

Chilled out: Trait mindfulness predicts frequency of aesthetic experiences evoked by the arts

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Background

- Aesthetic responses to artworks include somewhat unusual states such as the 'chills' (goose bumps and shivers), feeling 'touched', and feeling absorbed and immersed.



- Attention to present moment experience, letting go of distractions, and an openness and acceptance of current experience, are key features not only of mindfulness, but also of the production of aesthetic experience.
- Previous experimental research has shown that a brief mindfulness induction procedure can enhance positive emotional responses to music (Diaz, 2013).
- However, it is not known whether there is an association between trait mindfulness and how often people report unusual aesthetic experiences, whether trait mindfulness is related to aesthetic experiences to the arts in general (as opposed to only music), or which features of mindfulness are associated with aesthetic experience.
- The current research builds on research exploring individual differences in aesthetic responses to the arts, which found that openness to experience was a significant predictor of aesthetic 'chills'

Aim

- This exploratory study aimed to examine which factors of trait mindfulness are associated with self-reported frequency of aesthetic experiences (aesthetic chills, feeling touched, and feeling absorbed), while taking into account level of expertise in the arts.

Participants

- 248 participants completed a survey online using SurveyMonkey. We excluded 41 participants who reported meditating regularly, leaving N = 207 (mean age = 23.7 years (SD = 9.9); 159 female, 48 male).
- Demographics: Living in North American = 106, Europe = 84, Asia = 15, Other = 2

Measures

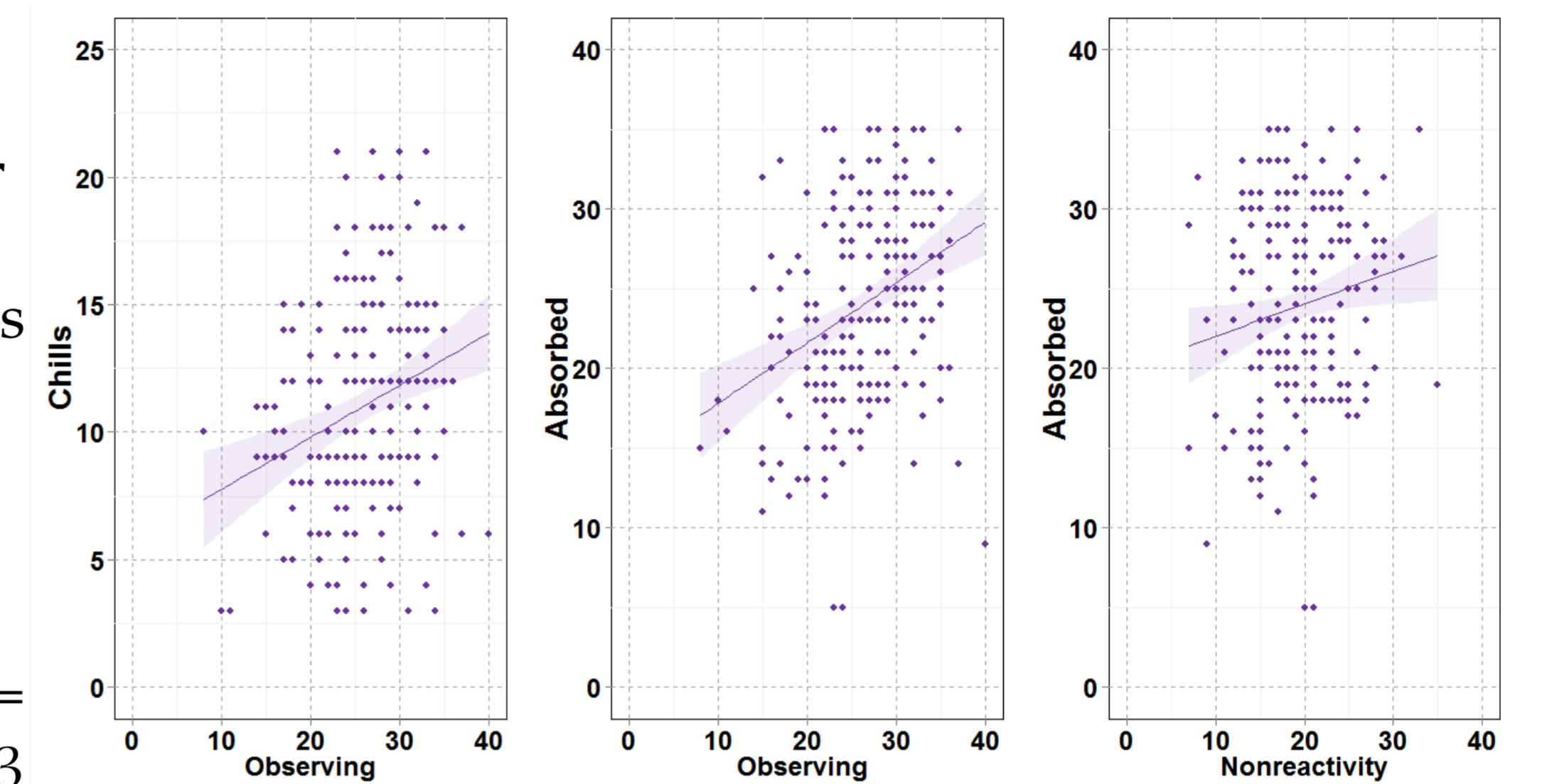
- Mindfulness:** The five facets of mindfulness questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006) was used to measure trait mindfulness. The FFMQ consists of 39 items measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never or very rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true). The subscales are observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience.
- Aesthetic experiences** were measured using the 10 item Aesthetic Experiences scale (Silvia, & Nusbaum, 2011). This consists of three subscale: aesthetic chills, feeling touched, and feeling absorbed.
- Familiarity with the arts** was measured with a modified version of the 10 item aesthetic fluency scale (Smith, & Smith, 2006). This is a knowledge-based assessment of expertise in the visual arts, and was modified to include items relating to knowledge of music.
- Participants reported which domain of the arts they encountered most frequently in daily life.

