CHAPTER 1

Terra incognita

*Introducing the new construct of social mindfulness*
This dissertation introduces the construct of social mindfulness, a new way of looking at how people can be mindful of others in spontaneous and proactive ways – or not. One of its main goals is to show how the new construct provides information over and above extant approaches. The following chapters thus provide evidence that social mindfulness has its own natural place among traditional and previously established ways of examining human cooperation and prosociality.

Would I have predicted this, when I was introduced to the concept myself, and heard the initial story of the operationalization that will be featured here? Honestly, I treated the project as an empirical question, bearing an open mind. Yes, a paradigm in which people could decide to be nice to others by not claiming a unique product seemed to convey something valuable about the quality of interpersonal relationships – quality here used as Aristotelian properties, or what and how they are. Especially, it seemed to reveal whether people were aware of others in their social environment while motivated to act in these others’ best interest. These were important things. But, was treating others nicely by letting them choose for themselves not simply something “my grandmother already taught me,” as I was politely asked after one of my earlier presentations on the topic?

Some years and multiple studies later, my definite answer is no, and also a bit of yes – but more about that later (grandmother must have been a wise woman). Part of the answer is that although a lot of what will be discussed here relies on the assumed prosociality of not blocking someone else’s choice, the concept of social mindfulness is much broader than that. However, constructing a task that focuses on leaving or limiting choice has been a fruitful way of operationalizing social mindfulness; indeed, it has borne more fruit than fits this dissertation. As the following chapters will show, leaving versus limiting choice seems to be indicative of important and decisive aspects of human interaction. For one thing, are we friends or foes, socially mindful or socially hostile? Would social class play a role?

I expect the full picture of social mindfulness at the current state of research to emerge gradually throughout this dissertation. Each empirical chapter will highlight specific aspects in the context of specific research questions. Providing initial evidence, for example, Chapter 2 will contain some basic theoretical reflections to carefully position the new construct in the realm of prosocial behavior, whereas Chapter 5 assumes social mindfulness to be prosocial in examining some remarkable effects of social class on prosociality. In between, Chapters 3 and 4 provide findings from studies that focus on different aspects of social mindfulness. This introductory chapter will break ground by highlighting some general observations and providing necessary conceptual background. Chapter 6 then aims to tie it all together.

**Spontaneous prosociality – some examples**

One of the guiding ideas within this dissertation is that social mindfulness is spontaneous and proactive; therefore, perceiving socially mindful behavior signals that you are being taken into account unsolicitedly. Consider the case of biking in Amsterdam. Amsterdam is a densely populated city, and with slightly more bikes than there are people (Iamsterdam, 2015), roads and biking lanes can be extremely busy. Among all individual bikers crowding the roads, there are some who conscientiously indicate where they are going, so that when they plan to turn right from a priority road, for example, you don’t have to wait when crossing that road. Experientially, this is highly appreciated, and the unknown other is perceived to be a nice person. You assume that the other anticipated where you were going and had no intention of making you wait unnecessarily. At the very least, you feel
seen and acknowledged. There are also those who do not indicate where they are going. In the same situation it can thus occur that you are waiting because you expect them to continue straight, while at the very last moment they make a right; by then you could have started crossing the street and been on your merry way. Again experientially, this does not reflect well on the other. Obviously, this other person was not thinking of you or anticipating where you might be going; you feel neither seen nor acknowledged.

Or consider the case of food shopping for your family. You might have been handed a shopping list with all the necessary groceries, but browsing the aisles, your eye falls upon a product that one of your family members likes but is not on the list. You know your pantry well enough to know that you are out, and have been for a while. Still, buying it was not requested, and the product is also not a standard item that goes without saying – it would just be a small extra thing to take home. Grabbing such a product from the shelf, then, shows that you were thinking of the other and mindful of what he/she might want. The same mechanism is activated for you when a stranger is blocking the aisle but spontaneously moves out of the way when you are approaching (Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015).

