This Very Moment: Mindfulness in Psychotherapy

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Mindfulness and Intimacy

Advanced Training in Relationship Building

What is Mindfulness?

- **Sati** in Pali
  - Connotes awareness, attention, & remembering
- In therapeutic arena, also includes
  - Non-judgment
  - Acceptance
  - Adds kindness & friendliness

Therapeutic Mindfulness

1. Awareness
2. Of present experience
3. With acceptance

Mindfulness is Not:

- Operating on "autopilot"
- Being lost in fantasies of the past and future
- Breaking or spilling things because we're not paying attention
- Rushing through activities without attending to them

Life Is Difficult, for Everybody

- Everything changes
  - Loss is inevitable
- We're hard wired to try to enhance our self esteem
  - But we win some and lose some
  - And we get sick and die
Mindfulness Can Help Us

- To see and accept things as they are
- To loosen our preoccupation with “self”
- To experience the richness of the moment
- To become free to act skillfully

Mindfulness Helps Us to Get Along

- By seeing the other more clearly
- By not taking things personally
- By being present in relationships
- By not acting on urges compulsively
- By not believing in our judgments

Mindfulness Practice is Not:

- Having a “blank” mind
- Becoming emotionless
- Withdrawing from life
- Seeking bliss
- Escaping pain

Breath Awareness

The Western View of the Self

- Emphasis on separateness vs. connection to family, tribe, nature, etc.
- Healthy (Western) development:
  - Individuated
  - Aware of Boundaries
  - Knowing one’s needs
  - Clear identity and sense of self
Narcissism in Western Psychotherapy

- In DSM
  - Narcissism is a character disorder
- In behavior therapy
  - Developing self efficacy
- In psychodynamic psychotherapy
  - Developing healthy narcissism or self esteem

Narcissism in Buddhist Psychology

- We suffer when we don't know who we really are
  - Attempt to buttress self is central cause of suffering
  - Our concept of “self” is based on a fundamental misunderstanding

Where do I Begin and End?

What about Boundaries?

Boundaries

Where is the Organism?
Us and Them

Constructing Experience
- Our identity is an elaborate construction project
- The mind is a world-building organ
  - Making order out of chaos
  - Constructing reality out of data streaming in at break-neck speed

Sense Contact
- Coming together of
  - Sense organ
  - Sense object
  - Awareness of object
- Six senses
  - Seeing
  - Hearing
  - Smelling
  - Tasting
  - Touching
  - Thinking

Perception
- Evaluates sense experience
  - Conditioned by culture and language
- Constructs and categorizes
  - Omiss detail
  - Fills in missing information

Feeling
- We add an affective or hedonic tone to all experience
  - Pleasant
  - Negative
  - Neutral

Intention and Disposition
- We try to
  - Hold onto the pleasant
  - Push away the unpleasant
  - Ignore the neutral
- We develop habits of intention
  - Dispositions
  - Learned behaviors
  - Conditioned responses
  - Personality characteristics
The Construction of Experience

Intention

Feeling

Consciousness

Perception

Sense Organ

Sense Object

A human being is part of the whole called by us universe ... We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self.

The Self

- A verb, not a noun
- Selfing occurs
- Organism responds differently when experiences belong to “me”
- Creates further distortions of
  - Perception
  - Thought
  - View

The Failure of Success

- The pain of I, me, me, mine
- Narcissistic recalibration
  - Attainments lose their power over time
- Narcissistic defenses are all compensatory

Jung’s Shadow & The Separate Self

- Identifying with some mental contents while rejecting others
- Creates split off “Shadow”
- Mild dissociation caused by trying to avoid pain

The Trance of Unworthiness

- Eastern meditation teachers are surprised by Western self-criticism
- Anxiety is primal mood of the separate self (Tara Brach)
- Related to Western cultural emphasis on the separate self
We’re all Bozos on this Bus

• Dandelions in a field
• Not a path to perfection, but a path to wholeness
  ▪ Boundary of what we can accept in ourselves is the boundary of our freedom – Zen Patriarch

Mindfulness and the Therapeutic Relationship

The Roles of Mindfulness

Implicit
• Practicing Therapist
  ▪ Relates mindfully to patients regardless of therapeutic intervention
• Mindfulness Informed Psychotherapy
  ▪ Insights from mindfulness practice inform treatment
• Mindfulness Based Psychotherapy
  ▪ Teaches mindfulness practice to patients

Explicit

Dodo Bird Hypothesis

“Everybody has won, and all must have prizes.”

