their experience in the job-search process, with multiple job offers leading to strong belief in their ability to succeed in an interview. Similarly, low interview self-efficacy may influence an applicant's ability to communicate a high level of motivation for the job, thus negatively influencing the applicant's interview performance. Finally, given that interviews are often stressful situations for applicants, Huffcut et al. (2011) propose that interview anxiety may also play a role in influencing interviewee performance. For example, Tross and Maurer (2008) found a negative correlation between interview anxiety and interview self-efficacy, suggesting that a high level of interview anxiety can lead to low confidence among applicants in their ability to perform well in the interview.

Of all the five factors discussed here, Huffcut et al. (2011) call for future research on interviewee-state influences, specifically understanding the mechanisms through which interviewee mindset can interfere with the recall of interview-relevant information and how their mindsets could be influenced. We heed to this call for research by investigating the effects of mindfulness meditation on interviewee mindset during an employment interview.

Specifically, drawing from the preceding discussion regarding interviewee-state influences, it appears that because of its evaluative nature, an employment interview may create anxiety for job applicants, which may in turn result in reduced interview performance. These findings have been observed in several research studies. For example, in a mock interview study with students, Young, Behnke, and Mann (2004) found that participants reported high anxiety before and during the interview, and anxiety levels significantly dropped only after the interview. Similarly,

McCarthy and Goffin (2004) found negative correlations between the five dimensions of interview-anxiety measure and interview performance. In another study, Tollenaar, Elzinga, Spinhoven, and Everaerd (2008) found that an applicant's ability to retrieve long-term memories decreases in conditions of stress and reports of false memories increases.

Taken together, these findings imply that despite their qualifications and ability to effectively perform the job for which they are applying, interviewees experiencing anxiety during the interview may receive lower scores, thus diminishing their chances of being selected. We propose that because of its ability to reduce distraction and help individuals to focus on the present moment (Brown et al., 2007), mindfulness meditation could be one intervention that may help improve interviewee performance in such situations.

Mindfulness Meditation and Interview Performance

According to Bishop et al., (2004) the operational definition of mindfulness includes two components:

> The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004; p. 232)

Mindfulness can exist as a trait or a state of consciousness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). State mindfulness is a temporary state of consciousness whereas trait mindfulness refers to a stable attribute that varies across individuals (Tanay & Bernstein, 2013). According to Kabat-Zinn (2005) all individuals have the ability to attain a mindful state; however, those high in trait mindfulness have the ability to maintain a mindful state of consciousness for extended periods of time with less effort. The goal of mindfulness-based training programs is to promote the practice of non-judgmental observation of present-moment thoughts, emotions, and body sensations with openness and acceptance through the use of self- or other-guided meditation, which focuses on specific objects, intentions, or internal and external environments (Bishop et al., 2004). The effectiveness of these meditation programs is based on the premise that with repeated mindfulness practice, individuals can develop a greater awareness of their beliefs and motivations, thus helping them to effectively cope with stressors (Chiesa & Serreti, 2009).

Long-term meditation practice has been found to prevent the deterioration of working-memory capacity during periods of high stress (Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga,Wong, & Gelfand, 2010; Shiverick, 2013) and enhance

attention (e.g., Beccera, Dandrade, & Harms, 2016). For example, in a study of military personnel being deployed for Iraq, Jha et al. (2010) found that military personnel who participated in an 8-week-long mindfulness-based training program displayed cognitive control of emotions as compared with those who did not attend the mindfulness-based training. In another study, Beccera, Dandrade, and Harms (2016) found a significant improvement in orienting and executive-control skills in a group of students who participated in an 8-week mindfulness intervention as compared with students in a waitlist-control condition. Similarly, Shiverick (2013) conducted a study with seven undergraduate students who participated in a weekly program of guided meditations on breathing, body sensations, thoughts, and emotions for one hour. Students were also encouraged to practice mindfulness daily for 15 minutes. Participants completed questionnaires at baseline and after four weeks. Results indicated a significant decrease in a measure of math anxiety following four weeks of mindfulness practice. Further, mindfulness presence was found to be positively correlated with acceptance and psychological well-being.

