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Advances in Psychotherapy –
Evidence-Based Practice

Mindfulness



 hogrefe



Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

Mindfulness is trending. It's been on the forefront of conversations in terms of Western therapeutic methodologies since Jon Kabat Zinn integrated it into his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) in the early 1980s. Today, mindfulness practices are at the heart of many psychotherapeutic approaches such as: mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT); acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT); dialectical behavior therapy (DBT); mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP); mindfulness-based trauma therapy (MBTT); and mindfulness-based eating awareness training (MB-EAT).

The word itself, however, is often confused. Its meaning subjectively associated with who or what entity is promoting its use. There's clearly a difference between Eastern approaches to meditation and mindfulness and the current Western emphasis.

With the proliferation of modalities integrating components of meditation and mindfulness practice, this book is a welcome addition to Hogrefe's Advances in Psychotherapy: Evidence Based Practice Series—noted as Volume 37. Per the series requirements, this book is designed to be a compact "how to" reference for "a particular disorder", for use by professional clinicians in their daily work and as an ideal educational resource. According to the publisher the most important feature is that the books in this series are practical and easy to use. All are structured in the same vein including: tables, boxed clinical "pearls", marginal notes and summary boxes to assist orientation as well as the use of checklists to provide tools for daily use.

[Mindfulness](#), while not focusing on "a particular disorder", does indeed fit the required series format: it is compact, easy to use, organized, succinct, detailed, and informative without being overdone. The authors note that the "theories, understandings and practices reviewed in this book are rooted in a rich and ancient tradition" (Preface). Their aim was to offer a "brief and simplified introduction to contemporary applications in 'mindfulness' as delivered within secularized mindfulness-based interventions" (Preface). Their work targets the roots and practices of mindfulness. It is not meant to be all encompassing, all inclusive; rather, it's noted to be a starting place. There are seven chapters including: Description, Theories and Models, Assessments and Treatment Indications, Treatment, Further Reading, References and an Appendix with tools and resources.

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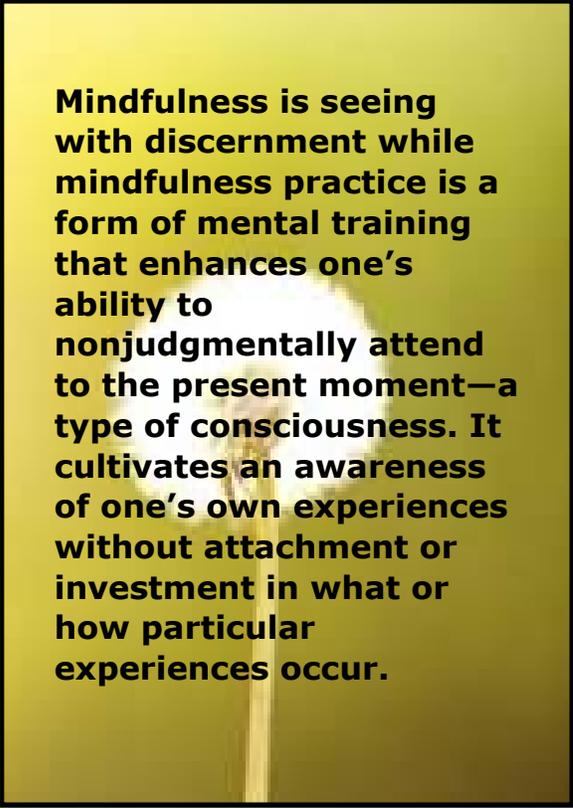
A look inside

I've read many, perhaps too many books on mindfulness, attended webinars, workshops, private groups, Buddhist retreats, mindfulness based stress reduction seminars, yoga sessions with mindfulness practice and so on. Yet, reading the description of mindfulness in the first few pages of this book felt refreshing. I felt a sense of synthesis, a sense of completion as if these authors gathered together all these dangling strands (so many different versions of a definition for one simple word), threaded them through the eye of one needle to then stitch their text together.

The authors distinguish between the noun—mindfulness—and its adverbial construction as in mindfulness practice. Mindfulness, they say, is seeing with discernment while mindfulness practice is a form of mental training that enhances one's ability to nonjudgmentally attend to the present moment—a type of consciousness. It cultivates an awareness of one's own experiences without attachment or investment in what or how particular experiences occur. They cite Jon Kabat Zinn's definition of mindfulness and its use in MBSR: "The awareness that emerges by way of paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding experience, moment by moment" (pg. 1).