What Matters Most in Psychotherapy?
“Evenly Hovering Attention”

- “Listen and not to trouble to keep in mind anything in particular”
  – Freud, 1912

Mindfulness Practice to the Rescue

- Practicing “presence” independent of content
- The rare gift of wholehearted attention
  - Usually we turn up the volume
  - We can turn up our attention instead
- Mindfulness practice transforms therapeutic presence

And I, Sir, Can Be Run Through with a Sword

Affect Tolerance

- Not “my,” but “the”
  - Anger
  - Fear
  - Lust
  - Joy

Embracing Affect

- Beyond affect tolerance – embracing emotion
  - Our patients can only be with those emotions that we can embrace
  - All emotions experienced as transient
    - A teaspoon of salt in a pond

Not Knowing
Mindfulness and Other Intimate Relationships

Relational-Cultural Theory

- Grew out of feminist critique of conventional psychology
- Benefits of mutual connection (Miller and Stiver)
  - Energy and vitality
  - Greater capacity to act
  - Increased clarity
  - Enhanced self-worth
  - Desire and capacity for more connection

Three Objects of Awareness

- Mindfulness of sensations, thoughts, feelings in “me”
- Mindfulness of the words, body language, mood of the other
- Mindfulness of the flow of relationship
  - Felt sense of connection or distance

Jeweled Web of Indra

First Noble Truth to the Rescue

The Story of the Mustard Seed
Teaching Mindfulness
Fitting the Practice to the Problem

Ronald Siegel, Psy.D.

Common Factors in Psychological Disorders

Overwhelmed?
- Intensity of experience
- Capacity to bear experience

The Thinking Disease
- Review past pleasure and pain
- Try to maximize future pleasure and avoid future pain
How Does Mindfulness Help?
• Reinforces experiential approach
• Helps free us from believing in our thoughts
• Reduces narcissistic orientation
• Connects us to the world beyond our personal pleasure and pain

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Explicit

Decisions, Decisions
1. Which skills to emphasize?
2. Formal or informal practice?
3. Which objects of attention?
4. Religious or secular practices?
5. Relative or absolute truth?
6. Turning toward safety or sharp points?

Forms of Mindfulness Practice
How Do I get to Carnegie Hall?

Core Practice Skills
1. Concentration
2. Mindfulness *per se*
3. Acceptance and Compassion

Concentration vs. Mindfulness
- Concentration
  - Choose an object and follow it closely
- Mindfulness
  - Attend to whatever object rises to forefront of consciousness

Acceptance

Loving-kindness Practice
- “Metta” practices
  - May I be happy, peaceful, free from suffering
  - May my loved ones be happy . . .
  - May all beings be happy . . .

Continuum of Practice
- Informal Mindfulness Practice
- Formal Meditation Practice
- Intensive Retreat Practice
Informal Practice

Taillight Meditation

Formal Practice
(Results May Vary)

• Data supports effects of formal meditation

• Structural and functional brain changes.

Intensive Retreat Practice

Objects of Attention

Coarse

• Feet touching ground
• Sights and sounds of nature
• Taste of food
• Sound of bell
• Breath in belly
• Mantra
• Air at tip of nose

Subtle

Religious or Secular?

• “Spiritual” practices
  ▪ Devotional and theistic

• Secular practices
  ▪ Science grounded

• Seek cultural consonance
Relative Truth

- Human story
  - Success & Failure
  - Pleasure & Pain
  - Longing
  - Hurt
  - Anger
  - Envy
  - Joy
  - Pride

Absolute Truth

- Anicca (impermanence)
- Dukkha (unsatisfactoriness)
- Anatta (no enduring, separate self)

Processing Trauma

1. Open to painful emotions
2. Explore the facts of trauma
3. See it through lens of dependent origination
4. Develop compassion

Timing is Everything

Turning toward Safety I

- Outer or distal focus
  - Walking Meditation
  - Listening Meditation
  - Nature Meditation
  - Eating Meditation
  - Open eye practices

Turning toward Safety II

- Inner focus
  - Mountain Meditation
  - Guided Imagery
  - Metta Practice
  - DBT techniques
Turning Toward the Sharp Points

• Moving toward anything unwanted or avoided
• How is it experienced in the body?
  • Pain, fear, sadness, anger
  • Unwanted images or memories
  • Urges toward compulsive behaviors

Different Strokes

• Need for frequent adjustment of exercises
• Elicit feedback both during and after practice
• Titrate between Safety and Sharp Points

When Focusing on the Breath Can Be Harmful

• When overwhelmed by traumatic memories
• When frightened of disintegration, loss of sense of self
• When suffering from psychosis

