Dispositional mindfulness, rejection sensitivity, and behavioural responses to rejection: The role of emotion regulation

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Objective: Recent evidence suggests that individuals higher in dispositional mindfulness display less rejection sensitivity. However, less is known about the potential influence of dispositional mindfulness on behavioural responses to implied rejection, and the mechanisms underlying these associations. The present research was designed to address these questions.

Method: In a community sample of 219 young adults, we examined whether low dispositional mindfulness was associated with higher rejection sensitivity and mal-adaptive responses to implied rejection (retribution and withdrawal), and whether emotion regulation mediated these associations. Participants completed an online questionnaire battery assessing dispositional mindfulness, emotion regulation, rejection sensitivity, and behavioural responses to implied rejection.

Results: Results revealed that dispositional mindfulness was indirectly associated, through emotion regulation, with lower rejection sensitivity and less withdrawal following rejection. Mindfulness was also associated with less retribution following perceived rejection, although this association was not mediated by emotion regulation.

Conclusions: These results suggest that dispositional mindfulness may be protective against rejection sensitivity and maladaptive behavioural responses following rejection, and that capacity for regulating emotions may be implicated in the association between mindfulness and less rejection sensitivity and withdrawal following rejection.

Keywords: emotion regulation, mindfulness, rejection sensitivity, retribution, withdrawal

1 | INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness is theorised to facilitate cognitive and behavioural flexibility, which allows for adaptive responses to events or situations, rather than habitual or impulsive responses (Baer, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004). In the context of close relationships, mindfulness may facilitate a relationally focused, non-judgemental and non-reactive stance, and enable adaptive responses to the range of emotions that arise in relationships (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Consistent with these theoretical propositions, much evidence reveals that individuals higher in dispositional mindfulness fare better than those less mindful on various psychological outcomes (e.g., Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). More recently, researchers have also found that dispositional mindfulness is associated with better social and interpersonal functioning (Karremans, Schellekens, & Kappen, 2017; Pepping, O’Donovan, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Hanisch, 2014). Less is known about the potential influence of dispositional mindfulness on sensitivity to rejection, particularly, behavioural responses to implied rejection, and mechanisms underlying these associations. The present research addressed this issue.

2 | REJECTION SENSITIVITY

Rejection is common in the human experience, although individuals differ in how they interpret and respond to
it. Downey and Feldman (1996) define rejection sensitivity as an individual's bias to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and strongly react to rejection cues. Drawing from Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, a history of rejection experiences is likely to oversensitise individuals to possible rejection, and create social information processing styles that lead to long-term negative outcomes (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Rejection sensitive individuals are hypervigilant to situations where they might experience rejection, and even ambiguous or inoffensive interpersonal cues are interpreted as evidence of rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Heightened rejection sensitivity is associated with poor psychological and interpersonal functioning (Staebler, Helbing, Rosenbach, & Renneberg, 2011), such as greater rumination (Pearson, Watson, Watkins, & Mullan, 2011) and aggression (Ayduk, Gyurak, & Renneberg, 2011), such as greater rumination (Pearson, Watson, Watkins, & Mullan, 2011) and aggression (Ayduk, Gyurak, & Luerssen, 2008; Galliher & Bentley, 2010).

Heightened rejection sensitivity can lead to behaviours that undermine relationship quality (Downey, Mougios, Ayduk, London, & Shoda, 2004). Maladaptive behavioural responses to rejection are characterised by hurt and social withdrawal (the “flight” response), or anger and aggressive behaviours (the “fight” response; Zimmer-Gembeck & Nerdale, 2013). For example, individuals may actively avoid situations where rejection is possible, such as romantic relationships; they may also emotionally withdraw from others following rejection (Berenson et al., 2009; Purdie & Downey, 2000). Alternatively, some individuals respond to perceived rejection with anger, aggression, or controlling behaviours (Downey & Feldman, 1996). These behavioural responses can sometimes alleviate short-term rejection-related distress, but they are considered maladaptive strategies as they undermine interpersonal functioning in the long term (e.g., Ayduk, Downey, & Kim, 2001).