While many of these initial studies used extensive meditation interventions, recent studies have shown the benefits of even brief mindfulness-meditation exposure on cognitive processing. For example, Tang et al. (2007) found that as compared with a control group of students who received relaxation training, students who participated in five days of meditation practice (which also included integrative body–mind training) showed significantly better control of stress and attentional capabilities. In another study, Bakosh, Snow, Tobias, Houlihan, and Barbosa (2016), using a sample of elementary-school students, demonstrated that a 10-minute-per-day, fully automated mindfulness program significantly enhanced students' quarterly grades in reading and science as compared with a control group with no such intervention. Similarly, Ramsburg and Youmans (2013) investigated the effects of brief meditation sessions on the retention of learned information in college students and found that those who meditated scored better on the quiz than the control group who rested instead of participating in the meditation session. More recently, Mrazek et al. (2013) examined the effects of a 2-week mindfulness-training course on cognitive performance in undergraduate students. Findings indicated that mindfulness training improved graduate record examination (GRE) reading-comprehension scores and working memory capacity and it reduced the occurrence of distracting thoughts during the completion of measures of working memory and the GRE.

In the workplace, mindfulness meditation has been found to improve cognitive functions required for performing various job functions. For example, an insurance company that implemented a mindfulness program reported that its employees felt more energized, achieved a higher level of concentration, regularly met their goals, and were less affected by stressors (Karlin, 2018). Leroy et al., (2013), in an experimental study, investigated whether mindfulness training would influence employee engagement in the workplace. Results indicated that mindfulness train-

ing enhanced engagement by making employees *fully there* in the activity, improving the quality of the experience. Results also indicated that authentic functioning mediated the effects of mindfulness on work engagement, meaning that to become more engaged in work, participants needed to volitionally engage in work behaviors for self-determined reasons. The effectiveness of mindfulness meditation in these studies has been attributed to the increased ability to focus on the present moment and reduced distraction from the task at hand.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence of the effects of mindfulness meditation on increased ability of individuals to focus on the present moment and reduce distraction, thus resulting in beneficial effects on attention, memory, and cognitive processes. Furthermore, results also suggest that brief interventions may have effects similar to longer interventions.

According to Dane (2011), one reason why a state of mindfulness may influence task performance is because it provides a wide internal and external attentional breadth, allowing individuals to focus their attention on present-moment phenomena that are occurring externally as well as internally. Thus, a state of mindfulness attunes individuals to their own thoughts, beliefs, and emotions as well as external stimuli, which may help them in performing the task at hand by focusing on task-relevant information. In the context of a selection interview, it may be that an increased state of mindfulness may help reduce interviewee distraction and anxiety and direct an individual's attention to his or her own experiences, which may help them to recall past experiences and answer interview questions more effectively. Thus, we hypothesized that exposure to brief mindfulness meditation before the interview would positively influence interviewee performance on interview questions in an employment context. Specifically, it is expected that brief mindfulness meditation exposure will result in an increased state of mindfulness during the interview, which would result in improved overall performance.

> **Hypothesis 1a**: Mindfulness meditation will have a positive influence on interview performance.
>
> **Hypothesis 1b**: Individuals exposed to brief mindfulness meditation before the interview will perform better than the control group.

Method

Participants

Data was collected during two semesters from a total of 84 psychology students enrolled in a suburban university located in the Northeastern region of the United States. Participants were recruited through the psychology department's research-pool participation system. The study

was advertised on the sona-system website, and interested participants signed up for participation. Each participant received one research credit for approximately one hour of participation in this study.

Control group.

Ethnic distribution of the control-group sample was as follows: 64.3% participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 31% identified themselves as African American, 4.8% identified as Asian American. Average age of the participants was 19.30 years, 55.8% of the participants were female, 41.5% of the participants reported working between 11 and 40 hours per week in their current jobs, 83.7% reported having prior meditation experience, and 90.7% reported being familiar with the interview process.

Experimental (mindfulness) group.

Ethnic distribution of the experimental group sample was as follows: 68.3% participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 22% identified themselves as African American, 2.4% identified as Asian American, 4.9% identified themselves as Latino/Hispanic, and 2.4 indicated that they belonged to other ethnicities. Average age of the participants was 19.12 years, 71.4% of the participants were female, 41.5% of the participants reported working between 11 and 40 hours per week in their current jobs, 83.7% reported having prior meditation experience, and 90.7% reported being familiar with the interview process.

