"Critical and Social Perspectives on Mindfulness"

Day:	Time:	Track:
Thursday 12th July 2018	9:00 – 10:15 am	Mindfulness in Society

It is imperative to bring attention to underexplored social and cultural aspects of the spread, appropriation and commodification of mindfulness. Social mindfulness can facilitate the development of more inclusive practices, which may challenge the values and working principles of current societal problems.

Rachel Lilley investigates mindfulness as social and environmental change. Based on different influences, such as behavioural economics, she develops a new transition science to move mindfulness from the therapeutic to the political by combining MBIs with insights of the behavioural sciences concerning the roles of cognitive biases and psychological heuristics, policy and change making processes.

David Forbes discusses how integral social mindfulness that includes second-person perspectives and considers and engages with developmental depth, cultural values and meanings, and inequitable social structures can be offered in schools.

Nicholas Canby shows in a mixed-methods study that outcomes of MBIs are related to the presence of social factors, such as supportive relationships with instructors and group members, indicating that relational and group therapy aspect of MBIs should be considered in MBI teacher training and treatment development.

Kristina Eichel reports on a systematic review of research on MBIs with focus on the problem of low external validity, especially relevant when meditation is presented to be the universal antidote for any mental health problem. This claim is problematic, if the samples that MBIs are based on, are of privilege and lack diversity.

Symposium overview

Presenter 1   **Rachel Lilley** - Mindfulness as social and environmental change – developing a new transition science to move mindfulness from the therapeutic to the political

Presenter 2   **David Forbes** - The Need for Social Mindfulness in US Public Schools

Presenter 3   **Nicholas Canby** - Assessing the role of social factors in Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Presenter 4   **Kristina Eichel** - Exclusion by Omission: A Systematic Review of Diversity Variables in Mindfulness Based Interventions

Chair: *Kristina Eichel*

Mindfulness as social and environmental change – developing a new transition science to move mindfulness from the therapeutic to the political

Rachel Lilley

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Background and objectives: Mindfulness and Mindfulness Based Intervention (MBI) research has largely been situated in the therapeutic/wellbeing fields within psychology and neuroscience. Even as it transitions to workplace based interventions, these are still largely positioned in the field of wellbeing and resilience.
There is increasing interest in mindfulness as environmentally, socially, politically and organisationally transformative. In recent years, political geographers at Aberystwyth and Birmingham Universities have explored how mindfulness can become more transformative and applicable to political and social change processes by situating it within models relevant to those fields, specifically behavioural economics. One result of this research has been the need for new models and frames of reference to understand, design and research MBI's which have very different intentions and theoretical frameworks to those based on wellbeing and MBCT or MBSR.

Methods: The research is based on over five years of empirical research, on adapted mindfulness programmes delivered in the public, NGO and private sectors. These MBI's combined established mindfulness practices with the emerging insights of the behavioural sciences concerning the roles of cognitive biases, psychological heuristics and understandings of 'rationality' in decision, policy and change making processes.

Results: The evidence we have generated suggests that the training can facilitate the development of practices, which, to a certain extent, challenge the values and working principles of neoliberalism.

Discussion and Conclusion: The research process has necessitated consideration of how to integrate new frameworks of reference and research methods in an evolving science of mindfulness. This includes a new model of understanding to differentiate between therapeutic transformative and socially/environmentally transformative MBI's; different perspectives on the mind, drawn from behavioural economics, neuroscience and philosophy; and how mindfulness can work to address bias; new research methods to support different phenomenological reports and self-interpretations of participants to include more collaborative/contextual/intentional elements.

The Need for Social Mindfulness in US Public Schools

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Background and objectives: Mindfulness programs in US public schools tend to focus on improving attitudes and behaviors of students and teachers on an individualistic level. This tends to reinforce normative definitions of educational success in a neoliberal society. School mindfulness programs thereby reflect the same limitations of the broader mindfulness field: they privilege first person (subjective) experiences and third person (objective) measurements such as behaviors and outcomes and fail to acknowledge that society and education are socially constructed and include contestable interpretations, meanings, and values. They thereby neglect critical awareness and evaluation of second person perspectives, i.e., intersubjective experiences and contexts of relationships, culture, moral values, and social structure. In particular, programs leave out critical consideration of neoliberal assumptions, methods, practices, and policies, moral development and values, and problematic cultural norms that ignore issues of social justice. They do not question the purpose of mindfulness within schools given they are offered in a neoliberal context and rely on its definition of success. The objectives of this presentation are to critically question individualistic oriented programs in schools and propose approaches for an alternative, more integral and critical social mindfulness.

