

Mindfulness

Emotion Regulation



What is mindfulness?

- Many connotations in our culture conjures up images that look to the East



- True it has roots in the spiritual traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism
- It has been westernized and secularized for many decades

- Really means 'having good control over your attention'



Focus

When attention is steady, mind is steady

mindfulness practices – train the mind to focus (and then refocus and then refocus) without judgment

- **aim is twofold:**
 - taking control over what is held in our 'mental chalkboard'/ awareness
 - What do you want to hold in your focus?
 - taking control over 'stimulation seeking'
 - Adjusting level of stimulation to 'optimal' for you

All done with calm and gentleness



Individual Variation

Neurological Diversity

- **Temperamental differences**
 - Holding Information in awareness: obsessive to unfocused
 - Allowing in new information: inflexible to flighty
 - Seeking stimulation: apathetic to voracious
- **Cultural differences**
 - Modern Western Culture - information overwhelm/ stimulation overload
 - One outcome – habituates us to 'overload' and stimulates 'monkey brain'
- **Situational differences**
 - Motivation, fatigue, illness, low blood sugar, preoccupation with worries/ sadness
- **What is optimal focus & stimulation?**
 - Moderate stimulation –Yerkes Dodson Law
 - Focused but flexible focus



Moderate Stimulation

- Quiet sitting can feel 'boring'/ the mind can rebel what to do...
- Create novelty – that intensifies attention
pay attention to the details of your body/ inner experience
be creative and fluid in this –
- Moving meditation – walk
- Savor the nice feelings – bring them into acute awareness; experiment with amplifying them

Focused but Flexible

- Imagine yourself a 'reporter' of the action – watching and carefully noting what you experience
- Use your language centers – label what you notice
- Create 'smoothies' of blended experience – add positive emotion to the mundane experiences you are noticing
"I absolutely love the warmth of my in breath"



UCLA Study – apply a label

- Mindfulness of emotion
non judgmental awareness of emotion

subjects were shown angry and fearful faces
asked to label them with emotion or gender labels

when they used emotion labels
activated right prefrontal cortex
reduced activity in amygdala



Dan Siegal

- UCLA, MD/ neurologist & psychiatrist
- Interested in brain development & attachment
sees relationships as key to brain structuring
includes the relationship to ourselves as key
- Offers us the concept of 'Mindsight'
directing attention – shapes brain firing patterns
'what fires together wires together'
- The focusing skills (mindfulness) it possible to see what is inside, to accept it, and in the accepting to let it go, and finally, to transform it.
 - This is like providing yourself with a 'good listener'
 - We have innate wisdom and can tap into that through a path of focus & acceptance
(link to Rogers)



Brain & Meditation

- Harvard Study
looked at the impact of insight meditation
measured brain structure with MRI
long term meditators (9 years, 30 minutes daily)

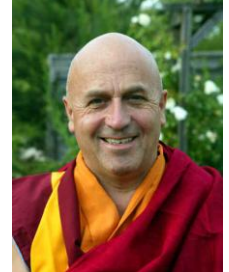
thicker prefrontal cortex
thicker insula

also found age related thinning of the cortex was not present
50 year old brains were as thick as 20 year old control brains

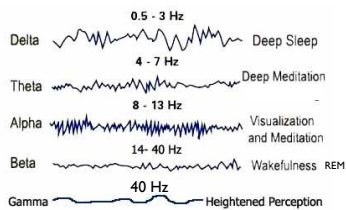
Professional Meditators

- Matthieu Ricard – Buddhist Monk
10,000 hours of meditation
- Brain waves measured with EEG
along with 30 other monks
compared to 30 college student controls

asked to meditate on compassion
very powerful gamma waves (30x)
left prefrontal cortex much larger
left and right hemispheres synchronized



Brain Wave Patterns



Shifts in hemispheric activity

- Employees at a high tech firm in Massachusetts
chose high stress individuals
taught half mindfulness meditation for 8 weeks
brains were scanned at baseline, completion and 4 months later
- Resting brain activity decreased in the right hemisphere
Increased in the left hemisphere



MBSR

- Jon Kabat Zinn combines mindfulness meditation and yoga typically 8 week programs mind/ body connections for healing
- Started at U Mass Medical Center in 1970 now available in over 200 hospitals



Umass Medical Center

- Reduced symptoms/ increased medical efficacy
 - Chronic pain
 - serious skin ailments (psoriasis)
 - bone marrow transplant
 - prostate cancer
 - anxiety/ panic
- Increased coping
 - more coherent sense of self
 - great self efficacy
 - ability to respond effectively under conditions of high stress



Going to Pieces

- Blends Buddhist/ mindfulness ideas with psychology
- Attempts to balance two competing ways of experiencing Ego's need to 'do' and our inherent capacity to 'be'
- Letting go/ letting it be in the face of struggle offers freedom and a path to happiness
- Mindfulness is the pathway to 'letting it be'