Procedure

The study was conducted in several sessions in a computer lab, with one participant per session. The study condition (mindfulness vs. control) was determined by a coin-toss prior to the participant's arrival. Next, participants were told that before participating in the actual study, they would be required to review and provide feedback on an audiobook that was under consideration for use in a health-psychology class the following semester and was unrelated to the study. After consenting to participation, participants were first given headphones and asked to sit comfortably in a chair in front of the computer. The experimenter then asked the participant to wear the headphones and began playing 35-minute audio excerpts (either mindfulness-meditation exercises or nutrition lectures). Participants were asked to carefully listen to the audio recordings and follow the directions provided in the excerpts.

After listening to the recordings, participants were asked to provide feedback on the quality of the recording. Next, participants were told to imagine that they were applying for the job of a customer-service representative in a retail sales company and were given a job description to review. Because the participants in this study were undergraduate students, it was important to choose a position description with which participants were familiar. According to Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price (2015), analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Sur-

vey data (2012–2013) indicated that 60% of students work in one of two career fields: sales and office-support occupations (34%) or food and personal-services occupations (26%) (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015). This suggests that the most likely jobs for undergraduate students might be in a service- or sales-related industry. Hence, the job description of a customer-service representative working in a retail sales company was chosen for this study. Participants were then asked to participate in an interview and answer four questions as a part of the selection process. The interview was conducted by trained experimenters, and the responses were recorded. Following the interview, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a measure of state of mindfulness. Upon study completion, participants were thanked, debriefed, and granted research credit.

Materials

Guided mindfulness meditation exercises.

For the experimental condition, excerpts from Mirabai Bush's (2012) mindful-meditation audio CD, *Working with Mindfulness* were used. The audiobook includes several guided mindfulness-meditation exercises for managing work behavior effectively. The guided meditations that were played during the experimental condition included *breath practice, enhancing listening and communication, walking with clarity, email with intention, and reminders for a mindful workday*. The excerpts were played for a total of 35 minutes. For example, the mindful-listening exercise included directions for sitting comfortably in a relaxed and alert state and then listening to the sound of a bell, acknowledging thoughts as they arise and letting them go and bringing attention back to the sound of the bell until the faintest sound could be heard. Next, the participants were asked to place their attention on any sound in their environment as it occurred with wide-open awareness, letting go of any thoughts, emotions, or memories that came into attention. The exercise ended with directions on how to practice mindful listening in daily life.

Health and nutrition lectures.

For the control condition, audio excerpts from Melissa Hartwig and Dallas Hartwig's (2014) audiobook, *It Starts with Food* on health and nutrition were used. The book includes various recorded lectures that describe the nutritional benefits of different types of food and how they affect the body. A 35-minute excerpt on the following topics was played during the control condition: *What Is Food;, Your Brain and Food; Healthy Hormones; Healthy You; The Guts of the Matter; Inflammation: No One is Immune; Sugar, Sweeteners, and Alcohol; Seed Oils; Grains and Legumes*. In accordance with Mrazek et al. (2013), we used a control group that was exposed to a lecture on nutrition to create the same frame of reference in participants in both groups. Thus, using this methodology ensured

that all participants participated in the study under the assumption that the preliminary step in the study was to evaluate two equally potential audiobooks that could be added to the curriculum in a health-psychology course. This in turn may have minimized motivation and placebo effects. Further, using a control group that uses similar material and duration as the experimental group allows for more confidence that the results observed are due to the manipulations used in the study.

Measures

State mindfulness.

Participants responded to a 15-item state-mindfulness component of the mindfulness measure developed by Tanay and Bernstein (2013) for manipulation-check purposes. Responses were scored on a scale of *1 = Not at all to 5 = Very well*. Example items include "while listening to the audiobook, I actively explored my experience in the moment" and "I felt that I was experiencing the present moment fully." Cronbach alpha reliability of the measure was .91.

Employment-interview questions.

