

Report from the Mindfulness and Psychotherapy Conference: Cultivating Well-Being in the Present Moment

October 5, 6, & 7, 2007

UCLA Campus

Submitted by Ellen Lin

Highlights

First day (Buddha Day)—sessions giving basic intro of mindfulness & Buddhist principles, including meditation practices in an auditorium setting.

I. Mindfulness Basics

- Aware
- Non-judgmental
 - When judging self, disconnected from self
- Non-reactivity (centered, balanced; comes back to clarity)
- Able to use words to describe what's going on inside
- Self-observation (deactivates automaticity)
 - Aware of awareness, attention of inattention
 - Different than “flow”; full picture; integrated stated of awareness
 - Brain studies find “flow” is different than mindfulness

II. Principles of Buddhist Psychology—The Wise Heart

- Original goodness
- Capacity for shift in identity
- Understanding that there's suffering, it's causes, and there's an end to suffering
 - Everything changes and find center in it; there's nirvana
- Systemic practices to develop mindfulness for loving kindness, forgiveness...
- Capacity
- Multiple dimensions of mindfulness & all it carries; rest in river of experience
- Many trainings for transformation
- Profound understanding and power of conditioning wise mind intention before speaking
- Stillness, equanimity, concentration
- Comfortable with paradox; wedding of universal and personal
- Sophisticated understanding of self, true self, selflessness (being nothing, you're everything)

III. Beneath the words: A clinical map for **using mindfulness of the body and the organization of experience in trauma treatment**. (Have handout of PowerPoint slides)—Pat Ogden, PhD

Two conditions of mindfulness

1. recognition
2. allowing what's there; accepting

Useful acronym

RAIN =

R = Recognize

A = Allow it

I = Investigate; continue deepening of recognition

N = Non-identification; shift in sense of who we are; open out of judging

Pause & not react

Step before RAIN

Create resources, safety, belonging

Because **mindfulness can be re-traumatizing**

1. recognize “it’s not my fault”
 - that was best way of surviving
 - safe refuge
 - taking refuge in sense of surviving
 - to begin to feel safe enough to reconnect with all that’s inside
 - hands can be sense of refuge
 - sounds
 - breath into that tightness
2. realize that the “fairy,” God, the compassionate being, all come from within us
 - “when you trust the ocean, you’re not afraid of waves”

Nature of trauma is severing of self

The nature of healing is reconnecting of all self:

- Procedural memory
 - most human behavior is driven by procedural memory—memory for process and function—and is reflected in habitual, automatic responses and well-learned action patterns & skills.
 - Includes functional actions (i.e., how to tie your shoes), as well as habitual, automatic processes and responses: movements, postures, autonomic response patterns, emotional and cognitive tendencies.
- Procedural learning organizes internal experience
 - Every time something happens, we perceive and encode that info in neural networks
 - Repeated activation of a set of neural networks results in increased sensitivity to particular stimuli
- Clients must be helped to address procedural learning, to “overcome the traumatic imprints that dominate their lives, which are the [thoughts], sensations, emotions, and actions that are not relevant to the demands of the present but are triggered by current events that keep reactivating old, trauma-based states of mind”—Van der Kolk (2002)
- Neuroregulatory Intervention: Mindfulness of Body Sensation
 - Teach clients the difference between body sensation and emotion

