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ARTICLE



Social mindfulness in the real world: the physical presence of others induces other-regarding motivation

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ABSTRACT

Two studies show that being socially mindful only requires a minimal social context: The presence of a specific other is enough to bring out greater social mindfulness in a one-shot social decision-making task that focuses participants' decisions on leaving or limiting other people's choice. Study 1 contrasts a control condition (with no second chooser) with two conditions in which a confederate chooses after the participant. We find that participants are socially mindful by leaving choice to the confederate more often. Study 2 reveals that a specified, identifiable other is left choice more often than an unspecified next chooser. The physical presence of others may thus be enough to elicit greater social mindfulness as manifested in simple and low-cost social decision-making.

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Social mindfulness; social decision-making; presence of others

When and why are people mindful of one another? Obviously, certain strong situations are likely to promote this. For example, when directly asked to pay attention, when interacting with a loved one or close other, or when it is otherwise obvious that the other person is important to the actor. But it becomes harder to predict when situations are less clear or interpersonal interest is less obvious. Even in socially more complex situations, however, we argue that the simple presence of others may be enough to enhance socially mindful behavior. Extending recent research (see Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015, for a brief review), we examine whether such presence will provide enough context to elicit social mindfulness as measured with a task in which people may leave choice to relevant strangers when options are restricted. An important goal is to test this in the multifaceted and stimulus-rich environment of real-world interactions rather than in the more abstract laboratory or online settings as used in previous research.

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Social interdependence and transforming the situation

Social mindfulness is ‘being thoughtful of others in the present moment, and considering their needs and wishes before making a decision’ (Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015, p. 18). The concept is firmly rooted in interdependence theory (e.g. Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012), a scientific concept that captures how human behavior predominantly occurs in a social environment where behavioral decisions have consequences for others. In other words, people depend on one another for the outcome of social situations. Acknowledging interdependence makes a logical starting point for many social decisions, rather than focusing on individual needs and drives. More often than not, people have to balance immediate self-interest with other-interests that are generated in the larger context. Such adjustments can be made through psychological transformation processes.

Psychological transformation processes describe how social interactions are shaped by broader goals beyond immediate self-interest (Kelley et al., 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). From a given situation as perceived from individual preferences, people habitually construct effective situations that include preferences that arise from broader other-regarding goals. Psychological transformation describes the motivational change from given to effective preferences (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Transformation processes thus describe how and why people forego immediate self-interest by letting other and presently more important goals take precedence, including but not limited to reputation, approach, or relationship goals.

In the current context this means that we expect that the actual and physical presence of others will sufficiently remind people of the social context to activate other-regarding inclinations, even without providing further information (Small & Loewenstein, 2003). Social mindfulness explicitly targets the relationship between self and other (Van Doesum, Van Lange, & Van Lange, 2013), and can be an indication of how much someone transforms the situation from a given self-oriented perspective (one’s own outcomes) to an effective perspective that is shared (one’s own *and* the others’ outcomes). People may indeed make different choices when realizing that their decisions have consequences for others (Van Lange & Balliet, 2014). By (re)emphasizing interdependence, the presence of task-relevant others may bring this to mind enough to elevate levels of social mindfulness.

Social mindfulness

The construct of social mindfulness was introduced and operationalized by Van Doesum et al. (2013). Social mindfulness differs from mindfulness by extending a predominantly self-oriented mindful awareness to include a benevolent perspective on the needs and wishes of others in the immediate social environment. The construct was developed in the tradition of research on social decision-making, providing a focus that is importantly different from research on mindfulness in clinical and other settings (e.g. Karremans, Schellekens, & Kappen, 2017). The task to assess social mindfulness (the SoMi paradigm) was based on the idea that leaving or limiting choice is a subtle yet effective way to show benevolence, indifference, or even hostility towards others (Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015). In a multi-trial, dyadic task, a first chooser took one item from a set of three products (two of which were identical and one slightly different, for example two yellow and one green baseball hats). Taking one of the identical products

left a second chooser some choice; taking the unique item limited this. Leaving choice was construed as socially mindful.