According to ONET (2016; Occupational Information Network website developed by the U.S. Department of Labor), some of the main work activities associated with the job of a customer-service representative included establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, making decisions and solving problems, performing for or directly working with the public, communicating, and coaching and interpreting information for others. Further, previous research has indicated that customer-service and problem-solving skills were positively related to customer-service performance in retail jobs (Motowidlow, Brownlee, & Schmit, 2008). Based on these findings, we created four interview questions that were designed to assess customer-service skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. According to Chapman and Zweig (2005) interview structure can be categorized across four dimensions including *question consistency, evaluation standardization, question sophistication,* and *rapport building*, and interviews can be structured on one or all of these dimensions varying on a continuum from nonexistent to very high. Following these directions, a structured interview was used in the current study. Each participant was asked the same four questions related to the job of a customer-service associate and were given five minutes to respond to each question. Questions were adapted from sample behavioral questions provided by the Rotman Career Center in the Rotman School of Management (2016), and rating dimensions were adapted from behaviorally anchored rating scales developed by the State of Michigan Group One competency rating scales. Each question was scored on a scale from *1 = low* to *5 = outstanding* using a behaviorally anchored rating scale with behavioral examples provided for each level (see example interview item and associated rating scale in the Appendix).

Feedback on audio recordings.

Several items were used to ask for participant feedback on the audio recordings they heard during the study. Participants were asked to rate the sound quality and clarity of the audio excerpts on a scale of *1 = Very Bad* to *5 = Very Good*. They also rated the content of the audio on a scale of *1 = Not at all suitable* to *5 = Very Suitable*. Participants also indicated the suitability of the audiobook in a health-psychology course for undergraduate students on a scale of *1 = Not at all suitable* to *5 = Very suitable*.

Employment-interview scores.

Two raters (second and third authors) from the research group who were trained using frame-of-reference training (Bernardin & Buckley, 1981) determined interview scores. In a typical frame-of-reference training; raters are provided with performance standards for each dimension to be rated and are required to match ratee behaviors to their appropriate performance dimensions (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994). Any discrepancies in ratings across raters are resolved through discussion. Thus, frame-of-reference training allows the raters to receive immediate feedback on the appropriateness of their scoring (Roch, Woehr, Mishra, & Kieszczynska, 2012). As a result of this training process, raters are trained to share and use common conceptualizations of performance when providing their ratings (Roch et al. 2012). For this study the practice material included 12 previously audiotaped interview responses from student participants with the same interview questions. During training, interviewers first independently rated the recorded-interview responses and then discussed the reasons for any rating discrepancies from previously established expert ratings. After receiving training and completion of all data collection, each rater independently rated each interview and average score across raters on each dimension was computed. An average overall rating across interview dimensions was also computed to indicate overall interview performance. Rater agreement within 1 point on a 5-point scale was 95%.

Demographic questionnaire.

Participants also reported demographic information such as gender, ethnicity, age, GPA, work experience, and whether they had had previous meditation experience.

Data-analysis procedures.

The data-analysis procedure included first comparing the experimental and control groups on demographic variables and then proceeding with the main analysis. To investigate the main study hypotheses, we conducted a univariate ANOVA to investigate how the experimental (mindfulness) and control groups differed on overall interview performance. Second, to investigate whether the experimental and control groups differed on specific dimension scores on the interview, we used

a MANOVA, as it allows for evaluating the effects of group differences across all interview dimensions in one analysis.

Results

Means and inter-correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Before analyzing the data, the two groups were compared on demographic variables by conducting a one-way ANOVA with age, ethnicity, gender, GPA, and meditation experience as dependent variables and condition (mindfulness vs. control) as the between-subjects factor. Results indicated that the two groups were not significantly different on any of these variables, thus indicating that the two participant groups were similar. Next, to assess the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation on the participant's state of mindfulness, participant responses on state mindfulness measure were also compared across the two groups. State mindfulness scores were compared across the two conditions using a univariate ANOVA; results indicated a significant main effect $F(1, 84) = 4.55$, $p < .05$ with participants in the mindfulness condition scoring higher ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .75$) than the control condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .57$), thus suggesting that participants in the experimental condition experienced a higher state of mindfulness.

Next, participant ratings on the feedback provided on the audio excerpts were also compared across conditions. A one-way ANOVA with sound clarity (F (1,83) = .27, *n.s.*), sound quality ($F(1, 83) = .06$. *n.s.*), content suitability ($F(1,83) = 1.35$, *n.s.*), and overall suitability of the audio ($F(1,83) = .00$, *n.s.*) for use in a health-psychology course as dependent variables and condition (mindfulness vs. control) as the between-subjects factor indicated that the two groups were not significantly different on any of these variables, thus indicating that the two audio excerpts were perceived similarly by participants across both conditions.