There are other examples to consider. Chapter 2 mentions recommending a restaurant to a stranger: It would be socially mindful to inquire about preferences and budget before actually mentioning a specific place. And when giving directions, it is generally much better to first establish whether the other is driving, biking, walking, or taking public transportation. Finally, cooking breakfast for someone else well will probably be more appreciated when you do not simply serve standard breakfast items or whip up what you like yourself, but show some effort in making an educated guess about what the other might prefer.

These everyday situations have in common that the socially mindful person holds others in their mind unsolicited and spontaneously, shown proactively. Thus, as described in more detail in Chapter 2, you have to see that you can have an impact on the situation for the other and do something positive about it, without checking with the other first. Another defining aspect is that portraying social mindfulness does not involve large sacrifices or big efforts. Rather, social mindfulness is about relatively small gestures. All that these gestures do is convey that the other is seen, acknowledged, and taken into account when making your decisions. In the course of this process, the actual outcome is not even that important. At an interpersonal level – to like or not to like, for instance – the result would probably be the same if you told your family member that you thought about buying that one product, but eventually decided not to. The message remains the same: “I thought of you; thus you matter to me.”

Leaving or limiting choice – the SoMi paradigm
The examples above suggest several possible ways of tapping into the broader construct of social mindfulness. Inspired by the events recounted in the prologue, however, this dissertation focuses on one: Leaving or limiting choice. It is well documented that having choice is good. But in moderation, and depending on the situation; see, e.g., Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, and Todd (2010) for a meta-analysis on choice overload.
Thus, providing choice may conceivably be a prosocial thing to do; Studies 2.2a-b (Chapter 2) succinctly sustain this notion. Specific targets in these studies were indeed better appreciated if they did not limit others’ choice, either when participants were on the receiving end as second movers or when they only observed the target interact with someone else.

Having his choice blocked in the prologue must also have triggered the son to be upset with his father; seeing his son upset subsequently must have triggered the father’s idea for a social mindfulness paradigm, ‘SoMi’ for short. Over the next few chapters, the SoMi paradigm will be fully described in its various stages of development, but the basic setup has always been the same (see the Appendix for the most recent version):

In a hypothetical or realistic two-person (i.e., dyadic) task, one participant is asked to choose first from a specific set of three or four products, while the other gets to choose second. All products are identical, except for one that is unique in some aspect (for example, color). We thus offered black and blue pens, green and orange pencils, yellow and blue baseball hats, and different brands of water bottles, for example, and of course there were different flavors of jam involved; also note that the intrinsic value of all these products is rather low. Importantly, there is no prior communication before decisions are made, and, except for the one-shot experiments in Chapter 3, there are multiple experimental trials. If the first mover decides to take the unique item in one of these trials (e.g., the one blue pen among multiple black ones), this is labeled as socially unmindful: The other has no real choice anymore, and the score is zero. On the other hand, the decision to take one of the identical products is labeled as socially mindful, because this means that the other still has a real choice. This is scored as one. The final score is computed as the proportion of socially mindful choices across all experimental trials.

The cross-culturally informed reader will notice that this procedure shows some similarity to the pen choice paradigm as developed by, among others, Kim and Markus (1999) and Yamagishi, Hashimoto, and Schug (2008). This would be correct, because the SoMi paradigm is inherently indebted to this measure. The pen choice paradigm has been used extensively to distinguish between individualistic versus collectivistic orientations by asking participants to choose from a set of five pens containing both majority and minority items (e.g., three blue and two orange pens). The rationale is that collectivistic orientations would emerge in an observed preference for the majority item – better to stick with the herd. Conversely, individualistic orientations would come out in preferring the minority item to emphasize individuality and stand out from the crowd. Findings indeed confirmed this notion, either explainable by internalized cultural norms (Kim & Markus, 1999) or more deliberate conformation strategies (Yamagishi et al., 2008).