In support, research has shown that leaving choice in the SoMi paradigm is associated with other-orientedness, prosocial value orientations (SVO; see Van Lange, 1999; Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, & Joireman, 1997), empathic concern and perspective taking (IRI; see Davis, 1983), other's trustworthiness, and the personality factors honesty-humility and – to a lesser extent – agreeableness (HEXACO; see Ashton & Lee, 2009; Hilbig, Glöckner, & Zettler, 2014; Lee & Ashton, 2004). Moreover, making socially mindful choices resulted in being liked and trusted more by others, and in being seen as less self-centered (Van Doesum et al., 2013). Additionally, people tend to appreciate choice (see, for example, Bown, Read, & Summers, 2003; Chernyak & Kushnir, 2013; Geers et al., 2013; Leotti, Iyengar, & Ochsner, 2010); leaving choice might thus be seen as a nice thing to do, reflecting other-regard.

Importantly, the unique product within the set is arguably the more desirable one: Accompanied by alternatives, single choices become more attractive (Mochon, 2013), whereas similar alternatives lose some attractiveness (Tversky, 1972). Research on the minority versus majority pen choice paradigm that inspired the SoMi task (e.g. Kim & Markus, 1999; see Van Doesum et al., 2013, for a discussion of the differences) showed that without others involved, people tended to prefer the more unique pen, regardless of cultural background (Yamagishi, Hashimoto, & Schug, 2008). Scarcity attracts (e.g. Cialdini, 2007; Mittone & Savadori, 2009), but this effect seems to be reversed when people are afraid to be seen as selfish (Lynn, 1991).

Altogether, Van Doesum et al. (2013) established that interactions as assessed in the SoMi paradigm are defined by who the interaction partner is and how the relationship is characterized. Their initial experiments targeted others who were either unspecified ('someone you don't know') (Studies 1a-c, 4), presented by a picture (Study 3), or strangers whose (ostensible) online presence was only indicated by a name and an avatar (Study 2a). Also, participants were either instructed to keep the best interest of others in mind, or it was made explicitly salient that someone else would make a subsequent choice. While targeting an abstract other, these studies reliably established social mindfulness as expression of other-regard, but also left some questions unanswered. For example, is the physical presence of others enough to trigger socially mindful behavior? Additionally, the paradigm needed to be tested in a real-life setting with targets who are actually present. The current research addresses both issues. Because social mindfulness is mostly about relationships at an elementary level, we expected that a minimal social context would suffice to promote socially mindful decisions as manifested in leaving or limiting choice to others who are present and relevant.

Study overview

Our approach was specifically behavioral (cf. Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007). In two field studies we investigated whether the presence of specified and/or unspecified strangers would be enough to elevate social mindfulness. Both studies used a one-shot version of the SoMi paradigm: Participants could choose a pen from a set of three similar and equally valuable pens, of which one was a different color (e.g. one blue and two black pens). Taking the unique pen limited the choice of anyone choosing next (a second chooser), while taking one of the two other pens preserved the original

choices. Study 1 contrasted a control condition in which no second chooser was present with two conditions in which a confederate chose next. We hypothesized that the actual and physical presence of a targeted other would lead to socially mindful decisions as manifested in leaving this other choice. The two other-conditions differed in an empathy versus no-empathy manipulation to test whether empathic concern would lead to more socially mindful decisions. Study 2 examined whether the actual presence of a second chooser (a confederate) would prompt more socially mindful decisions (i.e. a greater proportion of participants leaving the other choice) than keeping an unspecified other in mind; we expected it would. Because greeting could make the social context even more salient, we additionally explored whether greeting prospective participants at the beginning of the procedure would strengthen this effect.