Methods: The author will critically present examples of practices and approaches of school mindfulness programs that reflect individualistic and neoliberal values and orientations. He will describe aspects of an alternative integral model that includes critical thinking and cultural, developmental, moral, and social factors.

Results: The author will provide some examples of how an integral, critical social mindfulness is practiced in urban schools.

Discussion and Conclusion: This discussion is qualitative and its conclusions are ongoing. It questions whether mindfulness as practiced in public schools can and should be framed largely from first and third person perspectives that focus on neoliberal success, whether traditional positivistic research methods are the best way to account for school mindfulness practices, and how a more integral social mindfulness that includes second person perspectives and considers and engages with developmental depth, cultural values and meanings, and inequitable social structures can be offered in schools.

Assessing the role of social factors in Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Nicholas Canby[1], Kristina Eichel[2], Brendan Cullen[3], Willoughby Britton[2]

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Background and Objectives: Whereas the majority of research on Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) focuses on the role of meditation techniques in clinical outcomes, less is known about the contribution of social factors common across therapeutic modalities. This project used a mixed method design to investigate how common therapeutic factors, such as instructor and group member relationships, group interpersonal dynamics, secure emotional expression, and social support, affect clinical outcomes in MBIs.

Methods: One hundred and four individuals with mild-severe depression (73% female, M age = 40.28, range =18-65 years) participated in an 8-week MBI. Clinical outcomes measured depression, anxiety, stress, well-being, and positive and negative affect. Measures of common factors included the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI), the Therapist Empathy Scale (ES), the Therapeutic Factors Inventory-Short Form (TFI-19), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and qualitative interview data 3-month follow-up. Social factors variables were entered into a multiple linear regression to predict post-intervention outcomes. Qualitative data was coded into different themes.

Results: As a whole, the social factors variables significantly predicted post-intervention well-being outcomes, $p = .012$ with 8% of variance explained, stress outcomes, $p = .007$ with 22% of variance explained, anxiety outcomes, $p = .029$ with 15% of variance explained, negative affect outcomes, $p < .001$ with 29% of variance explained, and positive affect outcomes, $p = .011$ with 20% of variance explained. Social factors variables as a whole did not significantly predict depression outcomes. The results of the qualitative data show similarly the importance of the group and teacher relationship. Discussion: These data suggest that a significant portion of the outcomes of MBIs is related to the presence of social factors in these interventions, such as supportive relationships with instructors and group members, the group as a safe place in which clients can openly share and express their feelings, and the instillation of hope in participants.

Conclusion: These results indicate that the relational and group therapy aspect of MBIs should be considered in MBI teacher training and treatment development, and MBI outcomes should not be considered to be only the result of meditation practice.

Exclusion by Omission: A Systematic Review of Diversity Variables in Mindfulness Based Interventions

Sath Chau, Andy Pham, Kristina Eichel, Aya Cheaito, Jonah Lipsky, Zixi Zhu, Willoughby Britton, et al.

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Background and Objectives: External validity is an important criterion to investigate the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs). Do the samples of MBI research represent the population in real-life treatment? Are MBIs evidence-based treatments that can be disseminated and integrated into practice? Within a systematic review, this paper investigates the samples of those trials that study the effects of MBIs to dismantle possible lack of diversity regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, education and other demographics.

Methods: The 115 studies that were eligible for the systematic review used randomized controlled trials with at least one control condition, and standardized MBSR or MBCT treatment. Information on the amount of female, male and other identifying participants was extracted. The terms heterosexual, homosexual, straight, gay, and bisexual were searched through the papers. Primary methods of displaying and the completeness of race and education information were documented.

Results: 48% of the studies reported information on race. Of the 49 U.S. studies, 79% of the participants were white. Only 3 of all 115 studies had specifically mention the sexual orientation of their participants. No study included a third option for gender. Of the 49 U.S. studies identified, 67.4% of studies presented education information as number of years or percentages of having obtained specific levels of education. Within this system, there was no standardization of grouping categories. In terms of completeness of information, 32.6% of the U.S. studies provided education information for all participants, 34.8% were incomplete, and 32.6% having not reported education at all.

Discussion: Considering that the studies in our systematic review are well designed with rigorous methodology, the external validity is lacking overall and there might be a discrepancy between the investigated samples and the representation in the population in real-life treatment. How can a mindfulness-based intervention be evidence-based treatment if there is no externally valid evidence? Conclusion: The problem of low external validity applies to research on MBIs especially when meditation is presented to be the universal antidote for any mental health problem. This claim is problematic, more so if the samples that MBIs are based on, are of privilege and socio-economic advantages.