

Integrating Hypnotherapy and Mindfulness

By Peter Flagg, RCH

Abstract: *The author briefly reviews the history of “mindfulness” and its current practise among clinical counsellors and psychologists, and compares some techniques of mindfulness to hypnotherapy techniques. The connection between the two practises suggest a potential for hypnotherapists to use “mindfulness” techniques in hypnotherapy and as a means of integrating new mental landscapes and behaviours into the daily lives of clients.*

I was recently given a magazine dedicated entirely to what is generally called “mindfulness”ⁱ. The techniques described in the articles and other research suggested a strong connection between the practise of “mindfulness” in clinical counselling and psychology, and some techniques and processes used in hypnotherapy. The term “mindfulness” has generated a vast body of literature and ongoing discussion – and debate - among various mental health practises. My readings suggests there may be a potential for hypnotherapists to promote mindfulness practise(s) to help augment and integrate new beneficial personal and world views for our clients.

Some definitions and brief history:

Mindfulness definitions are varied depending on purpose and culture:

“...the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basisⁱⁱ”

“**Mindfulness** is the practice of purposely bringing one's attention in the present moment without evaluation,^{[1][2][note 1][3][web 1]} iii “

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally,” says Kabat-Zinn^{iv}

“Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present. This state is described as observing one's thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad^v”

“Mindfulness is the self-regulation of attention with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance.^{vi}”

The practise of mindfulness is ancient and stems from Buddhist meditation. In the last few decades, a Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, is often cited as bringing the practise of mindfulness to the west and having a huge influence on its popularity around the world. One of Thich Nhat Hanh's students in the United States was Jon Kabat-Zinn [whose program,] mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), definitely helped popularize the term and practise in North America and beyond. Kabat-Zinn is

“ an American professor emeritus of medicine and the creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.... and a founding member of Cambridge Zen Center. His practice of yoga and studies with Buddhist teachers led him to integrate their teachings with scientific

findings. He teaches [mindfulness](#), which he says can help people cope with stress, anxiety, pain, and illness.^{vii}

Current Use:

Thich Nhat Hanh died recently. His death and the current increase in anxiety due to a world-wide pandemic, pandemic-fighting regulations and government mandates, economic uncertainty and more recently military conflict and other factors affecting world supply chains, has fed a rising interest in the general public in mindfulness and other treatments for underlying anxiety or “general anxiety disorder”^{viii}.

Uses for mindfulness in mental health circles are growing as the popularity, and perhaps the vagueness of the term, also expands:

“[Clinical psychology](#) and [psychiatry](#) since the 1970s have developed a number of therapeutic applications based on mindfulness for helping people experiencing a variety of psychological conditions.^[18] Mindfulness practice has been employed to reduce [depression](#),^{[19][20][21][22]} [stress](#),^{[20][23][24]} [anxiety](#),^{[19][20][24]} and in the treatment of [drug addiction](#).^{[25][26][27]} Programs based on mindfulness models have been adopted within schools, prisons, hospitals, veterans' centers, and other environments, and mindfulness programs have been applied for additional outcomes such as for [healthy aging](#), [weight management](#), athletic performance,^[28] helping children with [special needs](#), and as an intervention during the [perinatal](#) period.”^{ix}

Even the American Medical Association (AMA), traditionally conservative in its views on “alternative” medicine practises, has embraced the value of mindfulness:

“The data is clear—mindfulness at work is not a fad like the latest diet. It should be perceived as a fundamental skill for career growth and success.”^x [AMA-Quarterly-Winter-2020-pg42-45 Griesel.pdf \(amanet.org\)](#)

Hypnotherapy Connection – in Techniques

Two articles in the December 2021 issue of *Mindful, The Science of Mindfulness* drew my attention. One article titled *Can we change Racial Bias* by Wendy Hosenkamp^{xi} was reminiscent to of my own article on the CACHE website on *Hypnotherapy: a treatment for racism*.^{xii} Another article by Elaine Smookler (Smookler, Elaine: *Mindful: Whatever YOU PREFER: The Science of Mindfulness*, December 2021, [www.mindful.org](#)) was focussed on using mindfulness to “release the tight hold on our preferences”. The article included a description of the S.T.O.P. technique. Most mindfulness practises follow a similar practising of Stop (or Pausing), Taking a Breath, Observe and Proceed.^{xiii} ¹:

- Stopping - Slowing down, “pausing” the mind’s pace and its focus on past traumas or future worries causing anxiety or other unwanted emotional states.
- Closing the eyes. It should be noted not all mindfulness practises require the person to close their eyes in the moment but training mindfulness often does suggest this, or focussing the eyes a few feet in front of the person as in many meditation practises. In our hypnotherapy practise, we know that the simple act of closing one’s eyes for a few moments will induce in

¹ Also See [www.mindful.org/stop](#)

most people a shift to alpha brain waves or increase those brain waves and induce what we call a light hypnosis or light hypnoidal state. The AMA explicitly says that mindfulness (in their interpretation) is NOT a trance, and yet hypnotherapy describes the alpha-brain waves as a “state” of light trance. These differences highlights the confusing and different interpretations of what is happening internally with the practise of “mindfulness”.