- Use mindfulness directed toward body sensation to interrupt cycle of escalating arousal
 - As mindfulness attention is turned exclusively to sensation, emotion and content are disregarded until arousal subsides.
 - Mindful attention to sensation limits the amount and intensity of info to be processed so that it becomes more manageable.
- Mindfulness is defined as paying attention, in the present moment, on purpose, without grasping onto judgments. Mindful awareness has the quality of receptivity to whatever arises within the mind's eye, moment to moment. Includes articulation (naming it) and description of building blocks of present experience.
- Directed mindfulness is defined as paying attention to particular elements of internal experience (body sensation, movement, emotion, 5-sense perception, cognition) considered important to therapeutic goals.
- Provide a Menu:
 - What do you feel in your body when angry part comes up—do you feel tense, or heavy, or jittery, or numb, or...
 - What kind of tension is it—do you feel really tight, or achy, or kind of stuck, or...
 - What does your arm want to do when this angry part comes up—push out, lift up, pull in, strike out, or...
 - Ask contrasting questions: Does it feel good or bad? Does it feel like something will hurt you from the inside or the outside?
- Somatic Resources
 - Comprise the category of abilities that emerge from physical experience yet influence psychological health. They include the physical functions and capacities that support self-regulation and provide a sense of somatic and psychological well-being and competency.
 - Change posture: Taking a posture will conjure up assoc in the past that is assoc with the posture.
- Mindfulness Skills
 - Notice present experience by observing in precise detail the moment-by-moment emergence of the building blocks of present experience, especially the body
 - Use directed mindfulness toward particular building blocks to meet therapeutic goals.
 - Describe the building blocks, rather than “talk about”
- Handout has several diagrams of various processes, including window of tolerance, reaction cycles, the mindfulness map in use...

IV. **Contemplative Relational Psychotherapy**—Concetta Alfano, PhD, & Marjorie Schuman, PhD

- Minds are relational in nature
 - Meditation practice (1 person) & relational (2 people)
 - Contemplative = to be with; contemplate the relationship
- Under natural condition, the mind will seek its own compassion, clarity, wisdom

- Have to provide condition to allow this capacity (here & now)
- 6 elements
 - Presence, here & now, contemplative attitude
 - Intersubjective ware; to bring about (intersubjectively) in the relation of 2 people
 - Or “co-transference”
 - Continuum of experience
 - Experience distance mode: patient as object; there’s a hierarchy
 - Get out of our way; let go of ego that separates; non-duality
 - Experience connection: transient iden; multiplicity of changing state in self & in relationship with another being
 - Intimacy
 - When intimate with any other, we’re intimate with ourselves & vice versa
 - Empathic: coming from another person; separateness
 - Compassion: coming from connectedness
 - Deep listening & transcendent attunement => imagery of client
 - When transcendently attune to client, can find some mode as when doing meditation
 - A state of being in reverie in which transcend any mind state; don’t become fixed in our being.
 - Compassion
 - Wisdom & skillful means

Second day (Dharma Day)—“Dharma refers to the basics underlying the contemplative teachings and practices: the transitory nature of all phenomena, including mental states; the willingness to be intimate with the nature of our ordinary mind, in contrast to the conceptual, illusory, fantasy mind-world assumed to be permanent and real; how to find peace, compassion, and wisdom within the heart of change.”

- V. The Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Master
 - a. Gave teaching of basic mindfulness principles & led a walking meditation around campus. Also led a silent lunch.
- VI. Awakening the good heart in everyone—Jack Kornfield, Ph.D.
 - Various exercises
 - e.g., look/gaze silently into a partner/friend’s face & eyes for five minutes & talk about experience with each other
 - a. Forgiveness = giving up all hope for what’s in the past
 - = not to put another human being out of your heart
 - b. Compost of life
 - Let all aspects of life brew/turn on its own
 - The problem is the problem
 - “the ocean doesn’t reject anything”—Zen Ctr of L.A.