To test the hypothesis regarding the effects of experimental manipulation on interview performance, first an average performance score

TABLE 1 INTERCORRELATIONS AMONG STUDY VARIABLES

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5	6
Problem Solving	–	.39**	.55**	.58**	.75**	.03
Interpersonal Skills	.49**	–	.62**	.62**	.77**	.10
Customer-Service Skills	.51**	.53**	–	.86**	.91**	.03
Teamwork	.46**	.69**	.65**	–	.92**	.19
Overall Interview Performance	.73**	.83**	.83**	.87**	–	.10
State Mindfulness	–.18	–.20	–.12	–.13	–.19	**(.91)**

Note. Values above the diagonal are for mindfulness condition and below diagonal are for control condition.

across all interview dimensions was computed. A univariate ANOVA with average performance rating as dependent variable and condition as between-subject factor indicated a significant main effect of condition on average performance rating F (1, 78) = 5.08, $p < .05$ partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Levene's test of equality of error variances was not significant $F(1,80) = .12$, *n.s.*, thus meeting the assumptions of the ANOVA. Thus Hypothesis 1a was supported. An examination of group means indicated that participants in the mindfulness group scored significantly better ($M = 3.21$, $SD = .85$) than those in the control group ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .87$) on overall interview performance. Thus Hypothesis 1b was supported.

To further investigate whether there were differences in individual performance-dimension ratings, a MANOVA with condition (mindfulness vs. control) as between subject-factor and interview-performance dimension ratings as dependent variable revealed a significant main effect, Wilks Lambda = .87, F (4, 73) = 2.72, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$, participant age, gender, ethnicity, meditation experience and grade were entered as covariates in the analysis. Box's M test of equality of covariances was not significant, and Levene's test of equality-of-error variance was also not significant, thus indicating that our data did not violate assumptions for MANOVA.

Follow-up Bonferroni corrections indicated that participants in the mindfulness condition scored significantly better ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .15$) than the control condition ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .15$) on the problem-solving dimension. Similarly, participants in mindfulness condition also scored significantly better on the teamwork dimension ($M = 3.38$, $SD = .18$) as compared with the control condition ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .17$). However, no significant differences were observed on participant scores on interpersonal skills and customer-service skills, even though the mean differences were in the expected direction.

Discussion

The effectiveness of mindfulness meditation has been recently investigated in the work context for employee performance (Karlin, 2018; Dane & Brummel, 2014; Zhang, Ding, Li, & Wu, 2013), employee engagement (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013; Malinowski & Lim, 2015) as well as employee health and well-being (Allen & Kiburz, 2012; Marzuq & Drach-Zahavy, 2012). However, none of this research has investigated the effects of mindfulness meditation on applicant performance in selection tests. In the current study, we specifically investigated the effects of brief mindfulness-meditation exposure on applicant performance in an employment interview. Our findings suggest that, in comparison with those who did not undergo mindfulness meditation, those who were exposed to a brief mindfulness-meditation exercise before participating in the interview performed better on the interview as indicated by interview scores. Our exploratory findings add to the employee-selection

Our exploratory findings add to the employee-selection literature by showing that mindfulness meditation may be helpful in (a) positively influencing applicant performance on selection interviews and (b) may be one technique that can help recruiters and interview coaches in training applicants for selection interviews.

literature by showing that mindfulness meditation (a) may be helpful in positively influencing applicant performance on selection interviews and (b) may be one technique that can help recruiters and interview coaches in training applicants for selection interviews.

Specifically, our results indicated that participants who were exposed to a brief mindfulness-meditation exercise before participating in the interview received overall high interview scores across all dimensions as indicated by the overall performance score. Furthermore, a comparison of participant scores on individual interview dimensions suggests that participants exposed to brief mindfulness meditation did significantly better on problem solving and teamwork dimensions but not on the interpersonal skills and customer-service skills dimensions. However, the group means on these dimensions were in the expected direction with participants exposed to mindfulness meditation scoring better than those in the control condition (see Table 2).

