



SYMPOSIUM/OTHER PROPOSAL

2014 APA Annual Convention

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- 1. Type of program:** Symposium
- 2. Title of program:** Mind, Body, and Creativity: Cognitive Mindfulness and its Cross-Cultural Extensions
- First index term: 36 Health Psychology/Behavioral Medicine
- Second index term: 16 Creativity
- 3. Brief Content Description:** Calling for healing the Cartesian divide between body and mind as an imperative for creativity, Ellen Langer's paradigm of cognitive mindfulness constitutes a psychology of the mind to which non-western psychologies can make significant contributions
- 4. Division to submit this proposal:** 01 - General
- None
- 5. Length of time requested on program:** 1 hr. 50 min.
- 6. Chair(s) of session:**
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- Membership status: APA Fellow

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- Title of presentation: Mind and Body in Severe Chronic Disorders: A Mindfulness Perspective
- Electronic Archiving: Yes
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Title of presentation: Identity, Creativity, and excellence

Electronic Archiving: Yes

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Title of presentation: Priming the Mind to see its Double: Mindfulness in a New Key

Electronic Archiving: Yes

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9. Accommodation request: None

10. Submit for CE: No

Mind, Body, and Creativity: Cognitive Mindfulness and its Cross-Cultural Extensions

Ellen Langer's paradigm of cognitive mindfulness situates creativity in the freedom of the mind to make new distinctions as well as to transcend existing boundaries between conventional object categories. Consider Harold Cohen, the renowned painter, who by redrawing the boundary between human and the machine found his soul mate in AARON, the computer he designed to paint for, and more recently with, him (Sundararajan, 2013). Far reaching implications of cognitive mindfulness are investigated by a panel of experts in cognitive and indigenous/cultural psychologies. The first paper presents empirical evidence of how cognitive mindfulness can attenuate the progress of a disease that is believed to be almost solely biologically-driven. The second paper, inspired by Sufi teachings, presents descriptive data to demonstrate the connection between creativity and the modification in radical ways of conventional categories, including identity--the category that lies at the core of the self. The third paper presents empirical data to substantiate this cross-cultural extension of cognitive mindfulness. In particular, it claims that the Chinese notion of *le* (categorical correspondence, see Sundararajan, 2009) could be understood as an implicit training, replicable through priming in the laboratory, in blurring the boundary between the self and non-self, thereby enhancing creativity. Together, these presentations suggest that Langer's paradigm of cognitive mindfulness offers a theoretical framework that calls for healing the Cartesian divide between body and mind as an imperative for creativity--a psychology of the mind to which non-western psychologies can make significant contributions.

(1) Mind and Body in Severe Chronic Disorders: A Mindfulness Perspective

Background: Mindfulness is defined as the process of actively making new distinctions about a situation and the environment rather than relying on previously "known", or automatic categorizations from the past. Previous studies suggest that mindfulness plays an important role in the mind/body relationship. Mindfulness has been positively associated with physical well-being, better recovery rates from disease or infections, pain reduction and overall quality of life.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is a rare, progressive and fatal neurodegenerative disease, clinically characterized by progressively increasing weakness leading to death, usually within three years. There is presently no cure for ALS, and it is considered one of the most genetically and biologically-driven illnesses. No previous study has investigated the influences of psychological factors on the course of the disease.

Method: A sample of 197 subjects with ALS were recruited and assessed online at two timepoints, with a duration of four months between assessments. Assessment included measurements of trait mindfulness, physical impairment, quality of life, anxiety, and depression. The influence of mindfulness as predictor of changes in physical impairments was evaluated with a mixed-effects linear model.

Result: Data analyses both at T1 and T2 indicated that mindfulness positively influenced the change of physical symptoms; subjects with higher mindfulness experienced a slower progression of the disease. Moreover, mindfulness at T1 predicted higher quality of life and psychological well-being at T2 assessment.

Conclusion: The available data indicate, that a psychological construct - mindfulness - can attenuate the progress of a disease that is believed to be almost solely biologically-driven. The potential implications of these results extend well beyond ALS. Our discussion considers these findings in the larger context of psychological traits and their impact on physiological changes.

(2) Identity, Creativity, and excellence

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of identity in creativity, and particularly toward achieving excellence. Two contrasting approaches to preparing the self to think and act creatively are examined. The first, the more traditional approach, involves gathering information and ideas and ‘filling the self’, so that the self can move forward well-informed, ‘well-armed’ in every way possible, to be creative. The second approach, inspired by Sufi teachings, involves ‘emptying the self’, abandoning traditional ways of thinking, acting, and sensing, and ‘becoming creative’ through an ‘emptied self’. Case studies are discussed to illustrate how this process of ‘emptying the self’ corresponds to experiences reported by highly creative individuals, when they become ‘lost’ in time and space, and for a while ‘transcend’ their surroundings and circumstances. Both the traditional ‘filling the self’ and the alternative ‘emptying the self’ approaches involve at least temporary transformations of identity, and it is through identity that creativity at individual and collective levels become strongly connected toward achieving excellence.

(3) Priming the Mind to see its Double: Mindfulness in a New Key

“For there is a spirit in the woods” (Wordsworth).

Langer’s mindfulness training capitalizes on the perception of similarities--perception that helps to reinforce the blurriness and permeability of boundaries between object categories. We propose that the counterpart of this approach is the Chinese notion of Le (categorical correspondence, see Sundararajan, 2009), which is a sophisticated version of animism. In sharp contrast to the Kantian dictum that “We are subjects thinking about objects” (Freeman, 2000, p. 117), animism opens up an inter-subjective space where mind-to-mind or subject-to subject transaction with all kinds of objects becomes a possibility. Thus the poet Li Po wrote:

Never tired of looking at each other —
Only the Ching-t’ing Mountain and me.

As Stern (2004) points out, infants are born with minds that are especially attuned to other minds. With the poet’s mutual gazing with Nature, our innate attunement to another mind has extended beyond the social arena, thanks to the blurring of boundaries between object categories—animate and inanimate, a distinction that even infants make (Meltzoff & Moore, 1999). The phenomena associated with animism or the Chinese notion of Le (categorical correspondence) attest to the human will to experience mind whether it is there or not (Noë, 2009, p. 28).

The poet’s mind-to-mind transaction with Nature may be considered a cross cultural extension of Langer’s model of cognitive mindfulness. To replicate the poet’s mindfulness experience, we use film clips of nature to test the hypothesis that (a) the capacity of the human mind to see its double beyond the social arena can be primed; and (b) attunement with a virtual mind can reap the benefits associated with cognitive mindfulness, in particular creativity. Supporting evidence from empirical studies will be presented.