Study 1: Basic social context

Study 1 examined whether the presence of a stranger triggers people to leave others more choice in the SoMi paradigm, and if empathic concern will reinforce this. We contrasted two conditions in which a confederate was present with a control condition in which pen choice was independent of the social context. We expected the presence of a specified target to be enough to promote socially mindful decisions, compared to no other individual being involved in the task. Further, we examined if providing relevant information about the target intensifies this effect. Because social mindfulness has shown positive associations with empathic concern (Van Doesum et al., 2013), meeting someone in need may increase the expected effect; after all, this person may deserve to be treated extra nicely. We thus included an empathy manipulation to test the effect of physical presence with or without this target deserving extra attention. Finally, we checked for moderating effects of social value orientation (Van Lange, 1999; Van Lange et al., 1997). Together, we hypothesized that the actual presence of a second chooser would lead to social mindfulness as manifested in leaving choice, that empathic concern would mediate and/or enhance this effect, and that SVO would have a moderating influence.

In Study 1, participants chose between blue and green pens. To check for color preferences, we ran a pilot study in which we asked 30 participants (aged 18–25) to pick the pen of their choice from a set of two. A binomial test revealed that the observed choice distribution (.53) was not different from an equal proportion of .50, $p = .855$, indicating no preference for a pen of a particular color.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred and twenty students, faculty, and visitors at the Radboud University and HAN University of Applied Sciences (Nijmegen, the Netherlands) were approached to complete a brief questionnaire. Four participants were not proficient in Dutch, and were excluded from analyses. Our final sample thus contained 116 participants (60% female) between 17 and 52, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.49$ ($SD = 3.66$). As a reward, all participants could choose a pen from a set of three differently colored pens; their choice constituted our dependent variable. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions in

which no other person was present to choose next (control), a confederate was present to choose next (present other), or a confederate in need was present to choose next (other in need). Next to basic demographics, the questionnaire assessed empathic concern and SVO.

Procedure

Participants were recruited at the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Law, the University Sports Center and HAN. These locations were chosen because most individuals using these facilities were expected to have little or no experience with psychological studies, which would lower suspicion regarding the actual purpose of the study. The experimenter greeted prospective participants, and asked how they were doing. Then the experimenter inquired if they would be willing to participate in a brief study. Upon agreement, participants were told they could keep the pen they were going to use to fill out the questionnaire. Next, each participant was offered a choice from three differently colored pens, presented in a ratio of two identical versus one unique color (i.e. one green and two blue pens, or one blue and two green pens). Pens were blue and green unmarked Athos pens (no. 2358.30 and no. 2358.70, respectively). The ratio of the colors (blue versus green) was always counterbalanced between consecutive participants.

In the control condition, there was no other individual present to choose next, and the participant was simply asked to choose a pen. In the two other-conditions, a confederate had settled down near the participant approximately three minutes before the experimenter would approach. The experimenter then greeted both participant and confederate, asking how they were doing. Most participants answered they were fine, as is the expected default answer. Depending on condition, however, the confederate would answer 'fine' (other present) or 'not so good,' explaining that he had just received a disturbing phone call (other in need); the latter information was designed to induce empathic concern for the confederate. After having agreed to participate, the participant and the confederate were asked to choose a pen, under the explicit instruction (verbally and non-verbally conveyed) that the participant could choose first, followed by the confederate. Because the other would still have a choice, taking one of the two identical pens was considered a socially mindful decision.

The questionnaire contained an assessment of SVO. Based on decisions in nine consecutive questions on how to divide valuable points between self and someone else (an unspecified other), participants were categorized in terms of prosocial, individualistic, or competitive orientations (Van Lange et al., 1997). Next, a definition of empathy and sympathy (as proxy for empathic concern) was given on the sheet, after which participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1–10 how much empathy and sympathy they felt for others in general; in the conditions in which a confederate was present this was complemented by how much empathy and sympathy they felt for the confederate, and how much they liked the confederate. The whole procedure took five to ten minutes.

Results and discussion

Manipulation check

Participants who were interacting with a confederate in need did not significantly report more empathy ($M_{\text{other present}} = 6.49$, $M_{\text{other in need}} = 7.21$) or sympathy

($M_{\text{other present}} = 6.03$, $M_{\text{other in need}} = 6.33$) for this target than participants who interacted with a regular confederate, $F(1, 74) = 2.77$, $p = .100$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and $F(1, 74) = 0.39$, $p = .534$, $\eta^2 = .01$, respectively, suggesting that our manipulation of empathic concern had not been successful. However, a confederate in need was liked slightly better, $M_{\text{other present}} = 5.76$, $M_{\text{other in need}} = 6.72$, $F(1, 74) = 5.14$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .07$.