One reason for these findings could be attributed to the mindset of the candidates at the time of the interview (e.g., Arvey & Campion, 1982), specifically their interview anxiety. Although an individual's tendency to be anxious may be determined by personality (e.g., neuroticism), recent authors (e.g., Hoffman, 2011; Macan, 2009) have argued that interview anxiety is a separate and specific state. Because of their evaluative nature employment interviews may create anxiety for job applicants. On the other hand, cognitive research suggests that conditions of high stress can influence an individual's ability to retrieve information from long-term memory (e.g., Tollenaar et al., 2008). Furthermore, in the current study we used a structured interview, which involved having the interviewer record interviewee responses for scoring and evaluation; this could have resulted in increased evaluation apprehension for the interviewees. Therefore, it may be that in the current study, mindfulness meditation may have helped reduce this anxiety, thus enhancing the recall of interview-relevant information for participants in the mindfulness-meditation group. Specifically,

TABLE 2 INTERVIEW DIMENSION SCORES BY CONDITION

DIMENSIONS	CONTROL N = 42		MINDFULNESS N = 40	
	M	SD	M	SD
Problem Solving	2.73[a]	.14	3.35[b]	.15
Interpersonal Skills	2.66[a]	.16	2.86[a]	.16
Customer-Service Skills	2.95[a]	.17	3.40[a]	.17
Teamwork	2.78[a]	.17	3.38[b]	.18
Overall Interview Performance	2.79[a]	.13	3.22[b]	.13

Note. Group Means followed by same letters are not significantly different.

the mindfulness-meditation exercise used in our study involved maintaining focus on sensations of breathing for a brief period of time (35 minutes) despite personal concerns or frequent interruptions of unrelated perceptions. Therefore, it may be that when this ability to concentrate was redirected to a challenging task (e.g., answering employment-interview questions), it may have prevented the displacement of crucial task-relevant information by distractions, resulting in better interview performance.

Second, research in neuropsychology has indicated that a state of anxiety can lead to lack of control in a given situation and suppress episodic memory, which can lead to poorer performance (Lachman & Agrigoroaei, 2012). Thus, it may be that because the interview questions involved recalling information about past experiences and interactions with people, those in the control condition may have found it difficult to recall relevant information, whereas individuals in the mindfulness condition were able to focus on relevant experiences and recall information more effectively, thus receiving a higher overall score on interview performance.

Even though we did not measure interview anxiety directly, our manipulation check indicated that participants in the mindfulness condition experienced a higher state of mindfulness than those in the control condition; thus, it may be that increased state of mindfulness may have facilitated the recall of interview-relevant information for participants in the mindfulness condition resulting in better performance, which may not be the case for those in the control condition. However, future research should measure change in interview anxiety to determine whether this may be the case.

Taken together, these findings provide preliminary support for the usefulness of mindfulness meditation in improving applicant performance in employment interviews. Future research should also explore the effects of mindfulness-meditation practice on applicant performance on other assessment tools.

Study Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

The results of the current study provide preliminary evidence that brief mindfulness training could be beneficial in employee-selection contexts, especially for the applicants. One implication of these findings is for recruiters and interview coaches who may suggest brief mindfulness-meditation training programs for prospective candidates. These training programs could include using guided mindfulness-meditation exercises in the form of audio recordings to facilitate the experience of increased mindfulness before a testing situation. Furthermore, prior research has shown that structured interviews place an increased cognitive load on the interviewee (e.g., Van Iddekinge, Raymark, & Roth, 2005), and this negative effect on performance can extend to other cognitively loaded assessments used during the selection process (Bragger et al., 2016). This decrease in performance could potentially influence the selection chances of qualified individuals. Using brief mindfulness-meditation training could be one way to eliminate this negative effect.