- Breath control and attention on breathing, much as hypnotherapists do in a “countdown” induction.
- Observing one’s emotional and thinking habits in the moment and the feelings of tenseness or pain in one’s body – without judging those experiences. This is also reminiscent of our use of client’s attention on their body sensations during a “fleshy” induction and in other hypnotherapy techniques.
- Observing again: Reviewing the source of those destructive self-perceptions and their impact on well-being – being non-judgemental about the observations
- Some mindfulness practises also include a focus on the person’s current “safety” in contrast to their anxiety over past traumas or future worries. This practise can include the person realizing that despite their anxiety, they are probably NOT facing an existential threat to their existence in the present moment. These “I am safe” affirmations are often used extensively in treating OCD. This is also reflective of the hypnotherapy practise of creating with the client a SAFE place in the client’s imagination, and knowing in the present moment (with the hypnotherapist) they are safe.

Integrating mindfulness and hypnotherapy

My reading suggests there could be two important aspects in client treatment where the mindfulness practise could be encouraged by the hypnotherapist for their client’s benefit:

1. Identifying “parts”: The mindfulness approach to preferences suggested in Elaine Smookler’s article could be suggested by the hypnotherapist to help the client identify the “part” of themselves that foster the chronic beliefs, emotions and subsequent behaviors that are no longer serving their best wellbeing. This could be used as an introduction to “parts therapy^{xiv} work^{xv} with the client. Many mindfulness practises also focus on “forgiveness” of self or others to help let go of the emotions and anxiety fostered by past traumas. This again is a suggestive of the parts therapy work done in hypnotherapy and clinical counselling.
2. Integrating new self-beliefs in daily life: The mindfulness “STOP” technique could be encouraged for the client to self-regulate when they are slipping back into those habitual patterns of thinking / feeling about themselves, or their world. One of the potential issues with clients in hypnotherapy (or conventional “talk” therapy without the use of hypnosis) is that the beneficial revelations about themselves adopted in hypnosis sessions and in subsequent recaps in the relatively safety and supporting environment with their hypnotherapist (or clinical counselor), can be undermined by those negative habitual thoughts, beliefs, world-views and resulting emotions when they are “back in their daily life” and surrounded again by events, relationships and circumstances that trigger those unwanted behaviours. Integrating new self-beliefs can be a struggle for the client and old habits can need more than a single revelation

about their source to remove their impact. The mindfulness S.T.O.P. technique can help the client be aware in “normal daily life” when they are retracing those unwanted mental habits and give them a “pause” technique to become aware of what is happening internally. What they can then do is consciously integrate their new-found beliefs, self-perceptions and mental / emotional freedom they earned through hypnotherapy and counselling.^{xvi}

Links, References and Further Reading

ⁱ Mindful: The Science of Mindfulness, December 2021, [Mindful - healthy mind, healthy life](#)

ⁱⁱ [Mindfulness Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Mindfulness - Wikipedia](#)

^{iv} [Jon Kabat-Zinn: Defining Mindfulness - Mindful](#) <https://www.mindful.org/>

^v [Mindfulness | Psychology Today](#)

^{vi} [3 Definitions of Mindfulness That Might Surprise You | Psychology Today Canada](#)

^{vii} [Jon Kabat-Zinn - Wikipedia](#)

^{viii} [Generalized anxiety disorder - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic](#)

^{ix} [Mindfulness - Wikipedia](#)

^x [AMA-Quarterly-Winter-2020-pg42-45_Griesel.pdf \(amanet.org\)](#)

^{xi} Wendy Hosenkamp, Can we change Racial Bias: The Science of Mindfulness, December 2021, www.mindful.org Wendy Hosenkamp is Science Director at the Mind & Life institute and hosts the Mind & Life podcast.

^{xii} Hypnotherapy: A treatment for racism by Peter Flagg (RCH) [Articles - CACHE Canada](#)

^{xiii} Smookler, Elaine Mindful: Whatever YOU PREFER: The Science of Mindfulness, December 2021, www.mindful.org. Smookler is a registered psychotherapist on the faculty of the Center for Mindfulness in Toronto.

^{xiv} Parts work is based on the concept that our personality is composed of a number of various parts. [What Is Parts Work? | Hypnosis News & Research](#)

^{xv} [What IS Parts Therapy? \(royhunter.com\)](#) Roy Hunter’s website, books and articles are a good place to find a wealth of material on parts therapy in hypnotherapy.

^{xvi} Readers can check out “The Power of Habit” by Charles Duhigg and “You Are the Placebo” by Dr. Joe Dispenza for a greater understanding of the power of habitual thinking, emotions and behaviours that impact people and the difficulties in overcoming them.