Presence of the other

As expected, condition had a significant main effect on pen choice, $\chi^2(2, N = 116) = 9.87$, $p = .007$, $\phi = .29$. Parameter estimates in a secondary logistic regression revealed that participants who were interacting with a confederate or a confederate in need had chosen one of the two identical pens significantly more often than participants in the control condition where no confederate was involved (78%, 82%, and 53%, respectively), $p = .020$, $CI_{95\%} [1.21, 8.91]$ and $p = .007$, $CI_{95\%} [1.48, 11.55]$, respectively. See [Table 1](#) for exact distributions, and [Figure 1](#) for a visualization. Following the results of the manipulation check, there was no difference in pen choice between the presence of a confederate versus a confederate in need, $p = .688$; mediation could therefore not be assessed. Further, there were no effects for participant sex or age.

SVO

Our sample contained 14 participants with less than six consistent choices in the SVO task; these were not included in the analyses involving SVO. Because there turned out to be only nine competitively oriented participants, we further combined these with individualists to create a single proself category ($n = 35$), to be contrasted with prosocials ($n = 67$) (cf. De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001; Van Kleef & Van Lange, 2008). However, SVO did not moderate the effect of condition: A generalized linear model (binary logistic) showed that next to a consistent main effect for condition, Wald $\chi^2(2, N = 102) = 5.97$, $p = .050$, there was no main effect for SVO, Wald $\chi^2(1, N = 102) = 0.02$, $p = .903$, nor was there an interaction with condition, Wald $\chi^2(2, N = 102) = 0.26$, $p = .877$.

Results of Study 1 showed that the presence of a second chooser promoted socially mindful decisions: Participants chose the non-unique pen more often when a confederate was present. The difference between the other-conditions was non-significant. Although our empathy manipulation seemed unsuccessful, another possibility could be a ceiling effect: The immediate impact of identifiable other-presence may have precluded other factors becoming effective above and beyond. Also, we found that SVO did not moderate the main effect of a present other. Because there were no further

Table 1. Distribution of participants over conditions and pen choice in Studies 1 and 2.

	Non-unique		Unique	
	Count	%	Count	%
<i>Study 1 (N = 116)</i>				
Control	21	53	19	47
Other present	29	78	8	22
Other in need	32	82	7	18
<i>Study 2 (N = 188)</i>				
Other unspecified	60	60	39	40
Other specified	68	76	21	24

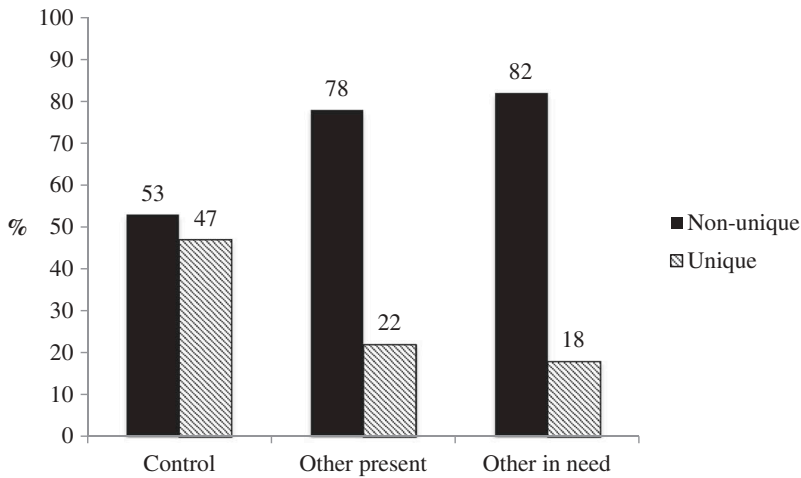


Figure 1. Percentage of choices for unique and non-unique pens per condition in Study 1.

introductions and no planned future interactions, these findings indicate that the simple presence of a second chooser was enough to make people choose one of the identical pens more often, leaving this person some choice and, thus, to be socially mindful.