The book begins with a clear presentation of the elements in mindfulness practice: awareness of the present moment; attentional allocation; and cultivation of specific qualities pertaining to the attention and awareness of the present moment (pg. 1). They distinguish mindfulness meditation from more concentrated-based meditation practices that involve focused/restricted attention to a single object such as the breath. The authors note four core assumptions about our brain and concentration: we have a tendency to work on automatic pilot (preprogramming); we can learn how to focus with regular practice; and with moment-to-moment awareness of our experiences, we can live a more "vibrant and meaningful sense of life" (pg. 4).

The discussion concerning mindfulness's historical roots—linked with early Buddhist teachings over 2500 years ago—offered an interesting point for further exploration. Mindfulness is said to be part of the path that leads to the end of suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path. Yet in most current mindfulness applications, it is used to alleviate suffering in one instance, say in pain reduction or anxiety or depression—participants are trained with one outcome in mind, i.e. stress reduction. The objective in many Western therapeutic applications is to "provide individuals symptomatic relief and enhanced well being and quality of life" (pg. 8). Buddhist teachings on the other hand are more applicable to the *root causes* of suffering, which are said to be attached to our attachment to outcomes, to our perspective of a situation or event, it is our mind's determination, our wants and desires that create our suffering (aka ignorance, attachment and aversion). Further, the practice is meant to not only end our own suffering but all of humanities: "the Buddhist practice aims to eliminate the root cause of suffering for all sentient beings, not just the specific individual practicing mindfulness" (pg. 9).



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Another distinction is related to what the Buddhist teachings call “the Four Immeasurables: loving kindness (metta), compassion (karuna), empathic joy (mudita) and equanimity (upekkha)” (pg. 9). And a fourth, which the authors consider the most controversial, involves ethical teachings. Ethics play a large part in the Buddhist practice as noted as Right Mindfulness, which is informed and developed as part of the Eight Noble Path, and require mental restraint and behavioral ethical disciplines. Per Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is not merely a tool to enhance attention but rather it is part of a larger way of being.

Chapter two offers detailed descriptions of the mindfulness based movement starting with MBSR and its spin-offs as well as a discussion on the mechanisms of action—how mindfulness, as a state or trait and as a practice or intervention, promotes psychological and physical health. Chapter three explores assessment and treatment indications with a differentiation between mindfulness as a state versus a trait and ways to objectively measure its impact without subjective judgments. Chapter four dives into an overview of treatment rationale. The authors note that each of the mindfulness based approaches do focus on discerning the difference between the experience of pain, “which is unavoidable in all sentient beings” and what transpires that causes the outcome known as suffering (pg. 35).

The Authors:

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Corey R. Roos is a 4th Year Clinical Psychology Doctoral Student at the University of New Mexico. He has experience delivering mindfulness-based interventions among clinical populations, particularly individuals with substance use disorders, and he is currently working on developing a mindfulness-based intervention for addictive disorders that can be delivered as a rolling group.

Dana Dharmakaya Colgan is a 4th Year Clinical Psychology Doctoral Student at Pacific University. She has been a student of meditation and mindfulness for two decades and an instructor of meditation and yoga since 2007. She is engaged in the research and clinical application of mindfulness and self-compassion to foster to resilience, well-being, and enhanced physiological functioning among first responders.

Sarah Bowen is an Assistant Professor of psychology at Pacific University, and a licensed clinical psychologist. Over the past 15 years, Dr. Bowen's research, clinical and training activities have focused on development, efficacy, and cultural adaptations of mindfulness-based programs. She has conducted clinical trials and trained individuals from diverse populations and settings, both in the US and internationally.

While different approaches exist, it is, in fact, the instructor’s ability to skillfully deliver the program that can make or break participant experience. “A skilled facilitator connects with the spirit and intentions of mindfulness practice and develops his/her own style of leading” (pg. 43). The authors write about the importance of personal practice then detail concepts and practices in various teaching approaches, such as using motivational interviews, rolling with resistance, reflective listening and modeling qualities of mindfulness. They also offer guidelines for leading mindfulness practices in different settings, i.e., a closed group format, a rolling group format, in residential treatment settings and individual sessions. Chapter five offers further readings, six references and seven appendices.

The book reads well despite the overall density and depth of detail. One walks away with a clear understanding of mindfulness as it stands apart from the Buddhist practice and belief (East meets West) and how specific Western therapeutic interventions have incorporated it into their program. I appreciated the conversation on the need for personal practice and on skillful delivery. It is far too easy to attend a webinar and feel qualified to lead a course without a basic understanding of learning theory and healthy relationship skills. I hope that readers who do take time to check out this informative book don’t try to simply apply its content to a teaching situation. It’s a beginning. Personal practice and formal training are clearly part of the process.