However, because ratios in the pen choice paradigm traditionally varied between one or two minority items versus three or four majority items, there was not always a unique item to take away from the set, which is a defining aspect of the SoMi paradigm. Also, the set-up was not always dyadic (cf. Yamagishi et al., 2008). The experimental trials in the SoMi paradigm thus direct the original pen choice paradigm towards social mindfulness by always offering one unique versus multiple identical products in a strictly dyadic framing: “You pick first, and then the other will.” This ensures that a first mover’s decision directly impacts the choice of a second mover.
Contrasting Kim and Markus (1999), one of the conclusions of Yamagishi et al. (2008) became part of the underlying assumptions for the SoMi paradigm: In the absence of a social context, people generally seem to prefer a unique over a non-unique item. This conforms with the classic similarity effect as formulated by Tversky (1972), who observed that “the addition of an alternative to an offered set ‘hurts’ alternatives that are similar to the added alternative more than those that are dissimilar to it” (p. 282). In a covert process of elimination-by-aspects, the unique features of any product within a certain set makes this product more likely to be chosen. Using Tversky’s (1972) example, when choosing between two similar Beethoven recordings (e.g., the same composition played by different orchestras) and one Debussy recording, the chance that Debussy will be chosen increases with increasing similarity between the two Beethoven recordings (they may also feature the same conductor) – assuming that the music of Beethoven and Debussy is equally appreciated. From this, it follows that the unique product in the SoMi paradigm must have a higher a priori chance of being chosen than any of the other individual but mutually identical products. Because the ultimate “probabilities merely reflect the fact that at different moments in time different states of mind (leading to different choices) may prevail” (p. 296), a choice for one of the non-unique products is therefore likely to result from something else than unmediated self-interest; this theoretical idea is examined in Studies 2.1a-c (Chapter 2).

**Mindfulness – what this dissertation is not about**

For a proper understanding of social mindfulness as a psychological construct, one important distinction needs to be made. Although it shares some aspects of ‘being in the moment’, social mindfulness has little to do with the kind of mindfulness that is used and studied as an increasingly popular answer to the challenges of everyday life (e.g., Langer, 1989; Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009) or with the proven psychotherapeutic approaches to mindfulness (for reviews and/or meta-analyses, see Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010). Some exceptions notwithstanding, these ways of applying mindfulness share an inward, individual focus that is mostly achieved by means of (mental) exercises. And even though the Buddhist mindfulness meditations at the root of these approaches may have some social implications in the long run, social mindfulness implies something different in that context than what will be discussed here. In fact, there is no meditation or mental exercise involved in the psychological construct of social mindfulness at all, nor extra attention to breathing, bodily sensations, or momentary feelings. So why use the term ‘mindfulness’ to name this construct?

The main answer can be found in the dictionary. The primary definition of mindfulness is “the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something” (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2015). It follows that social mindfulness must be a state of being aware of your social environment. That is not bare or unqualified awareness, however; just like ‘minding the gap’ means showing awareness of the potentially dangerous gap between platform and train at the London Underground by not falling or stumbling into it, being socially mindful means to be aware of your social environment by adjusting your behavior to reflect this awareness. In the case of the London Underground, the motivation would be to not fall; in case of social mindfulness, the motivation is to benevolently acknowledge that your behavior has consequences for others, and thus to be prosocial.

Social mindfulness, then, is socially qualified awareness, as opposed to the non-qualifying and ‘accepting’ open awareness of psychotherapeutic mindfulness exercises or Buddhist mind-
fulness meditation. In the latter cases, mindfulness can indeed be understood, as the secondary dictionary entry reads, as “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique” (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2015). Even the more socially oriented Buddhist would admit that it still requires dialogue, meaning the active involvement of at least one other person, to go from an individual state of enlightened mindfulness to social mindfulness – finding sympathy and compassion for others (cf. Chappell, 2003, p. 264).

The proof is in the process – interdependence theory and transition lists
The construct of social mindfulness is deeply rooted in interdependence theory (e.g., Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). As its name clearly suggests, interdependence theory is applicable to situations in which people are interdependent as to what happens next, meaning that the outcome of a specific situation (i.e., who ends up where and with what) depends on the initial position and subsequent decision(s) of each and every individual involved. Interdependence theory therefore acknowledges people’s individuality in their situational affordances and their personal motivations, while also postulating that the outcome of any interpersonal situation is contingent on the decisions of all individuals with the power to make an impact.

