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Evaluating a Christian Approach to Mindfulness Practice

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Mindfulness Defined



- Compassionate, purposeful awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of personal experience, such as thoughts, feelings, impulses, and/or behaviors, in the present moment
- Open, present-moment awareness

• (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006)

Mindlessness?

- Biased thinking
- Defensiveness
- Rumination
- Thoughts and emotions are carried along by the stream of consciousness without self-awareness or purposeful attention.

Mindfulness Defined

- Mechanisms of Change
 - **Attention:** Give purposeful, regulated attention to the immediate, present moment. This enhances an awareness of emotions, thoughts, sensations, and behaviors as they occur
 - **Attitude:** Keep a stance of curiosity, openness, and acceptance without self-imposed judgment toward inner experience. Keep a non-judgmental attitude toward the self and others
 - **Intention:** Answer the question of why you are choosing to practice mindfulness. Find personal meaning in the exercise

• (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006)

Mindfulness as an Empirically Supported Treatment

- Lowered Stress and Overall Well-being:
Goyal, Singh, Sabinga, et al., 2014
- Lowered Anxiety and Depression:
Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010
- Lowered Anxiety and Stress:
Chiesa & Seretti, 2009
- Enhanced Emotion Regulation:
Menezes, Pereira, & Bizarro, 2012

Religiously Accommodative Treatments

- Multicultural sensitivity requires consideration of a client's personal belief system in the administration of ethical and effective mental health treatment
 - (Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013)
- *Religiously accommodative treatments* seek to increase therapeutic effectiveness, striving to enhance empirically supported treatments by respectfully adapting or adjusting interventions as needed to incorporate the worldview of the client
 - (Hathaway & Tan, 2009; Tan, 2013)

Mindfulness as a Religiously Accommodative Treatment

- The clinical application of mindfulness is correlated with multiple mental health benefits as a therapeutic technique
 - (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006)
- Mindfulness claims origins in both Zen Buddhism and Christian contemplative tradition
 - (Tan, 2011)

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- Ancient Buddhist approaches to mindfulness include Vipassana meditation and Zen meditation
- The modern psychotherapeutic practice of mindfulness includes evidence-based, standardized protocols
- Mindfulness is often compared to the practice of centering prayer, emphasizing a commonality with Christian traditions that incorporate principles of mindful meditation

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- Both modern, secularized protocols for mindfulness and ancient Buddhist mindfulness meditation practice present philosophical problems for individuals that are devoted to a Christian worldview. Adapting mindfulness to a Christian worldview requires the consideration of key doctrines of the Christian faith.

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- The Christian integration of open, present-moment awareness requires the acknowledgement that God is always present, so we are never alone
- Adapting the mindfulness technique to a Christian worldview includes the awareness of God's presence alongside present-moment awareness

• (Garzon, 2015)

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- **God is near.** Christian doctrine upholds specific characteristics of God that contradict the Buddhist teachings on the divine. For example, in addition to being omnibenevolent (all-loving), omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing), God is also omnipresent, meaning that God is always present, everywhere, in every moment, regardless of an individual's physical location, spiritual condition, or emotional state. This is known as God's immanence.

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- **God is personal.** Buddhist teaching asserts that the path of spiritual awakening is open to individual interpretation and gives no specific name to deity. From a Christian worldview, God is not vague, but rather is personal, knowable, and nameable. Christian mindfulness will address God as a personal being, in the manner in which he is self-identified in Scripture.

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- **God is above.** God is separate from the individual, as the creator of both nature and mankind. This is known as God's transcendence. While God's immanence refers to his presence and activity within creation and throughout history, God's transcendence refers to his independence from and superiority over the universe and the progression of time.

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- **God is gracious.** God's love, as demonstrated by the sacrificial gift of Christ in atonement for sin, is the foundation for his gracious and compassionate nature toward mankind. God's grace stands in stark contrast to the Buddhist concept of Karma, as it is given freely to all in spite of being undeserved. Christians believe that those who receive God's grace by faith in Christ are spared from the consequence of God's wrath toward evil.

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- **Other spiritual influences.** Meditation can be a spiritual practice even when framed secularly. Leaving out the Christian worldview elements may implicitly embrace Buddhist/Hindu premises and assumptions, exposing clients to potential demonic influence.

Mindfulness and a Christian Worldview

- God is personal, near, above, and gracious
- Avoid other spiritual influences
- A Christian worldview of mindfulness practice includes an awareness of God in the present moment as a personal being who is separate and above our internal and external experience, and gracious to all. It recognizes the potential for other spiritual influences when practicing meditation from other religions solely from a secular or eastern religious paradigm (Tan, 2011).

