



FINAL ESSAY

PSY545 MINDFULNESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Vyučující: PhDr. Roman Hytych, Ph.D.

Goals and expectations

Ever since I first learned about mindfulness, I have been fascinated by its uncomplicated wisdom. The simplicity, however, turns out to be illusory – it is something to work towards and there are no shortcuts and no way around it. I have known this before enrolling in this course because I already had some limited experience with mindfulness training from another course. I was hoping that being pushed to train a set amount of times per week would help me develop a skill, that I would learn how to meditate on my own independently of any audio instructions.

Komentář [R1]: For me it sounds grounded in reality

Because I already failed to finish that previous course, my intentions when it came to this one were humbler. I just wanted to finish what I was set out to do and see what possible benefits it would bring me. I knew that without putting in the work, there was no point in planning how to apply what I have not learned yet. I thought it would be nice to get to know my mind and possibly learn how to work with it. I took this whole experience as an exploration of an area that I tend to neglect. Later on, after some weeks of training (at the beginning of 6th week), a second, more concrete goal emerged. I noticed I was having trouble staying focused not only during formal practice but also in daily life because I tended to multitask at all costs and I became very dependent on various distractions. Therefore, I wanted to see if mindfulness skills and mindset were something that could be helpful in overcoming this.

Komentář [R2]: Nice concretization of your goals based on your experiences with the training.

My process

At first, I was very motivated to learn. I enjoyed the *Come to the senses* exercise because my mind had something to focus on and it did not get distracted very often. But as soon as I started practising the mindfulness of breathing, the obstacles began. I had to quickly adjust my goal from 30 minutes of meditation a day to only 20 minutes because half an hour proved to be too long. And even 20 were enough of a challenge for me, on some days it was even more than I could take. It was hard for me to find a time of day and a suitable quiet place to meditate. The time was crucial because whenever I felt I had some other things to do, I couldn't help but think about them. I often grew very tired by the time I had done everything I had planned for that day and I struggled with falling asleep during the practice. This happened very often. I preferred meditating in a quiet room where I would be alone which was hardly ever possible. This became less of an issue when the second instruction, mindfulness and insight meditation, was introduced. Even then it was very easy to learn what to do during meditation, which is what I had in mind when I set the goal of independent meditation. What I did not know then was that the non-doing was the difficult part.

Komentář [R3]: As with any other training, preparing suitable conditions is quite important.

Komentář [R4]: ☺ it is usually like that

Over time, I developed a use of two metaphors that helped me. I started to think of my mind as a muscle that I was training. When I started exercising my body a few years ago, I struggled too, and it took some time before I learned to like it. The results also took some time to show. It was the same with mindfulness – the process slowly becomes more enjoyable (or at least a bit easier) the more one practises. This was the case with building the secure base. I was not able to find any meaning in only focusing on breathing and letting everything else go but when the second instruction got introduced, I suddenly realized that I have built the secure base of my primary meditation object doing just that.

Komentář [R5]: Great

The second helpful metaphor was introduced to us in class. It was George Mumford's concept of arriving. This idea made the whole process of meditation a lot less intimidating because I knew that whenever my thoughts wandered off, I could arrive back at my primary meditation object. At first, I used to think that having distracting thoughts and noticing anything besides my breath was wrong but arriving helped me understand that it is not and that getting back is what counts. This also helped me discover that my mind is much more flexible than I think.

Komentář [R6]: Can you apply your particular personal knowledge in your future profession?

Komentář [R7]: Great

Komentář [R8]: I would like to know more about. It provokes my curiosity.

Although it is still an ongoing process, I had to accept that my progress was not linear. According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), patience is one of the major aspects of mindfulness training and it is important to give our minds and bodies the time they need for their processes. There were days when I enjoyed these 20 minutes to myself and a couple of times (twice in week 4, once in week 7) I had a new and pleasant experience. My body was very relaxed, but my mind was present, which was enjoyable and helped me deepen my meditation. But then there were other days and weeks when I really struggled with my practice. I felt trapped or short of breath and it was hard to continue. Sometimes I managed to collect myself and finish, sometimes I did not. In this way, I learned that there is a lot more going on inside my mind and body than I usually pay attention to and that my mind is hard to tame. Turning the "autopilot" off and not reacting to whatever is happening can be extremely difficult at times. I found out that the bodily distractions were easier to resist than the mental ones because they were often more difficult to notice until it was too late, and my mind wandered off.

Komentář [R9]: From my point of view it is quite crucial understanding for future psychologist, it is quite helpful to understand the clients, who are wishing to change things, but usually it needs so much time...

Komentář [R10]: Nice insight. Can you apply your particular personal knowledge in your future profession?

One of the techniques I employed in order to stop distracting thoughts was muting them. I started using this technique in the 8th week. I just tried to turn the sound of my inner voice off as if I was turning off a radio. It did work sometimes, but other times it felt as if the distractions kept going on some level that was more difficult to reach. I discovered that my mind has multiple layers and some of them take more effort to control.