Because many situations resemble each other in a payoff structure that can be formalized in outcome matrices, it is possible to construct a taxonomy, or atlas of interpersonal situations (Kelley et al., 2003). One of the best known examples of such a situation is the classic prisoner’s dilemma, originally described by Luce and Raiffa (1957). In short, two prisoners are accused of a crime they supposedly committed together, and are proposed a deal: They can tell on the other in exchange for a sizable sentence reduction (defect). This becomes very profitable if the other decides to remain silent (cooperate), because then the defector will be set free, while the other will serve maximum time. If both remain silent (cooperate), each will still serve a minimum amount of time; if both decide to betray the other (defect), they will be sentenced to something between minimum and maximum time, but always more than when both remain silent (cooperate).

The four possible outcomes of this particular situation can functionally be described as Reward (R; to reflect mutual cooperation), Temptation versus Sucker’s Payoff (when one defects [T] while the other cooperates [S]), and Punishment (P, when both defect). Specific payoffs (i.e., how high they are or what they entail) and what is best on an individual versus collective level depends on the structure of the encompassing situation; in research this can be structured according to the psychological question under scrutiny. The ultimate question is always how individual versus collective outcomes are weighed and what makes most sense to the decision-maker; what is the rational thing to do? Should I cooperate or defect, follow self-interest or other-regard? The various outcome matrices have led to a host of different standardized ‘games’ with illustrious names like Chicken, Stag Hunt, Threat, Hero, and so on (for a good overview, see Kelley et al., 2003).

Most of these games assume no communication between parties before or while decisions are made (in the original prisoner’s dilemma, the prisoners were kept in separate cells). There is no negotiation, and no chance to warn the interaction partner(s) one way or the other. The SoMi paradigm is no different; it is not possible to ask the other person what their preference would be, which is obviously the easy way out, but theoretically the answer to an entirely different question. An important difference from most outcome oriented games, however, is that decisions are made
subsequently, not simultaneously – “first you, then the other.” In fact, the first mover is given the power to change the situation for the second mover. This makes the SoMi paradigm more about the process than the outcome. Or: The process is the outcome.

This might need some elaboration. Most measures of prosocial behavior record how much of something one individual gives to one or more others, be it money, valuable points, certain goods, labor, or even time. Person A thus gives something to person B, or to the collective. But what can be given cannot be changed, only the amount of it. In other words, the situation reflects a constant, a frozen slice of time; ultimately, there is only a single and unchangeable matrix of possible outcomes. This is different in the SoMi paradigm: The person who makes the first decision structurally determines the outcome matrix for the one who comes next. The situation for the first mover is actively transitioned by this first mover into a subsequent and slightly different situation for the second mover; time has moved one slice ahead.

This notion latches on to what Kelley (1984) described as transition lists. The somewhat under-represented concept of transition lists, or lists of (con)sequential outcome matrices, acknowledges the fact that actual social dilemmas are not played out in a time vacuum, unlike their usual game setting in research. In real life it is seldom the case that everyone involved makes simultaneous choices without anticipating what the other might do, or even knowing what has already been decided. Situations generally develop by sequential individual decisions that in turn create new situations with new possibilities; every single decision brings along a new range of possible outcomes. This can be reflected by a sequence, or list of matrices where each subsequent matrix is contingent on the decisions that are made directly before.

Although trying to sketch out all the possibilities for moving from one matrix to the next can become quite complicated, being socially mindful requires that people have at least some level of if-then perception (cf. Kammrath, Mendoza-Denton, & Mischel, 2005; Mischel, Mendoza-Denton, & Shoda, 2002; Murray & Holmes, 2009), or an idea of what might happen as the result of their possible decisions. Social mindfulness implies that social consequences are taken into account, meaning that these consequences are spontaneously calculated and weighed to benefit others. In other words, the situation is bent for the other to gain maximum profit. Any interpersonal effect will be generated by this principal show of other-regard (i.e., the procedural outcome), more than ending up with a slightly preferred blue instead of a black pen, for instance (i.e., the material outcome). For interpersonal relationships, the perceived process of being socially mindful is pudding to the proof.