Study 2: Elevating social mindfulness

Study 1 confirmed our expectation that the presence of a task-relevant other can trigger socially mindful decisions in the sense of leaving a choice for the other person. This forms an extension to Van Doesum et al. (2013), who found that other-orientations led to greater social mindfulness. But is it only the explicit construal of the paradigm as a two-person task with a first and a second chooser, where a second chooser may be involved without actually having to be present? Or does the actual, physical presence of this second chooser bring some extra weight to the scale – someone who can be identified?

Being kind to others and identifiability have been linked before. For example, literature on helping suggests that people tend to give more to identifiable victims in the immediate present than to unspecified victims at a future point in time (e.g. Small & Loewenstein, 2003). Confronted with victims, it is obvious that helping is opportune as a natural and salient behavioral option. But most daily interactions do not involve victims who need help, yet other-regarding – socially mindful – decisions are routinely made. Perhaps the effect of identifiability on such decisions can be stretched to situations with even more limited information. We thus examined whether the actual presence of a specified (versus unspecified) confederate as second chooser would impact the degree to which participants decide to take one of the identical pens.

We designed two conditions in which the target was either an unspecified other or a specified, identifiable confederate, and hypothesized that people would choose one of

the identical pens more often when a confederate was actually present to choose next than when the next chooser was an unspecified other in an undefined future. We additionally explored whether social mindfulness would increase by emphasizing the social context through a simple greeting. We expected that a greeting by a confederate at the beginning of the procedure would lead to an even higher proportion of participant choices for the non-unique option.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were individuals riding down the elevator in one of the larger midrise buildings on the campus of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. In total, 308 individuals were approached, of which 188 (53% female) complied and eventually completed the procedure. Participants were mainly students, (young) faculty, and visitors. Information on age was missing for four individuals, and recorded ages ranged from 18 to 54, $M_{\text{age}} = 23.63$ ($SD = 6.96$). In a factorial 2×2 design, the second chooser in the pen choice paradigm was either a confederate or an unspecified other (other; specified, unspecified), and a confederate either greeted participants before starting the procedure or not (greeted; yes, no).

Procedure

We chose an elevator in a quiet hallway with light but regular traffic. The setup required one confederate and two experimenters in the role of interviewer, who all followed a strict protocol. Roles of confederate and interviewers were regularly and randomly switched among a group of four females. The confederate would go up to the sixth and highest floor of the building, determine randomly which condition to run (to greet or not to greet), call the elevator, check whether it was empty, and ride it down to ground floor. If at one of the intermediate floors a single individual would enter the elevator – groups or multiple persons were not approached – the confederate greeted this person by saying ‘hello,’ or did not greet at all, according to condition. Vocal and facial expressions were kept neutral at all times. The two interviewers were waiting at ground floor, and randomly determined whether the other person in the pen choice paradigm was going to be the confederate or an abstract other; interviewers were blind to the greeting-condition, and the confederate to the other-condition.

When the participant and the confederate exited the elevator at ground floor, one of the two interviewers asked the participant to fill out a brief survey regarding the quality of the building and the facilities, while the other interviewer did the same for the confederate (i.e. participant and confederate were approached simultaneously). The confederate always agreed, but only after participants had made their decision. If agreed, participant and confederate were handed a clipboard with a one-page questionnaire and an attached pen. Items in the questionnaire included ratings of lighting, lecture halls, signposting, et cetera. Answers to these questions were not of interest to the research question, and were not included in the analyses.

As a reward for completing the questionnaire, participants were offered a pen. They could choose among three BIC M10[®] clic pens, always presented in a single transparent plastic cup holding one blue and two black, or one black and two blue pens, randomly

determined. This ensured that any decision would have consequences for the choice of a next person. Before they could decide, however, participants were told that the study was almost completed, which, as the interviewer told, was ‘a good thing because these were all the pens that were left.’ In the ‘specified other’ condition, the interviewer would add: ‘Now, if you choose first, then this other person comes next,’ while pointing at the confederate (who made sure she was still busy filling out the questionnaire). In the ‘unspecified other’ condition, the interviewer said: ‘After this, we only need one more participant,’ without specifically referring to the confederate verbally or non-verbally.