Komentář [R11]: Again, nice insight; if I understand you properly, you realized, that sometimes when we try to control in unwise way, phenomena just submerge, we could think that we have everything under control, but the reality is quite different.

Curiously, there are no more positive reports in my research diary after week 8. Maybe it has become too repetitive for me, I still do not know why I stopped making any progress and my attitude towards meditation slowly changed for the worse. I felt completely stuck and sometimes I only meditated five times a week including the group practice at school. I failed to find a routine that would help me ease into the practice which is a pity because I have spent quite a lot of time on this and the idea of mindfulness makes sense to me. Reading Dreyfus' (2011) entry about the nature of mindfulness, I realised that I might have been making progress in these last 4 weeks of training without knowing about it. He explains that the more one practises mindfulness, the quicker he or she is to detect distractions and obstacles in the mind. Maybe I was not getting more distracted, I was just getting better at noticing distractions. The meditation might have felt more difficult because my mind was working harder. I might never know but this gives me some hope for the future.

The introspective method

The research diary proved to be an effective source of data. I found introspection to be a fitting method of describing and later analysing my experience. Because I did not know what to expect from the beginning, I could just observe and write down whatever was going on in each practice. At certain times, it was hard to verbalize the sensations I was experiencing. I knew no two practices were the same and that something was going on during each of them, but it was sometimes difficult to describe it as the unique experience it was. It might have been easier if I could write everything down as it was happening, but it was not possible. It would have also been interesting to keep track of the number of distraction during every practice to see if there was any trend.

This brings me to perhaps the biggest downside of this method, which is that it sometimes interfered with the process of meditation. The intention to report everything was always present. In my diary, I noted many times that the ideas and thoughts I was planning to put in the next entry were often distracting. I wanted to let them go and focus on the meditation object but at the same time, I did not want to forget them. That was always a dilemma. I would have preferred a more structured way to track my process than just the introspective diary entries. I understand it is hard to assess inner processes that are sometimes hard to explain or verbalize but I feel I like another way of describing my experience with mindfulness might have been a helpful additional tool. Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer and Toney (2006) examined five quantitative self-report measures of mindfulness and found they were all positively correlated and internally consistent. They proceeded to extract five facets to finally create the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire. Although it was shown to

Komentář [R12]: I would agree. There are some other possibilities how to help yourself.

1. Your metaphor with muscles – if you succeed in improving to some level, to advance to next level usually means extra effort in the way of being patient;
2. Test if you can apply mindfulness in everyday situations and what are the results.
3. While reviewing meditation training every time find the small pleasant moments, usually there are present in every training.

Komentář [R13]: Nice; Can you apply your particular personal knowledge in your future profession?

Komentář [R14]: I know it from myself, if we try too much to analyze, that we block process of flowing – it is about balancing mind faculties, specifically confidence and wisdom

have less than ideal discriminant validity in later trial (Goldberg et al., 2016), it might still be a good idea to incorporate this or other similar self-report measure at the beginning and end of a mindfulness program. It might be helpful in evaluating the experience and perhaps even identifying avenues for future development.

Komentář [R15]: Thanks, I am working on it

Application in everyday life

Even though I would not say that I properly solidified the mindfulness practice, there were nevertheless some ways that I have used the mindful approach and even some techniques in my day to day life. This was quite surprising for me as I felt I did not really earn this. I found out incorporating training of mindfulness into automatic daily activities suited my needs better than having to find 20 minutes solely for meditation. I tried to mindfully walk, mindfully wash the dishes or mindfully brush my teeth. Doing this helped me stay without any distraction and give myself some space to just exist. It can be very calming from time to time.

Komentář [R16]: Great; Can you apply your particular personal knowledge in your future profession?

Another way I chose to apply mindfulness was when I took driving lessons. Driving can be very stressful, and it is important to stay focused at all times. Not only I but also my driving instructor noticed that I became calmer. When I felt overwhelmed, I just focused on my breathing and that helped me ground myself, not thinking about what I'd done wrong or what trouble I might run into next. This also applies to other stressful situations when I might feel powerless. I always tell myself that the present moment is all I have, and I accept what is happening here and now.

Komentář [R17]: Can you apply your particular personal knowledge in your future profession?

Yet another helpful skill or perspective that I gained from this course was that of staying with unpleasant feelings but not giving them any more attention. I experienced time and time again that the negative sensations I would normally get rid of sometimes disappeared by themselves. In that moment when the unpleasant feeling emerges, it usually seems like it is never going to end but that is never true. It always passes, sooner or later. These little daily reminders during meditation practice were very useful in that sense. And when some negative emotion gets too strong and it will not leave, I try the loving kindness meditation. What I like about it most is that not only do I make myself feel better, I also give to other people (although only in my thoughts) and that way it does not seem selfish and instead becomes more meaningful.