Emotional withdrawal undermines the quality of relationships (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Gottman, 2014). Similarly, retribution-based responses to perceived rejection, such as anger, hostility, and criticism, are also associated with poor relationship outcomes (Gottman, 1994; MacKenzie et al., 2014; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). Therefore, it is important to investigate factors that may influence the extent to which people are rejection sensitive, and how they behaviourally respond to perceived rejection. As increasing evidence suggests that dispositional mindfulness is associated with interpersonal outcomes (Keng et al., 2011), mindfulness might be expected to play a role in rejection sensitivity and associated behavioural responses.

3 | DISPOSITIONAL MINDFULNESS AND REJECTION

The concept of mindfulness is rooted in ancient Buddhism and commonly defined as, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). The term mindfulness can refer to a state or quality of awareness, to the practice of cultivating mindfulness through meditation, or to a psychological trait known as dispositional mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005), which was the focus of this study. Dispositional mindfulness refers to an individual's tendency “to abide in mindful states over time” (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007, p. 218). Individuals who are high in dispositional mindfulness are theorised to be better able to focus their attention on whatever arises in each moment in a non-judgemental and accepting manner (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Theoretically, dispositional mindfulness facilitates cognitive and behavioural flexibility, fostering adaptive responses to situations, rather than habitual or impulsive responses (Baer, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004).

In the context of close relationships, dispositional mindfulness is theorised to allow greater awareness of affective, cognitive, and behavioural tendencies, which can facilitate a relationally focused and less judgmental stance in relationships, including enabling adaptive responses to potentially difficult emotions (Karremans et al., 2017; Pepping & Halford, 2016; Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Cross-sectional research supports these theoretical propositions. For example, dispositional mindfulness is associated with greater couple relationship satisfaction (see Karremans et al., 2017 and Pepping & Halford, 2016 reviews), and it predicts less emotional stress following a relationship conflict discussion task in established couples (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). Dispositional mindfulness is also associated with less attachment insecurity (Pepping, Davis, &
O’Donovan, 2013). Here, we consider how dispositional mindfulness may be associated with less rejection sensitivity, and more adaptive behavioural responses to rejection.

3.1 | Rejection sensitivity

Individuals higher in dispositional mindfulness are better able to accept internal and external experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). As such, rejection episodes may be experienced in a non-judgmental and non-reactive manner, resulting in less propensity to become overwhelmed by these experiences. To date, only two studies have examined these associations. Using Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, and Toney’s (2006) mindfulness model, in which five facets of mindfulness are posited, Peters, Eisenlohr-Moul, and Smart (2016) found that four facets (acting with awareness, non-judging, non-reactivity, and describing) were negatively correlated with rejection sensitivity in their American, undergraduate sample, although the observing facet was not.

In a study of an Italian clinical sample and middle-aged community sample, Velotti, Garofalo, and Bizzi (2015) found negative correlations between three of Baer et al.’s (2006) mindfulness facets (acting with awareness, non-judging and describing) and rejection sensitivity in both samples. Furthermore, emotion regulation mediated two significant relationships (acting with awareness in the community sample, and non-judging in the clinical sample). Thus, mindfulness has been found to be associated with rejection sensitivity in two preliminary studies (Peters et al., 2016; Velotti et al., 2015).

3.2 | Behavioural responses to rejection

Although two studies have found correlations between mindfulness and rejection sensitivity, whether dispositional mindfulness predicts behavioural responses to perceived rejection is unclear. As mentioned earlier, there are two typical defensive responses to perceived rejection: social withdrawal and aggressive retribution (Zimmer-Gembeck & Nesdaile, 2013). Withdrawal and aggressive retribution in response to perceived rejection are likely to impact not only the person experiencing the perceived rejection, but also the other person. Indeed, both withdrawal and aggression have been shown to undermine romantic relationship quality for both partners (Gottman, 2014), and both processes are common features of couple relationship distress (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999). It is therefore important to identify predictors of maladaptive behavioural responses to rejection.