Results and discussion

Confirming our hypothesis, the physical presence of a next chooser had a significant effect on pen choice, $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 5.38, p = .020, \phi = .17, OR = 2.11, CI_{95\%} [1.12, 3.97]$. Of the participants who were instructed that the confederate would choose next, 76% decided to take one of the identical pens, versus 60% of those who were told that an unspecified other would be next; see [Table 1](#) for distributions, and [Figure 2](#) for a visualization. Being greeted or not before the start of the procedure had no effect on pen choice, however, $\chi^2(1) = .01, p = .931, \phi = .01$, nor did it interact with the other-condition ($p = .128$). Additionally, neither the age nor the sex of the participant influenced these results. Being greeted also did not matter for the willingness to participate, $\chi^2(1, N = 308) = 3.38, p = .066, \phi = -.11$.

As expected, results of Study 2 suggest that the presence of a specified second chooser elicits more socially mindful decisions than interacting with an unspecified other. Putting a face to a stranger – making them identifiable – even without further information or introduction can thus be sufficient to make people behave more socially mindfully. Being greeted is not enough to emphasize the social context, however, at least not when riding the elevator. What is more, a marginally significant trend suggested that this could have negatively influenced the willingness to participate in our brief survey. It could feel somewhat intimidating or too invasive of one’s personal space to be greeted by a complete stranger in an elevator, thus negatively impacting the influence of social context (Lockard, Mcvittie, & Isaac, 1977; Szpak et al., 2015).

General discussion

Two behavioral field studies showed that the presence of a task-relevant other triggered socially mindful behavior as manifested in leaving this person choice in a one-shot pen choice paradigm. SVO did not moderate this effect, nor was it guided by empathic concern (Study 1). Further, we found that a specific target who was identifiable and actually present led to more socially mindful decisions than an unspecified target who was going to choose next in the near future (Study 2). Together these studies suggest that the presence of relevant strangers can be sufficient to bring out social mindfulness as operationalized using the SoMi paradigm; a small but definite social cue is enough to do the trick. Socially mindful behavior only requires a minimal social context.

Several theoretical approaches could help explain our findings. See, for instance, the broader literature on altruism, prosociality, and cooperation. Specifically,

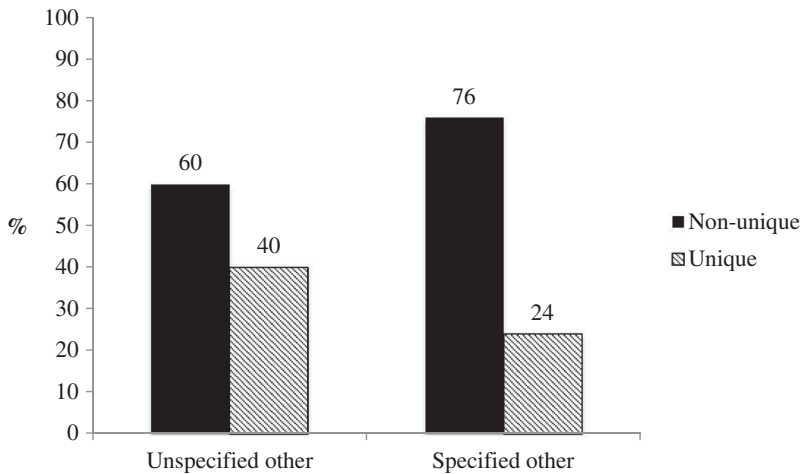


Figure 2. Percentage of choices for unique and non-unique pens per condition in Study 2.

cooperation may even be the default under limited information (e.g. Rand et al., 2014; Zaki & Mitchell, 2013). But even though the design of our two brief behavioral studies did not leave much room to test particular underlying mechanisms, we suggest a few explanations that could be investigated in future research. A first and proximal answer is that the presence of a relevant, identifiable other can promote (a) greater awareness of social consequences (cognitive perception; seeing an actual other makes you see the consequences for the other's choice more directly), and (b) a greater willingness to preserve another's choice (other-regarding motivation). The other's physical presence makes this awareness and/or willingness extra salient. The combination of seeing another's perspective, realizing the impact of your decisions, and weighing these to others' benefit is well captured under the construct of social mindfulness, the primary focus of our investigations. Greater social mindfulness was shown in the act of leaving choice.