Komentář [R18]: Can you apply your particular personal knowledge in your future profession?

Komentář [R19]: Try to test it in some relationships or situation that seems problematic, if there will be a change

The benefits I have described are not something that comes automatically and without effort, but I do not see that as a problem. I am grateful for these insights that mindfulness practice taught me. I learned that I have control over my mind and that I do not have to pay attention to everything that comes up. It might take a while but eventually I reach the

realisation that I can think and do things differently and stop the problematic reaction as if it was just a distraction. As Kabat-Zinn (2013) suggests, the practice of mindfulness in everyday life can make us aware of our choices and options and we can ask ourselves questions that reveal how we can live more fully.

Komentář [R20]: I am rejoicing.

Future uses in clinical psychology

Although there has been a whole range of clinical application of mindfulness in psychology and psychotherapy particularly since the 1990's (Didonna, 2009), I think the possible benefits are not limited to directly mindfulness-based interventions. At this time, I cannot imagine myself teaching mindfulness techniques to my future clients, but I see it as a helpful framework and a guide for thinking about people and their problems. For example, building a capacity for suffering is undoubtedly a very useful application of mindfulness in an area where human suffering is the key problem. I can imagine using the mindfulness principles to distance myself from strong emotions, be it countertransference or anything the client or patient brings to the table. Being able to observe my thoughts without acting on them and instead being aware of my own process and being able to describe it when appropriate might benefit any communication. Jones and Hansen (2015) attempted to explore the role of mindfulness in supportive communication. They found that higher mindfulness was associated with less automatic behaviour and more positive reappraisal. Hopkins and Proeve (2013) present both quantitative and qualitative evaluation of a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy program for trainee clinical psychologists. The psychologists who participated in the program reported changes in their perception of stress, namely increased resilience and acceptance. They also experienced more attentiveness, increased interpersonal relating to clients and awareness of their own reactions. They associated this increase in awareness with being less worried about their performance as a therapist. I find these results very inspiring. It seems mindfulness is a useful tool for not only work with clients but also for personal development (and maybe even burn-out prevention) that is necessary in this field.

Komentář [R21]: I agree, I think that mindfulness is mostly for professionals, because clients goals are usually quite different from training mindfulness.

Another compelling idea is that of compassion. I had a good experience with the loving kindness meditation and I believe this idea can extend to any interpersonal setting. It shows how self-compassion ties into compassion towards others (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011). Feldman and Kuyken (2011) explain how compassion creates space for healing and that can mean simply reaching out to someone with kindness and curiosity and being with them. I see this as a crucial foundation for any psychological intervention. The mindfulness practice also helped me develop not only compassion, but a new kind of respect for patients who learned or are willing to learn this method as a part of their treatment plan. It was very hard for me to

practice on days when I was emotionally overwhelmed or just slightly physically unwell. I cannot begin to imagine how hard it is to find the strength to live with serious problems and conditions. It is admirable how some people manage to incorporate their struggles into their life and even embrace them.

Komentář [R22]: I am proud how did you use your training

Limitations

One of the obstacles I faced with my own mindfulness practice was my inability to detect any improvements and most of the time I felt as if I did not make any progress at all. This was one of the reasons why it was hard to find motivation sometimes, because I could hardly see the point of my efforts. I know that if it was not for this course, I would have given up. The need for high motivation is perhaps the most serious limitation that I perceived. If I found a way to be more motivated, I would have dealt better with the practical issues that I mentioned in the description of my process. This method is not one that provides those who practice it with instant gratification, the effect is slow and gradual, and this might be off-putting to some people. As Hyland (2016) points out, this is often an issue with contemporary mindfulness-based interventions – there is no quick fix and the considerable benefits will show only with long-term, perhaps even lifelong practice. Although I do not consider that a flaw, it might make mindfulness seem less approachable.

Komentář [R23]: I agree; could I do something more for the students to help them in the training? Do you have any ideas?

Komentář [R24]: Definitely; we can also ponder about settings, what could be helpful. Did you get support from group settings?

Even for me, there were times when I wondered if I am capable of ever learning how to meditate. Not surprisingly, there is believed to be such thing as dispositional mindfulness. It turns out there are individual differences in this trait on the neurological level, particularly in prefrontal activity during reappraisal of negative emotions (Modinos, Ormel, & Aleman, 2010). People who are more mindful prior to formal training probably have an easier time learning these skills. Maybe I was unlucky to be one of the people who are predisposed to be less mindful, it is definitely something to consider. But this limitation is one that is a common thread with any intervention or therapeutic approach – there will be people who will benefit more and people who will benefit less or even experience some adverse effects.

Komentář [R25]: From what have you written i would not say so.

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Komentář [R26]: I appreciate range of literature list. I enjoy reading your essay, you have written one of the best part about application in your future profession. If you would agree, I could offer it (with your name or without) for students in the future.
I evaluate your text A.
All the best
Roman

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