Theoretically, individuals high in dispositional mindfulness can accept potentially distressing experiences without impulsively reacting to them (Baer et al., 2006; Bishop et al., 2004). Consistent with this proposition, dating partners with higher dispositional mindfulness displayed less anger hostility following a conflict discussion, and state mindfulness during the discussion was associated with less verbal aggression, and somewhat less withdrawal (Barnes et al., 2007). Recent evidence also suggests that mindfulness may attenuate the impact of rejection fears on destructive behaviour in romantic relationships (Dixon & Overall, 2018). It therefore seems likely that more mindful individuals may take a non-judgemental, non-reactive stance towards perceived rejection, rather than engaging in aggressive retribution or withdrawal.

3.3 | Emotion regulation

If those who are higher in dispositional mindfulness do indeed report more adaptive responses to rejection, one might next ask what mechanism underlies this association. Increasing evidence suggests that emotion regulation is implicated in the association between mindfulness and psychosocial outcomes (Pepping et al., 2013; Pepping et al., 2014), and recent evidence suggests that emotion regulation may mediate associations between mindfulness and rejection sensitivity (Velotti et al., 2015). Emotion regulation refers to ways in which individuals experience, express, and react to emotions in response to environmental demands, and how well they pursue desired goals under emotional arousal (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). This capacity for emotion regulation that mindfulness affords may also allow them to respond more adaptively to experiences of rejection without, for example, engaging in aggressive retribution, and without withdrawing from others. In brief, we propose that dispositional mindfulness is likely to predict less rejection sensitivity, and more adaptive behavioural responses to rejection, with these associations being mediated by the capacity for emotion regulation.

3.4 | Aims and hypotheses

The aim of the present research was to examine whether dispositional mindfulness was associated with less rejection sensitivity, and with less withdrawal and retribution following rejection. Furthermore, we examined whether these associations would be indirect through emotion regulation. We predicted that greater dispositional mindfulness would be associated with less rejection sensitivity (Hypothesis 1), and with less social withdrawal (Hypothesis 2) and retribution (Hypothesis 3) following perceived rejection. Furthermore, we hypothesised that these associations would be indirect through emotion regulation (Hypothesis 4).

4 | METHOD

4.1 | Participants

Participants were 219 young adults (59 male, 157 female, and 3 who did not identify with these labels) ranging in age from 18 to 25 years ($M$ age = 20.52, $SD$ = 1.99). Most
identified as Caucasian (71.7%), followed by Asian (10%), European (7.8%), Middle Eastern (3.2%), Indian (2.3%), and other (5%). Participation was open to anyone over the age of 18. However, for this study, only those aged between 18 and 25 were included as the rejection measures described below were designed for young adult university students. The advertisements were posted on Facebook pages designed for, but not restricted to, university students. Thus, we excluded 25 participants who indicated they were not currently at university.

4.2 | Measures

4.2.1 | Dispositional mindfulness

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire-Short Form (FFMQ-SF; Bohlmeijer, Ten Klooster, Fledderus, Veehof, & Baer, 2011) is a 24-item questionnaire derived from the original 36-item FFMQ (Baer et al., 2006). The FFMQ-SF can yield a total mindfulness score comprising five subscales: observing, describing, non-judging, non-reacting, and acting with awareness. Participants rate from 1 (never or rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true) items such as, “I find myself doing things without paying attention (reversed)”. Here, we used the total score, with higher scores indicating higher mindfulness. We selected this measure as it is widely used and consistent with the two prior studies that have examined mindfulness and rejection sensitivity. The FFMQ-SF correlates highly with the original FFMQ (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011), and Cronbach’s α in the present sample was .83.

4.2.2 | Rejection sensitivity

The 8-item short form of the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 2013) assesses the degree to which an individual anxiously expects rejection. It presents hypothetical situations such as, “You ask your parents for help in deciding what programs to apply to.” Participants rate how anxious they would be regarding the outcome from 1 (very unconcerned) to 6 (very concerned), as well as the likelihood of the other person accepting from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely), and a total rejection sensitivity score is derived, with higher scores indicating greater rejection sensitivity. Our sample’s Cronbach’s α was .77.