What grandmother taught me – social mindfulness as the norm
Construed as making cooperative decisions, being socially mindful constitutes the norm under many circumstances (Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015, proposition #2). Still focusing on leaving or limiting choice, most people probably have been told at some point in their lives that it is rude to take, for example, the last chocolate chip cookie from a plate that also holds a couple of almond cookies. The strength of this norm depends on the strength of the social situation. Decisions are going to be different among close family at Thanksgiving dinner as compared to the reception after the new President’s inaugural address. Uncle Jack can live without chocolate chip cookies, but the new Vice President’s wife may actually enjoy them; and staying on her good side might open a new and very profitable network.
Indeed, steering clear of the last single cookie is something that may have been internalized to the extent that you do not have to think about it anymore. It is just a social norm, right? But let us deconstruct this internalization for a second. As with almost every sensible norm, there is a good reason why people have come up with it. This reason is often more practical and mundane than we usually realize. Eating pork, for example, was probably unsafe centuries ago, and not running a red traffic light simply enhances road safety, but only when all abide by the rule. The same goes for social norms; all they do is regulate social traffic. So what is regulatory about not taking that last chocolate chip cookie when there are other options?

The answer becomes more clear when remembering that choice is good, and that the attractiveness of the last cookie resides in its uniqueness (cf. Tversky, 1972) rather than its specific flavor; it might just as well be made from pecans, for instance, or be a macaroon of sorts. Notwithstanding individual preferences, the flavor in this example – the quality of the unique product – is much less important than what it represents within the interpersonal relationship when one does not grab the unique product and maintains choice for the other; leaving choice suggests that you are willing to take the other into account when making your decisions.

Ultimately, then, social mindfulness communicates that a situation is *socially constructed*, or defined in terms of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Reis, 2008). Being socially mindful shows acknowledgment of not being alone in the situation, together with the willingness to consider the needs and wishes of others who are involved. From this, it follows that it takes at least two individuals for the construct to make sense. Social mindfulness only became an issue for Robinson Crusoe when he first noticed Friday’s footsteps in the sand.

Socially sensitive as she may have been, the grandmother mentioned earlier was right to say that it is not polite to grab the last chocolate chip cookie from the plate, but this only reveals the tip of the iceberg of what social mindfulness means for interpersonal relationships. The mere act of leaving or limiting choice implies a whole underlying score of information about the social construction of the situation and the realization of social interdependence. Furthermore, as I must emphasize again, leaving or limiting choice is only one way of operationalizing the construct of social mindfulness; there will be many others. In sum, socially mindful behavior is normative because it communicates openness to cooperation by confirming the momentary social construction of the situation. Chapter 3 will examine this basic aspect of social mindfulness.

### Hostile strategies – willful norm violations

Assuming that socially mindful behavior complies with the generally accepted and more or less automated norms of cooperation (e.g., Rand & Nowak, 2013), then, behavior that could be perceived as socially mindful has a good chance of being given the benefit of the doubt; others must be more likely to be socially mindful than not. At least, that is what the results of Studies 2a-b

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2 Throughout this dissertation, I use the term ‘social construction’ to describe how people construe and perceive a situation in terms of their immediate social environment and the individuals populating it. In other words, the situation gets socially defined; there are others present who all have a stake in the situation. This is comparable to how the term is used in literature on the social construction of technology, for example (e.g., Bijker, Hughes, Pinch, & Douglas, 2012), and has less far-reaching implications for the perception of reality (i.e., the world in which we live) than what is understood as ‘social constructionism’ in sociology and phenomenology.
suggest (Chapter 2). In these studies, one perceived socially mindful and one socially unmindful decision was no reason to like a target less than when both these decisions were socially mindful. But as an obvious violation of the norm, this started shifting when the target was perceived to make two unmindful decisions in a row. Two of these instances were enough to not trust this individual, like him less, think he is more self-centered, and more of such negative social judgments.

