

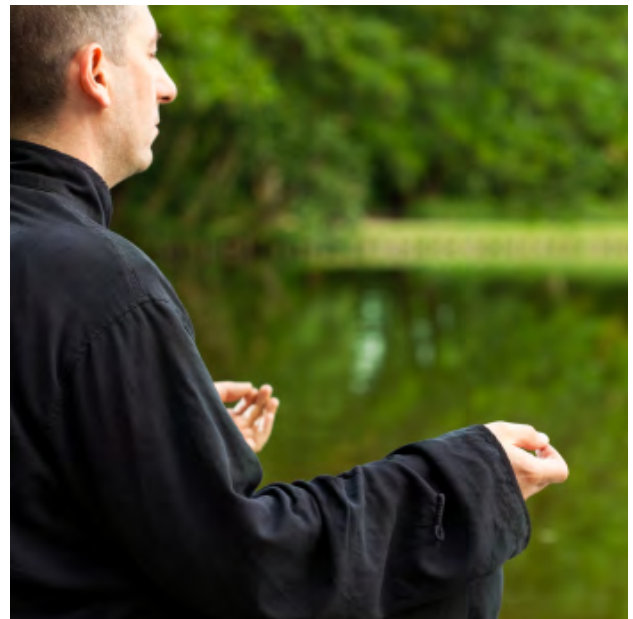
RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Intergroup Harmony

Dr Baljinder Sahdra of the School of Social Sciences and Psychology is examining “nonattachment,” a Buddhist psychological concept, to investigate its usefulness in increasing intergroup harmony and reducing human psychological suffering. This project is funded by the Mind & Life Institute through its Mind and Life Contemplative Studies Fellowship Program.

‘The practice of nonattachment seems central to Buddhist psychology and is in fact important in many Eastern traditions’, explains Dr Sahdra. ‘Nonattachment can be defined as release from unhealthy mental “attachments” to or fixations on ideas or objects that make us suffer. My previous research shows that nonattachment is not the same as detachment, dissociation, indifference or withdrawal. Instead, it involves engaging with one’s activities with ease and balance, and not feeling mentally trapped or fixated on ideas and beliefs about self, others and life in general. There is emerging evidence that nonattachment is linked to less close-mindedness, and less defensiveness regarding one’s group members’ transgressions. Research has shown that directly confronting prejudicial beliefs can sometimes backfire and even increase prejudice and intergroup conflicts. So other approaches are needed. Modern psychological interventions are increasingly adopting psychological concepts and practices from Buddhism. Measuring the effectiveness of these interventions is difficult but necessary. More research is needed to investigate the link between nonattachment and intergroup harmony.’

A series of experiments involving racially and ethnically diverse control groups, and groups who are involved in exercises to promote nonattachment will be carried out. Senior Buddhist teachers, including the Dalai Lama, have informed the project with their understanding of the role of



nonattachment in promoting peaceful intergroup relations.

Current psychological approaches to promoting intergroup harmony are influenced by western individualism and sometimes involve confrontation. By using a more general practice of nonattachment or loosening of rigid fixations on one’s beliefs and attitudes, it might be possible to develop novel effective approaches to workplace diversity training and positive social group interactions. As modern society becomes more racially and culturally diverse, evidence-based approaches for promoting inclusiveness and intergroup harmony become increasingly important for peaceful co-existence.

Project Title: Nonattachment and Intergroup Harmony

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