4.2.3 | Behavioural responses to rejection

The Behavioural Responses to Implied Rejection Scale (Zimmer-Gembeck & Nesdale, 2013) is a 24-item measure that assesses participants’ behavioural responses to rejection. Participants read three scenarios featuring implied rejection rating from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly) and rated the extent to which they believe they would engage in social withdrawal (e.g., “Would you decide to spend more time by yourself?”) and retribution (e.g., “Would you think of ways to get even?”) in each scenario. We selected this self-report measure because it correlates with theoretically relevant constructs in the context of rejection (Zimmer-Gembeck & Nesdale, 2013). Our sample's Cronbach’s α were acceptable, withdrawal α = .74, retribution α = .74.

4.2.4 | Emotion regulation

The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-16 (DERS-16; Bjureberg et al., 2016; based on the 36-item DERS, Gratz & Roemer, 2004) assesses individual differences in emotion regulation. Participants rate from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) how often the statements apply to them. A single total score was calculated, as recommended for the DERS-16 (Bjureberg et al., 2016); higher scores reflected poorer emotion regulation. For the original measure, Gratz and Roemer (2004) reported good test–retest reliability and convergent validity in non-clinical samples. The DERS-16 correlates highly with the original DERS (Bjureberg et al., 2016). Our sample’s Cronbach’s α = .94.

4.3 | Procedure

University ethics approval was received. Participants were invited to complete an anonymous online study through advertisements on several Facebook pages designed for university students. The advertisement provided a brief study description and questionnaire weblink. The four measures described earlier were presented in a randomised order to reduce potential order effects, followed by demographic questions. Participants could enter a prize draw through a separate weblink to win one of six shopping vouchers.

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays descriptives and a correlation matrix of study variables. Emotion regulation and mindfulness significantly correlated with each other, and with rejection sensitivity, withdrawal, and retribution in expected directions. Although the associations between mindfulness and the rejection-related variables were significant, they were generally small in magnitude.

5.2 | Tests of indirect associations

We tested indirect associations of mindfulness (independent variable) on rejection sensitivity, social withdrawal, and retribution (dependent variables) through emotion regulation (mediator) using the Process Macro with 10,000 bootstrap samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). For indirect associations, significance was indicated by 95% confidence intervals not including zero. Mindfulness was associated with the emotion regulation mediator (B = −.78, p < .001; Path A). Emotion regulation difficulties (mediator) were positively associated with rejection sensitivity (B = .05, p = .008) and
withdrawal ($B = .15, p < .001$), but not with retribution ($B = .07, p = .181$) (Path B).

Table 2 displays total (Path C) and direct (Path C') associations for the models, and Table 3 displays indirect associations between mindfulness and rejection variables through emotion regulation. Regarding Path C, the total associations of mindfulness on rejection sensitivity, withdrawal, and retribution were each significant. There was an indirect association of mindfulness on rejection sensitivity through emotion regulation, although the direct effect of mindfulness on rejection sensitivity remained significant. There was an indirect association of mindfulness on withdrawal through emotion regulation, and no direct association once the emotion regulation mediator was accounted for. Finally, there were no direct or indirect associations between mindfulness and retribution.

Although the total mindfulness score is frequently used in research, several studies have shown that the observe facet does not always load with the other four facets, particularly in non-meditating samples (e.g., Baer et al., 2006; Curtiss & Klemanski, 2014), and some have recommended removing the observe subscale when using a total mindfulness score (e.g., Gu et al., 2016). To ensure that including the observe subscale did not influence results, we repeated all analyses with the observe subscale removed, and obtained the same pattern of results. For brevity, we have not reported these findings, but they can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

### 6 | DISCUSSION

This study’s aim was to examine whether dispositional mindfulness was associated with less rejection sensitivity and maladaptive behavioural responses to rejection, namely social withdrawal and retribution, and whether these associations were indirect through emotion regulation. There were significant, negative correlations between mindfulness and rejection sensitivity through emotion regulation, although the direct effect of mindfulness on rejection sensitivity remained significant. There were significant, positive correlations between mindfulness and retribution, and difficulties in emotion regulation. Difficulties in emotion regulation were significantly and positively correlated with all three rejection variables. Regarding the tests of direct and indirect associations, there were significant total associations of greater dispositional mindfulness with less rejection sensitivity (Hypothesis 1), less social withdrawal (Hypothesis 2), and with less retribution (Hypothesis 3). Regarding indirect associations, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported; the associations between dispositional mindfulness and low rejection sensitivity and social withdrawal were indirect, through emotion regulation, although a direct association between mindfulness and rejection sensitivity remained. There were no significant indirect effects of mindfulness on retribution.