These findings led to a preliminary answer to another question I am often asked that, in a sense, can be said to be true of almost all prosocial behavior: Can social mindfulness be used strategically? In other words, can behavior that is usually perceived as socially mindful be recruited to actively distinguish between those we like, those we might not know, and those we do not like; between friends, strangers, and foes? In fact, the very first study using the SoMi paradigm showed that friends were more socially mindful towards one another than towards strangers (Van Doesum, 2011).

Not surprisingly, the answer is yes. Note that most examples mentioned here have a notable instance of not doing something as the most salient occurrence within a situation (bringing something home from the grocery store being an exception). Being ostensibly unmindful of others when it takes so little probably hurts the target’s perceptions of the unmindful person more than the reverse gets appreciated. Counting on it to be perceived, this little sting of unmindfulness can easily be a result of scorn, simply to spite or subtly harass others. Being the opposite of social mindfulness, and thus a violation of the norm of being prosocial, intentionally unmindful behavior can be labeled as social hostility. Social hostility comes into play when socially unmindful decisions are made (and perceived) consistently. As elaborated in Chapter 4, the SoMi paradigm is apt for measuring social mindfulness as well as social hostility.

Under the hood – the neural correlates of social mindfulness

The notion that social mindfulness must be the norm and social hostility a violation has recently found support – among other things – in a study using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to explore the neural correlates of the SoMi paradigm (Lemmers-Jansen et al., 2016). This study used Blood-Oxygen-Level dependent imaging (or BOLD responses) to assess brain activity during spontaneous decision making (i.e., no instructions were provided other than “you choose first, then the other”) and after the added instruction of being mindful of the target’s best interest (cf. Studies 2.1a-c, Chapter 2). Analyses were based on a comparatively large sample of 47 healthy adolescents and young adults between 16 and 27 years old.

The main expectation was that decisions in the SoMi paradigm would involve cognitive effort, mentalizing, and reward processes. This was duly confirmed by whole brain analysis, except for the involvement of reward processes. In general, facing experimental trials with socially relevant decisions activated areas of what is also known as the ‘social brain’ (e.g., Blakemore, 2008; Frith & Frith, 2010). The observed cooperation between the frontoparietal network (FPN) (e.g., Scolari, Seidle-Rathkopf, & Kastner, 2015) and the default mode network (DMN) (e.g., Buckner, Andrews-Hanna, & Schacter, 2008) during the task is also hypothesized to generate and support

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Circumnavigating the reefs of (self)plagiarism, the following discussion of the results and implications of this study leans heavily on a manuscript that is submitted for publication at the time of writing, of which I am grateful to be one of the coauthors.
the ‘train of thought’ (Smallwood, Brown, Baird, & Schooler, 2012), which can be defined as running different scenarios in your head; participants thus are likely to have played various ‘if-then’ scenarios before their minds’ eye.

Between the various options, decisions to leave choice (the socially mindful option) predominantly activated the FPN. Literature suggests that the FPN is mostly active when paying attention to the external world (e.g., Scolari et al., 2015). Gathering such information is crucial to make informed behavioral decisions. This happens in a fairly automated network that has been associated with goal directed cognition (Spreng, Stevens, Chamberlain, Gilmore, & Schacter, 2010), directing attention, weighing behavioral choices (Seeley et al., 2007), and decision making by integrating information from the external environment with stored internal representations (Vincent, Kahn, Raichle, & Buckner, 2008). It follows that socially mindful decisions must incorporate externally derived information; within the SoMi paradigm, the most important information would be the presence of the other.