Life Preservers

• Concentration Practices
  • Stepping out of the thought stream
• Eyes open, external sensory focus
  • Ground, trees, sky, wind, sounds
Befriending Fear: Treating Anxiety Disorders

Components of Anxiety
- Physiological
  - Psychophysiological arousal
- Cognitive/Affective
  - Future oriented thinking, fear
  - Accurate and inaccurate risk appraisal
- Behavioral
  - Avoidance and rituals

Yerkes-Dodson Law

Toppling Forward
- Most of the time we’re lost in thoughts about the future
- Next, next, next
  - Looking forward to pleasure
  - Dreading pain

Anticipation
- All anxiety is anticipatory
- Even people in terrible present situations worry about the future

Worry
- Keeps me safe
- Helps me cope
- Prepares me for what may come
Trying to Be Happy by Avoiding Pain

- The “Diver Dan” approach to life
  - Phobic avoidance & constriction
  - Medicating discomfort
  - Hooked on distraction
    - TV, Internet, Shopping
  - Stimulation tolerance

Escape-Avoidance Learning

- Enter situation
- Anxiety arises
- Leave situation
- Anxiety abates
- Reduction in anxiety is negatively reinforcing

Compassionate Bait and Switch

- Patients want us to remove anxious feeling
- Instead, we help them to increase their capacity to bear it
  - Changing their relationship to the experience
  - Paradoxically, this interrupts patterns that maintain anxiety

Exposure and Response Prevention

2500 Year Old Treatment

Why do I dwell always expecting fear and dread? What if I subdue that fear and dread keeping the same posture that I am in when it comes upon me? While I walked, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither stood nor sat nor lay down until I had subdued that fear and dread.
Facing Fears

- Necessary component of all anxiety treatment
- Mindfulness provides support

Relief from Narcissistic Threats

- Anxiety often involves threats to who we think we are
  - Self image
  - Health
  - Wealth
  - Anticipated loss of pleasure
  - Anticipated pain

Holding

- Focus on the present moment antithetical to anticipatory anxiety
- Safety in identification with universe larger than individual
- Has belief in God had evolutionary health benefits?

Mindfulness in Action

Mindfulness of Unwanted Affect

- Much anxiety is signal anxiety
- Fear of
  - Anger
  - Sadness
  - Sexual urges
  - Repressed/suppressed memories
  - Unacceptable thoughts

Environmental Circumstances

- Walking out in the middle of a Highway
- Being in an abusive relationship
- Untenable work environments
- Interpersonal situations that prohibits affective expression
Beyond Symptom Management:
Treating Psychophysiological Disorders

The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain

Bad Back?

The Orthopedic Story

What’s the Evidence?

• 2/3 of people who have never suffered from serious back pain have the same sorts of “abnormal” back structures that are often blamed for the pain

• Millions of people who suffer from chronic back pain show no “abnormalities” in their backs

• Many people continue to have pain after “successful” surgical repair

“Smoking Gun” Studies

• What countries have chronic back pain epidemics?

• Who gets chronic back pain?

• What is the quickest way out of acute back pain?
Disorders of Chronic Overarousal or Disregulation

- Back, Neck, or other chronic muscle pain
- Gastrointestinal Distress
- Headaches, TMJ, Tinnitus, Bruxism
- Insomnia
- Eczema and other skin disorders
- Sexual Dysfunctions
- Panic and other anxiety disorders
Not Imaginary Pain

- While psychological stressors of all types can contribute to chronic back pain, the pain is not imagined or “All in the head”
- It is caused by real muscle tension.
- Patients often need for this to be explained repeatedly

Four Steps of the Back Sense Program

1. Medical Evaluation
2. Cognitive Restructuring
3. Exposure Treatment
4. Working with Negative Emotions

Resuming Lost Activities

- Exposure and response prevention central to treating kinesiophobia
  - Extinction trials
- Resume activities often enough to be convinced that they are not damaging

In the Physical Therapy Office

- The weird science experiment gone awry
  - Implosion treatment
  - Ignores Back School instructions
- Fastest method
- Greatest chance of drop out

In the Psychotherapy Office

- Begin with activities that are:
  - Easy
  - Pleasurable or rewarding
  - Can be done 3 or more times/week
- Continue until no longer feared
  - Convinced it doesn’t make pain worse
- Use Resuming Activities Chart

Systemic Issues

- Much stress is interpersonal
  - Need for enhanced communication strategies
- Need to address systemic secondary gain
  - Interpersonal
  - Economic
Mindfulness

When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows (*Sallatha Sutta* [The Arrow]).