#### 6.1 | Mindfulness, emotion regulation, and rejection

Greater mindfulness was associated with lesser rejection sensitivity, withdrawal, and retribution, supporting the hypothesis linking mindfulness with rejection variables. Furthermore, the indirect (and total) associations found between mindfulness

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**TABLE 1** Means, standard deviations and correlations for variables of interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. FFMQ total</td>
<td>74.38 (10.94)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. DERS</td>
<td>41.68 (13.97)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.61***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rejection sensitivity</td>
<td>9.69 (3.31)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.34***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Withdrawal</td>
<td>29.79 (7.57)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.29***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Retribution</td>
<td>20.82 (8.10)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.18**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.29***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale; FFMQ = Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire. ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$. 

**TABLE 2** Unstandardised associations ($B$) in the mediation analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Path C (total effects)</th>
<th>Path C' (direct effects)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>Rejection sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFMQ</td>
<td>−.11***</td>
<td>−.20***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. FFMQ = Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire; Path C = the total effect of mindfulness on rejection-related variables; Path C' = direct effect of mindfulness on rejection-related variables when considering the mediator (emotion regulation). *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

**TABLE 3** Indirect associations of mindfulness on rejection-related variables through emotion regulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indirect 95% CI</th>
<th>Withdrawal 95% CI</th>
<th>Retribution 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rejection sensitivity</td>
<td>FFMQ −.04, −.073, −.012a</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td>−.182, −.056a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. CI = confidence interval; FFMQ = Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire. 

a Significant associations as indicated by the CI not including zero.
and lesser rejection sensitivity and withdrawal through emotion regulation support a model of mindfulness protecting against rejection sensitivity and maladaptive behavioural responses to rejection, largely through their association with emotion regulation.

The finding that mindfulness was associated with less rejection sensitivity, and that the effect was indirect through emotion regulation, is broadly consistent with prior research (Peters et al., 2016; Velotti et al., 2015). However, this is the first research to reveal that mindfulness is also associated with less maladaptive behavioural responses to implied rejection and, in particular, that mindfulness is indirectly associated with less social withdrawal through emotion regulation. Although this study was concerned with dispositional mindfulness, these findings are consistent with experimental evidence that mindfulness meditation enhances capacity for emotion regulation (e.g., Arch & Craske, 2006). Indeed, the most commonly reported reason for engaging in mindfulness meditation practice is to enhance emotion regulation (Pepping, Walters, Davis, & O’Donovan, 2016).

Taken together, results suggest that those with greater mindfulness display more adaptive emotion regulation which, in turn, is associated with less rejection sensitivity, and with less maladaptive behavioural responses to rejection, namely withdrawal. This supports propositions that difficulties regulating emotion lead to short-term maladaptive strategies (such as withdrawing and aggressive retribution) to help manage negative affect (Zimmer-Gembeck & Nesdale, 2013). These behaviours may be short-term “mood repairers” that serve to regulate negative affect in the absence of more adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Chester & DeWall, 2017), but are ultimately maladaptive, and have been associated with relationship distress (Johnson et al., 1999).

It is notable that the association between mindfulness and withdrawal was only indirect through emotion regulation. Once emotion regulation was included in the model, there were no direct associations of mindfulness on withdrawal. We do not propose that emotion regulation is the only mechanism by which mindfulness relates to withdrawal following perceived rejection. The inclusion of additional mediators could reveal further mechanisms underlying these associations. For instance, regarding social withdrawal, factors such as shame-proneness (Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992) and experiential avoidance (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996) may potentially also underlie these associations.

Regarding retribution responses, there was a small but significant negative correlation between dispositional mindfulness and retribution, and the total effect of mindfulness on retribution was significant. However, there were no indirect associations through emotion regulation, and no significant direct associations once emotion regulation was accounted for. This finding may be partly explained by fewer reports of retaliation tendencies in this sample relative to withdrawal. Alternatively, other factors may predict and mediate associations between mindfulness and post-rejection retribution seeking, such as trait anger (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983), rumination (McCullough et al., 1998) or impulsivity. Future research should examine the relative importance of multiple mediators underlying the association between mindfulness and rejection-related variables.