Decisions to limit choice, however (the socially unmindful option), mainly activated the DMN. As a general network that was originally defined in connection with a resting state (e.g., Greicius, Krasnow, Reiss, & Menon, 2003), the DMN is mainly active when people are engaged in thoughts that are internally focused, independent of external stimuli (Spreng & Grady, 2010). For example, the DMN has been found to support perspective taking arising from self-reflective thought and judgments, including moral decisions (e.g., Buckner et al., 2008; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). It has also been associated with spontaneous internal mentation, self-referential and autobiographical thoughts, and, importantly, processing self-promotional goals (Spreng et al., 2010). Taken together, it seems that such cognitions all focus on the self in semi-detachment from the reality of the outside world. In this process, the outside world has not fully disappeared from cognition, but only functions as a backdrop to the action. Within the SoMi paradigm, the presence of the other will be processed more distally than the proximal self.

Region of interest (ROI) analysis subsequently showed anterior cingulate cortex activation (indicating cognitive control and conflict processing) in all conditions, while showing left caudate (indicating reward and goal directed behavior) and bilateral insula activation only when making unmindful decisions. Notably, most ROI activation was noticed in the unmindful decisions; such decisions seem to be the more effortful response. This accords with the idea that self-reflective and internally focused processes are perceived as more effortful (Lieberman, 2007). Thus, it takes less to be socially mindful (cf. Rand & Nowak, 2013), while the (moral) implications of being socially unmindful are more actively considered.

In the context of introducing social mindfulness as a new psychological construct, another important and more general contribution of these findings (Lemmers-Jansen et al., 2016) is the neurological confirmation that social mindfulness involves the ‘social mind’ that can be expected on theoretical and behavioral grounds (Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015). Neural activity during the SoMi paradigm followed (but was not identical to) a pattern commonly observed with related psychological concepts that deal with being in the social world. Together, these findings form a solid building block in the argument that social mindfulness has its own specific position among other concepts of prosocial behavior.
Seeing you – social mindfulness as basic interpersonal acknowledgment

Nearing the end of this introductory chapter, let me briefly summarize what has been guiding the empirical work that will be discussed in the next chapters. There are three important aspects that, taken together, define social mindfulness and distinguish it from other measures of prosociality: 4 (1) social mindfulness involves a ‘social mind’ that recognizes the needs and wishes of others in the present moment, (2) socially mindful behavior does not necessarily require big sacrifices, and (3) perceived social mindfulness is more about the interpersonal process than the material result of the situation – intention over outcome.

These three aspects make social mindfulness such a helpful tool in ‘navigating the social world’, as Chapter 2 emphasizes. Compared to the other tools in the ‘prosocial package’ (Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2012), it is especially helpful because social mindfulness operates at the elementary level in human cognition where sharing space is transformed to having interpersonal relationships; other individuals are acknowledged to be present in a shared situation, and outcomes to be interdependent. This happens even before relationships get further defined by various qualifications (social judgments). Thus, others are seen and acknowledged in a first-level realization of being together with others in a situation, which can be construed as a heideggerian ‘Mitsein’, or ‘being-with’ (Heidegger, 1996).

The idea that social mindfulness operates at the first level of interpersonal relationships (being-with) is also the reason why it may reflect the social construction of a situation. If sharing the world with others is an important part of being human, then social mindfulness is the root from which many social relationships can grow. Hence, the novel construct of social mindfulness can broadly inform us about the basic quality of interpersonal relationships. At the same time, this is an important limitation, which will be discussed more in Chapter 6. Social mindfulness reveals much about how people construe their relationships with others, but not at every level.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapters 2-5 are based on papers that have been published or are currently under review at various academic journals. As a quick-guide to this dissertation, below is an overview of what has been investigated and found across a grand total of 15 reported studies. This section is based on the abstracts to the individual papers; see each chapter for credits and references.