Another interpretation of our findings could include differences in psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Especially the results of Study 2 could be construed in terms of the present confederate (a concrete other) being experienced as closer than the implied (abstract) other. This could then prompt a higher awareness of the social context, and thus more other-regard as manifested in leaving choice more often to the concrete other. Our data do not allow to disambiguate interpretations at this point, but future studies could explicitly consider this option.

Additionally, norms and/or norm violations may be at play (e.g. Van Kleef, Wanders, Stamkou, & Homan, 2015), for instance related to niceness or considerateness, (e.g. Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Schwartz, 1968; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Another norm is the 'no harm principle.' In this case, harm would come from taking away options for another (taking the unique pen; for more information about the no harm principle, see Baron, 1994; Van Beest, Van Dijk, De Dreu, & Wilke, 2005; Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). Yet another possible mechanism is reputation management. This is especially relevant in a social context where observers are present, because previous

findings suggest that seeing someone limit someone else's choice can lead to lower levels of trust and liking (Van Doesum et al., 2013, Study 2a-b).

Before norms become applicable, however, the social context must be activated (cf. Schwartz, 1977) by cognitive processes like perspective taking (e.g. Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Ruby & Decety, 2001) and/or theory of mind (e.g. Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1985; Frith & Frith, 2005). Next, it is important how people decide to present themselves in this context: 'How do I see myself, and how do others perceive me?' (cf. Baumeister & Hutton, 1987; Leary, 1995). One of the first things to communicate is the basic acknowledgement of being embedded in a social context. This does not require large sacrifices. Rather, subtle and daily behaviors like leaving someone a choice of pen sufficiently confirm an ongoing awareness of this embeddedness.

In this framework, social mindfulness is especially applicable: Its subtle and low-cost behaviors signal to others that they are seen and that they matter; that – when possible – they are taken into account. Put in a broader social psychological context, however, our findings corroborate the literature on how the presence of others guides behavioral decisions; humans are notoriously influenced by their social environment. To this we add the suggestion that the presence of relevant others can be a minimal trigger for socially mindful decisions.

Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to our studies. For example, future research could improve empathy manipulations and use larger samples to check on SVO. More pressingly, an important question we could not answer from our data is what really makes the actual and physical presence of others promote socially mindful behavior. Can we pin down the underlying mechanisms? Future studies could find out what the actual presence of task-relevant strangers does to people. Does it generate immediate evaluation concerns or impression management, or invoke social norms? Another perspective we were not able to take is the cultural one: Would collectivistic versus individualistic orientations impact how often the unique versus the non-unique item is taken? Extant literature suggests it might (Kim & Markus, 1999), but not in a socially unqualified way (Yamagishi et al., 2008). However, given that our samples were taken within one country at very comparable locations, we assume that such possible differences did not confound our results.

Conclusion

Interdependence theory speaks of psychological transformation processes to describe how interactions are formed by broader goals beyond immediate self-interest. Here we show how such other-regarding motivation can be initiated and enhanced by the actual and physical presence of a task-relevant stranger in real-life interactions. For one, this sheds some light on the host of findings that are based on interactions with unspecified and/or absent others. Although such findings provide reliable information about general traits, attitudes, or social preferences, other factors regarding the actual moment of decision may weigh in more than expected when put to the test in the real world. This is the first time that social mindfulness as operationalized using the SoMi paradigm has been put to such a test and, for all intents and purposes, it passed. Given enough

incentive by the actual presence of others, people can and will acknowledge their social embeddedness by not limiting others' choice in a simple pen choice paradigm.

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