It should be noted that the results of the current study should be interpreted within the context of the study's limitations. For instance, we used a student sample, and their data may differ from actual job applicants; thus, data in future studies should be collected from job incumbents and applicants in a variety of professions. Furthermore, even though we measured state mindfulness at the end of the manipulation, we did not measure baseline levels of state mindfulness at the beginning of the study. Future studies should measure change in state mindfulness to effectively capture the change and how it affects interview performance. Second, as discussed by Huffcut et al. (2011), the effect of interviewee-state influences on interview performance has been relatively less explored in the literature. In this exploratory study, we aimed to influence the applicant's mindset by providing brief exposure to mindfulness meditation and investigating the effect of this increased state of mindfulness on their performance in the interview. Furthermore, given the beneficial results of mindfulness training on student performance in academic contexts (e.g., Bakosh et al., 2016; Mrazek, et al., 2013), it may be possible that brief mindfulness-meditation training can influence applicant performance on other assessments such as cognitive-ability tests and situational-judgment tests that involve cognitive processing. Thus, future research should investigate the effects of mindfulness exposure on applicant performance on these tests.

In addition, to further understand how and why mindfulness has beneficial effects on interview performance, the role of individual-difference variables should be explored. For example, mindfulness researchers theorize that the beneficial effects of mindfulness can be attributed to the enhanced ability for self-regulation of thoughts and emotions (e.g., Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007), which is also a characteristic associated with those high in conscientiousness. Similarly, both mindful and conscientious individuals typically focus on responding effectively through deliberation and acknowledgement of present-moment demands (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Thus, it may be possible that the effects of mindfulness meditation on interview performance may be moderated by conscientiousness such that those higher in conscientiousness may perform better than those lower on the trait. Similarly, the personality trait of openness to experience implies receptivity to experience, including one's own inner feelings and emotions. Open individuals are attentive to and curious about both their inner and outer worlds (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As mindfulness emphasizes attention to and awareness of one's experiences as well as an approach to these experiences that is curious, open, and accepting (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), it may be possible that individuals high in openness to experience may perform better on interviews following exposure to mindfulness-meditation exercises.

Finally, while participants in the mindfulness condition significantly performed better on problem-solving and team-work questions as compared with the control group, this was not the case for interpersonal skills and customer-service skills questions. However, the means were in expected direction, and it may be that a higher sample size may result

in significant differences on these dimensions. One alternative explanation for these findings could be attributed to recent findings regarding the relationship between trait mindfulness and creativity. Zedelius & Schooler (2015) found an overall negative relationship between mindfulness and creative performance. However, their findings also indicated that more mindful participants performed better when they were instructed to approach problems analytically, suggesting that mindfulness may be positively related to problem-solving ability. Because problem-solving and teamwork questions require an individual to think about the specific approach taken to address a situation at work, it may be that mindfulness meditation may have helped recall of such information. This may not be the case with interpersonal skills and customer-service skills, which are more behavioral dimensions. Future studies should investigate whether mindfulness meditation facilitates the recall of specific types of information from memory.

In summary, this study is the first to explore the beneficial effects of mindfulness mediation on applicant performance in a selection context, specifically in a structured interview. Even though our findings are exploratory in nature, they provide preliminary support for the effects of mindfulness meditation in the selection context and further open up avenues for future research within this area. Our findings also provide evidence for mindfulness meditation as a potential methodology for performance improvement in employment interviews.

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Appendix

Dimension: Customer Service Skills - Effectively meeting customer needs; building productive customer relationships; taking responsibility for customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Interview Question 3

Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to serve a customer effectively. What caused the situation that required this extraordinary effort? What did you do? What was the outcome?

1	2	3	4	5
– Does not ask appropriate questions to determine customer needs. – Offers easy and quick fixes that fail to solve the problem or meet the need. - Does not help the customer feel valued or appreciated. – Provides misleading or incorrect information to customers. – Fails to provide information in a timely manner; fails to follow up with customer concerns. – Shows impatience in dealing with customers. – Uses policy and procedures as a barrier.		– Exhibits understanding of customer relationships by expressing concern, following up, and resolving issues promptly. – Is polite, professional and courteous to customers. – Resolves customer issues by providing accurate and timely responses to customers. – Takes personal responsibility for meeting needs. – Displays authentic concern to and for the customer. – Balances provision of information with customers' capability to understand technical information.		– Gives the customer extra information that can be helpful. – Projects a highly energetic and enthusiastic attitude when interacting with customers. – Places customer as high priority. – Displays a "whatever it takes," "above and beyond," approach to satisfying the needs of the customer. – Proactively provides information to customers when they don't understand how to communicate their needs (or don't know what they need.) – Places customer as a high priority, responding ahead of schedule or unexpectedly; seeking out customer needs before customer expresses them.

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