Third Day (Sangha Day--Community)

VII. The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement and the Neuroplasticity of Mindful Practice—Sara Lazar, PhD, & Daniel J. Siegel, MD

Energy info flow

- Body process
- Relational sharing of info
- Mind = regulator of energy & info flow

Long-lasting change in behavior requires change in brain structure

Meditation does not equal relaxation

Actual regions involved = right anterior insular, cingulate, paralimbic cortex (integration of cog & visceral functions) “mind-body connection”

- Structure
 - Compared to no meditation, areas in brain are thicker in meditators
 - Insular: awareness & control of visceral activity
 - Recognize facial emotions
 - Prefrontal cortex: working memory & selective attention
 - Emotion-cog interaction
 - Moral decision making
 - Entire cortex thins with age
 - Prevent/slow normal aging
 - Thickness is equal to that of 20 y.o.
 - Overlap with functional activity
 - Highly localized activity
 - Correlate with # of hours on mat
 - versus # of years in practice
 - change brain activity after MBSR (mindfulness based stress reduction)
 - compared to control group
 - decreased self-referential
 - increased sensorimotor cortex
 - (out of their heads and into their body)
 - Zen practitioners have increased reaction speed

VIII. Results of mindfulness meditation

- capacity to regulate body functions
 - capacity for attunement
 - emotional balance
 - response flexibility; capacity to pause
 - insight; connection with past, present & capacity to connect with future
 - empathy
- mind sight; see the mind

- capacity to modulate fear
- access to intuition
- morality & enacting

The first 7 of 9 are outcomes of secured parent-child attachment

All share the process of integration

- flexible, adaptive, energy info flow for different regions of brain & connect/integrate all
- harnessing social circuit of the brain
- differentiation & connection = healthy mental health

How I will incorporate this new information into my position and in my department.

This conference has taught me the multiple advantages of practicing mindfulness, from decreasing one's reactivity to various life stressors, to increasing forgiveness, and changing the brain structure (e.g., increase in prefrontal cortex of brain, which regulates moral decision making). This is information that I can share with my clients, as well as use for my own personal well being. In addition, I also learned specific mindfulness techniques I can use when working with clients with trauma history, and I have shared this knowledge with other clinicians to help increase their therapeutic tools.

How my participation will contribute to student learning at SJSU.

There have been a significant number of studies in the past 20 years on the practice of mindfulness and its positive impact on psychological and physical well-being. However, most of the clinicians at Counseling are trained in the traditional Western approach of therapeutic practices, which doesn't include any mindfulness component.

- Increase repertoire of clinicians' therapeutic tools . On a campus such as SJSU, where a large percentage of student population is of Eastern ethnicity, and many have a Buddhist upbringing, it is important to have clinicians with knowledge of some Eastern practices. There are overwhelming research findings on the effectiveness of mindfulness on various well-being factors (e.g., see Grossman, Niemann, & Schmidt, 2004; & Baer, 2006), However, currently we have no full-time clinicians in Counseling Services who has enough expertise about mindfulness techniques and skills (which are based on Eastern Buddhist practices) to fully integrate it in counseling with students/clients or to teach it to other clinicians. I feel honored to have been given the funding to attend this conference so that I can incorporate the information in my therapeutic work with the diverse SJSU student population. Helping students increase their overall wellbeing will lead to increased academic performance and learning.
- Retention rate. Research has found that mindfulness helps reduce stress & depression, manage chronic pain, insomnia, increase attention-related behavioral responses, etc., which can all impact a student's academic performance. Indirectly, having mindfulness skills may increase the students' graduation rate at SJSU campus. The conference taught me some specific mindfulness skills that I can share with students who seek personal counseling, which may lead to increased retention rate of our student population.

How I will share the results of my experience with colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs.

I have typed up the notes I took from the conference and have sent these to the rest of the Counseling Services staff. I can forward the notes to others in the entire Division of Student Affairs, if requested.

Website and resources where interested staff could learn more information about this particular professional development activity.

Here are couple of websites about the conference:

The conference program:

<http://www.uclaextension.edu/unex/departmentalPages/mindfulness/7582.pdf>

A YouTube video of the silent lunch led by Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78Oad6tVDME&feature=related>

One of the co-sponsors of the program, the Center for Mindfulness and Psychotherapy, provides other continuing education courses for practitioners. Here's their website for more information:

<http://mindfulnessandpsychotherapy.org/>