(Pain) x (Resistance) = Suffering

- Pain can be observed to be separate from “suffering”
- Impermanence as gift as well as curse
- Apparently solid pain states are observed to be like frames in a movie, ever-changing

Pain is Inevitable, Suffering is Optional

- Suffering Includes:
  - Grimacing, wincing, bracing.
  - Aversive thoughts.
  - Wishes for relief.
  - Self-punitive thoughts.
  - Anger, fear, depression regarding condition.

Thoughts Are Just Thoughts

- Mindfulness increases cognitive flexibility
- Need to believe that beliefs are part of the problem
- Not events themselves, but our reactions to events that are the problem

Mindfulness & Cognitive Restructuring
Observing Pain-related Thoughts

- Tally-mark assignment to monitor thoughts
- Notice prevalence of anxious thought and feeling
- Notice future-oriented catastrophizing
- Notice “budgeting” activity

Mindfulness & Resuming Normal Life

Creative Hopelessness

- Central paradox in treatment of psychophysiological disorders:
  - Attachment to symptom reduction perpetuates disorder

Control Addiction

- Letting go of quest to fix problem
- Useful to control behavior, not affect

Mindfulness: Beyond Relaxation Training

- Not trying to gain control over physiological arousal
- Mindfulness
  - Fosters cognitive change
  - Increases symptom tolerance
  - Uncovers emotions
  - Increases capacity to choose whether to act on urges
Working with Intentions

• Pain is distinct from urge to eliminate it
• Attention can be brought to urge to move
• Urge arises, reaches crescendo, and passes

Mindfulness and Working with Negative Emotions

Mindfulness and Psychodynamic Exploration

• Lack of affect awareness often central to psychophysiological disorders
• Mindfulness practice
  • Aids psychodynamic exploration
  • Helps to develop both affect awareness and tolerance

Use Mindfulness to Identify Difficult Emotions

• Many stressors can contribute to tension and hence pain
  • Take inventory of emotional issues that may be contributing to stress
    • Coping with Emotions Chart

Mindfulness and Other Psychophysiological Disorders

• Dynamics very similar to chronic back pain
  • Headaches; TMJ, neck, knee, foot, wrist, shoulder pain,
• Need to rule out structural causes
  • Then follow same 4 step program

Other Muscle Tension Disorders
Placebo TMJ Treatment

- Sham tooth grinding cures TMJ (Goodman, Greene, & Laskin, 1976)
  - Told patients tooth grinding would resolve problem
  - Actually only vibrated teeth
  - 64% of patients reported total or significant relief

Placebo Knee Surgery

- Sham knee surgery resolves knee pain from osteoarthritis (Moseley, O’Malley, & Peterson, et al., 2002)
  - 1/3 subjects received arthroscopic debridement
  - 1/3 subjects received arthroscopic lavage
  - 1/3 subjects received incisions only (placebo surgery)
  - All improved. Real surgery had no advantage over placebo at any point during 2 years following surgery.

Sexual Dysfunctions

- Rule out physical disease or physiological condition
- Effective non-pharmacological interventions target acceptance
- Masters and Johnson
- Attention to relationship issues
  - Unresolved anger, guilt, etc.

Insomnia

- Conventional Treatment:
  - Stimulus control
  - Sleep hygiene
  - Relaxation
- Mindfulness Treatment:
  - Reduced sleep need
  - Give up goal orientation

Gastrointestinal Distress

- System remarkably sensitive to emotional stress
  - No need to digest your lunch when you’re about to become somebody else’s
Facing Mortality: The Challenge of Illness Anxiety

Illness Anxiety

- A universal, existential challenge
- An invitation to spiritual practice:
  - The Buddha’s Second Chariot Ride
  - The Story of the Mustard Seed

It’s Probably Nothing

It’s Probably Something Serious

Facing Mortality

- Everything falls apart in the end
  - Illness challenges delusion of immortality
- Opportunity to live more fully here and now
  - Meditation at burial grounds
  - Spiritual Autopsies

Silver Linings

- For many patients, recovery is first exposure to mindfulness insights.
  - Learning to let go
  - Learning to face fear
  - Noticing transient nature of experience
  - Increased awareness of emotion
- Lessons apply to the rest of life.
New Age Guilt

For worksheets, charts, and more information visit:
www.backsense.org

For mindfulness & psychotherapy resources, visit:
www.meditationandpsychotherapy.org

For recorded meditations, visit:
www.mindfulness-solution.com

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