Our findings suggest that dispositional mindfulness provides protective properties specifically regarding responses to perceived rejection. The findings are also consistent with the theoretical rationales underpinning interventions that feature mindfulness and emotion regulation training, such as Shepakes, Suri, and Gross’s (2015) conceptualisation of emotion regulation as a transdiagnostic feature of psychopathology. Components of mindfulness-based interventions, such as dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan, 1993) include training to manage emotional distress. For example, mindfulness training can help individuals with traits of borderline personality disorder to manage intense anxiety, depression, and anger in adaptive ways rather than engaging in maladaptive coping strategies such as self-harm or physical aggression (Koons et al., 2001). Results of the present research are broadly consistent with Linehan’s (1993) approach towards treatment of borderline personality disorder as an emotion regulation-based disorder amenable to mindfulness-focused activities.

Negative affect and heightened sensitivity to rejection and abandonment are commonly associated with couple relationship distress (Johnson et al., 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Given that dispositional mindfulness is associated with less rejection sensitivity and more adaptive behavioural responses to perceived rejection, it seems plausible that mindfulness-based interventions that enhance emotion regulation could have beneficial effects on distressed couple relationships. Few studies have directly addressed this possibility, although Carson, Carson, Gil, and Baucom (2004) found that a mindfulness-based relationship enhancement intervention had beneficial effects on couple relationship functioning relative to a wait-list control condition. Future research is needed to investigate the potential efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions for distressed couples with heightened rejection sensitivity.

6.2 Limitations and future directions

The present research has some limitations. First, participants were young adults at university and this limits generalisability of findings. Exploring these associations in more diverse samples, including both clinical and more diverse community samples, is important in future research. Second, this study examined only self-reported dispositional mindfulness, rather than mindfulness-based interventions, or experimental inductions, and used a cross-sectional design which precludes drawing conclusions regarding causation. However, as reviewed earlier, the extant literature does tend to support how these variables are related. For example, experimental manipulations of
mindfulness lead to increased emotion regulation (Arch & Craske, 2006), and clinical trials have demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions result in greater emotion regulation (e.g., Delgado et al., 2010), reduced social anxiety (Bögels, Sijbers, & Voncken, 2006), and less aggression following rejection (Fix & Fix, 2013; Heppner et al., 2008). Nonetheless, future research would benefit from using longitudinal and experimental designs, as well as mindfulness-based interventions, to test the hypotheses explored in the present study.

Here, we used the short-form FFMQ (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011) to assess mindfulness and conceptualised mindfulness as a single construct. It is important to note that there is substantial debate in the literature regarding the structure, conceptualisation, and measurement of mindfulness (e.g., Grossman, 2011; Van Dam et al., 2018). For instance, Brown et al. (2007) conceptualise mindfulness as a multidimensional construct characterised by attention and awareness, and argue that other factors, such as a non-judgemental attitude, are outcomes of mindfulness. Therefore, the results of this study pertain to dispositional mindfulness when measured as a single construct comprising five particular conceptual facets. Future research is needed to examine mindfulness and rejection-related outcomes examining those individual facets and other conceptualisations of mindfulness (e.g., Bergomi, Tschacher, & Kupper, 2013).

Finally, the measure of behavioural responses to rejection was a self-report questionnaire asking respondents how they would respond in hypothetical scenarios. Although this is consistent with existing methods in rejection sensitivity research, future studies should examine actual rejection experiences and observe and code behaviours following rejection and examine the potential influence of mindfulness on observed behaviour.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

The present study examined whether dispositional mindfulness was associated with rejection sensitivity and behavioural responses to rejection through emotion regulation. This was the first study to investigate whether those higher in dispositional mindfulness respond behaviourally more adaptively to implied rejection. Results revealed that individuals higher in dispositional mindfulness reported less rejection sensitivity, and less withdrawal and retribution following implied rejection. Furthermore, there were indirect associations of mindfulness on rejection sensitivity and withdrawal (but not retribution) through emotion regulation. Future research is needed to test these associations longitudinally.

REFERENCES