Chapter 2 describes the initial studies on social mindfulness and provides a definition of the psychological construct. We state that although one may not always see it, social life often involves choices that make people act in ways that are mindful of others or not. We adopt an interdependence theoretical approach to the novel concept of social mindfulness, which we conceptualize in terms of other-regarding choices involving both skill (to see it, e.g., Theory of Mind, perspective taking) and will (to do it, e.g., empathic concern, prosocial orientation) to act mindfully towards another person’s control over outcomes. We operationalized social mindfulness in the SoMi paradigm that focuses on leaving or limiting choice options for others, which we tested across seven studies. Studies 2.1a through 2.1c showed that people with other-oriented mindsets left interde-
pendent others more choice than people with self-oriented and/or unspecified mindsets. Studies 2.2a and 2.2b revealed that people developed more favorable judgments of a socially mindful than of a socially unmindful person. Study 2.3 indicated that unknown others with trustworthy (versus untrustworthy) faces were met with more social mindfulness. Study 2.4 revealed that social mindfulness could be traced in personality by being positively related to Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness (HEXACO-PI-R) as well as to Empathy (IRI) and a prosocial value orientation (SVO). Together, these studies contribute to explaining how social mindfulness can help people to navigate the social world by aiming to maximize other people’s control over their situational outcomes.

Chapter 3 reports two field studies in which we investigate whether the actual presence of a specific (versus unspecific) other brings out prosociality in the SoMi paradigm. Participants choose from a set of three different pens of comparable value, divided into one unique and two identical ones, which focuses the participants’ decision on leaving or limiting choice. To explore prosociality within a minimal social setting, Study 3.1 contrasts a control condition (no second chooser) with two conditions in which a confederate chooses after the participant. We find that participants do indeed show prosociality by leaving choice to the confederate more often. Study 3.2 reveals that a specified confederate is left choice more often than an unspecified next chooser. We conclude that the physical presence of others brings out greater prosociality as manifested in the simple and low-cost decisions that are associated with social mindfulness.

Chapter 4 examines the flipside of social mindfulness: Social hostility. Social hostility is seldom expressed overtly. More often than not, individuals try to get their hostile message across without risking violent altercations. However, subtle and relatively covert hostility is not easy to research. We suggest a novel way with the SoMi paradigm, a social decision making task that offers participants the opportunity to be socially mindful or socially hostile by leaving or limiting choice to others. Sampling a general population we find that, relative to friends and strangers, foes are indeed met with greater social hostility (Study 4.1). Focusing on the highly competitive environment of youth soccer, we find that rival team members elicit social hostility, whereas teammates elicit social mindfulness (Study 4.2). We conclude that social mindfulness and social hostility play a subtle role in the dynamics of interpersonal and/or intergroup relationships, in which leaving or limiting choice is one of the subtle ways to express benevolent versus hostile intentions; the SoMi paradigm may thus be helpful in identifying which way the ball rolls.

Chapter 5 investigates social class and prosociality. Social class predicts numerous important life outcomes and social orientations. To date, literature has mainly examined how an individual’s own class shapes interactions with others. But how prosocially do people treat others they perceive as coming from lower, middle, or higher social classes? Here, in addition to testing effects of self social class on prosocial behavior, we also investigate how target social class affects prosocial behavior, operationalized using a social mindfulness paradigm that focuses on leaving or limiting choice to others. We offer three main lines of reasoning, predicting that lower class targets either elicit greater prosociality than higher class targets (fairness), that higher class targets elicit greater prosociality (status), or that people are most prosocial to same class targets (similarity). Across four studies, we find that participants behave less prosocially (i.e., are less socially mindful) toward higher class targets relative to lower and/or middle class targets. Perceptions of similarity, warmth, and competence did not mediate lower prosociality for higher relative to lower
class targets (Study 5.4). Together, this is most consistent with a fairness perspective in the sense of leveling at the high end rather than at the low end of the class spectrum. Across all studies, we also found that self social class had little to no relationship with prosociality. In total, results suggest that social class is relevant for prosocial behavior, but that target social class matters more than self social class.

Chapter 6 provides a general discussion of the findings and what they mean for theory. It also discusses some limitations, and suggests directions for future research. Finally, Chapter 7 contains a Dutch summary of this dissertation.