Results

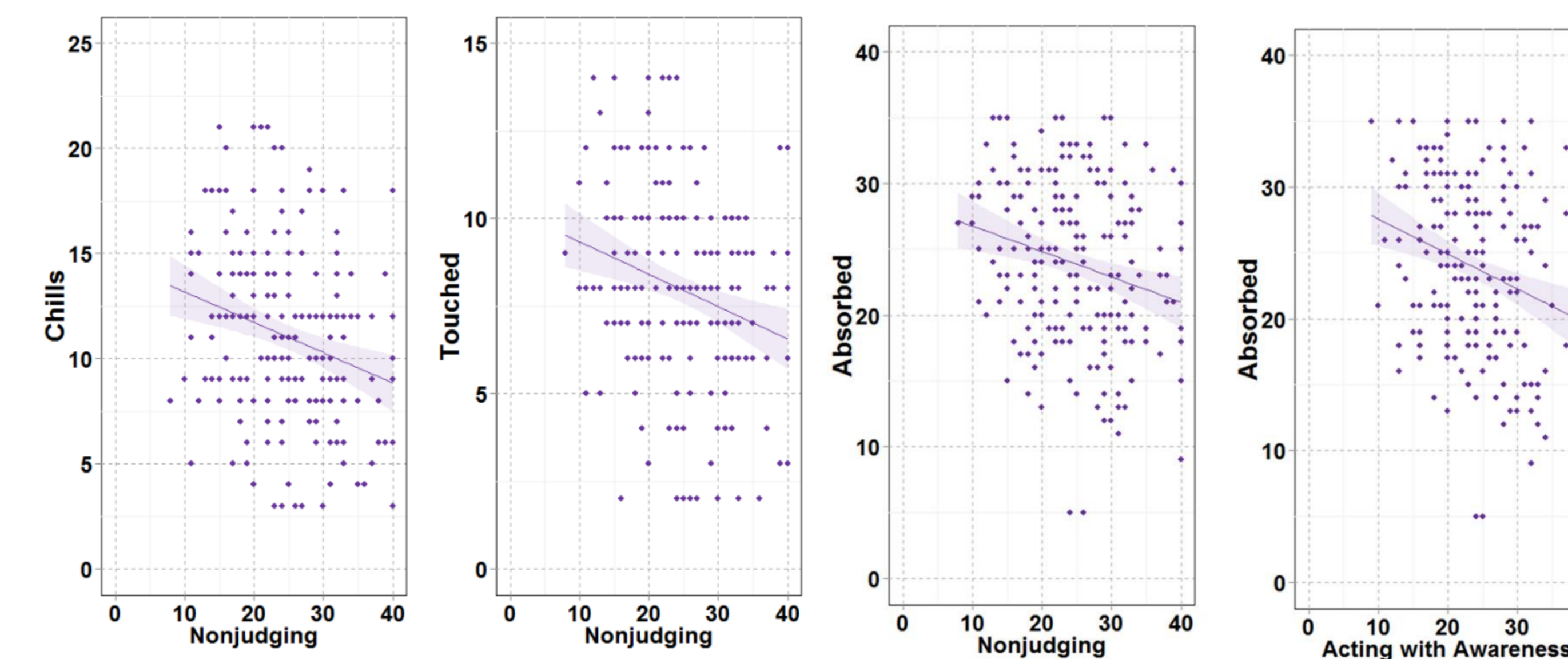
Table 1
Frequencies of the Art Domains

Domain	N
Music	112
Visual Art	25
Motion picture media (e.g.,	17
Reading	13
Dance	4
Theatre	3
Listed a creative process	10
Obscure, hard to classify	23

- Overall, trait mindfulness was a significant predictor of frequency of aesthetic experiences ($p < .001$).
- Aesthetic fluency significantly predicted feeling touched ($\beta = .494, p = .020$) and absorbed ($\beta = 1.971, p < .001$)



- Controlling for aesthetic fluency, linear regression revealed that 'observing' positively predicted aesthetic chills ($\beta = .140, p = .016$), and 'observing' and 'non-reactivity' positively predicted absorption ($\beta = .186, p = .018$ & $\beta = .178, p = .042$, respectively).



- 'Non-judging' negatively predicted aesthetic chills ($\beta = -.140, p = .002$), feeling touched ($\beta = -.096, p = .001$), & absorbed ($\beta = -.159, p = .009$), and 'acting with awareness' negatively predicted absorbed ($\beta = -.191, p = .007$).

Discussion

- Observing was a predictor of frequency of aesthetic response (chills and absorbed). An increased ability to notice or attend to the external experience (e.g., sight, sound etc.) leading to full engagement (absorption) with and heightened emotional response (chills) to the artwork is in line with models of aesthetic information processing that place perceptual analysis at an early stage in the development of the aesthetic response (e.g., Leder et al., 2004).
- Frequency of feeling absorbed was also positively predicted by the stance of non-reactivity, suggesting this state is related to the ability to allow thoughts and emotions to come and go, thus producing a state of immersion.
- People scoring high on non-judging of inner experience reported fewer aesthetic chills, reduced frequency of feeling touched, and lower absorption, in line with models of aesthetic experience that emphasise the importance of an evaluative judgement of the stimulus in the realisation of an aesthetic response.
- Scoring highly on 'acting with awareness' negatively predicted the state of absorption, suggesting that the tendency to attend closely to one's activities precludes losing awareness of the surrounding environment to become fully immersed in the symbolic reality of the artwork.

References

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