Meditation in Christian Historical Tradition

- Recognize these terms?
 - Kataphatic meditation
 - Apophatic meditation
 - Lectio Divina

Meditation in Christian Historical Tradition

- Kataphatic
 - Meditating on Words and Images (Ie. Scripture)
- Apophatic
 - Wordless Contemplation (Ie. Resting in God)
 - Practicing the Presence (Ie. Present moment awareness)
- Example: Breath Awareness Meditation
- Reactions?

Research Question

- Will the adaptation of mindfulness training to a Christian worldview alter the impact of the intervention by positively modifying outcomes on measures of perceived stress?

Purpose of the Study

- This study investigated the impact of Christian mindfulness training (CMT) in comparison to conventional mindfulness training (MT), utilizing a randomized trial design to compare pre- and post-treatment differences between the two groups on measures of perceived stress, religious coping strategies, and God attachment

Methodology: Treatment

- **Christian Mindfulness Training (CMT)**
 - Defined as a mindfulness technique for increasing open present-moment awareness that has been explicitly adapted to a Christian worldview
- **Conventional Mindfulness Training (MT)**
 - Defined as a mindfulness technique for increasing open present-moment awareness that lacks explicit adaptation to a Christian worldview

Methodology: Randomized Trial

- The two groups consisted of volunteer participants associated with a private, Christian college in Florida ($n=78$)
- Randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions:
- Christian mindfulness training (CMT) or conventional mindfulness training (MT)

Methodology: Treatment Protocols

- Both groups completed three weeks of training that included psycho-educational group sessions and prescribed exercises for daily application of the mindfulness techniques
 - Week 1: Breathing Exercise (Attention)
 - Week 2: Body Scan Exercise (Attitude)
 - Week 3: Meditation Exercise (Intention)

Methodology: Dependent Measures

Stress

- **Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS)**
Measures the frequency of symptoms of psychological distress during the previous week. Stress subscale: (DASS-S)
 - (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)
- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)** Assesses levels of generalized stress by evaluating the degree to which an individual perceives life as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded during the previous month
 - (Cohen, Kamarch, & Mermelstein, 1983)

Methodology: Hypothesis 1

- Statistically significant decreases in perceived stress for participants in both the CMT and the MT group based on responses on the DASS-S and the PSS

Methodology: Hypothesis 2

- Statistically significant decreases in perceived stress for participants in the CMT group in comparison to participants from the MT group based on responses on the DASS-S and the PSS

Demographics

- Self-reported as belonging to the evangelical Christian faith
- Male (42%) and Female (58%)
- Average age = 27 years (range: 18-66)
- 73% ranged in age from 18-25
- 37.2% married, 61.5% single, 1.3% divorced
- 91% *Caucasian*, 5.1% *African-American*, 2.6% *Latino*, 1.3% *Other*
- Average of length of time as a Christian = 15 years (range: 5 months – 57 years)

Demographics

- 99 applicants completed intake
- 49 randomly assigned to the CMT group
- 50 randomly assigned to the MT group
- 42 CMT participants and 49 MT participants completed all pre-tests and attended the first group meeting
- Following three weeks of treatment, 36
CMT participants and 42 MT participants completed all post-tests, resulting in a final sample of $n=78$
- The completion rate for both the CMT and the MT group was identical at 84%

Statistical Analysis

- Random assignment of participants to either the CMT group ($n=36$) or the MT group ($n=42$)
- Following treatment, Pre-test and Post-test data was analyzed as to variance within and between groups using both ANOVA and a series of paired samples and independent samples t-tests as an experimental comparison of means

Results: Hypothesis 1

- Participants in both the CMT and the MT group reported lower levels of perceived stress on responses on the DASS-S and the PSS

Measure	Change	Pre-test		Post-test		**Significant at $p < .01$
DASS-S						
CMT	M=3.94	M=10.22	SD=7.36	M=6.28	SD=5.56	** $p=.001$
MT	M=1.74	M=11.02	SD=7.25	M=9.29	SD=6.99	$p=.126$
PSS						
CMT	M=2.97	M=16.92	SD=6.9	M=13.94	SD=6.10	** $p=.002$
MT	M=2.76	M=18.29	SD=7.8	M=15.52	SD=7.60	** $p=.012$

Implications:

- Suggests that Christian accommodated mindfulness was at least as effective as the conventional application of mindfulness for reducing perceived stress
- In a Christian sample, accommodated mindfulness may produce equally meaningful reductions in stress compared to empirically supported mindfulness

Results: Hypothesis 2

- Participants in the CMT group reported lower levels of perceived stress compared to the MT group on responses on the DASS-S

Measure	Change	*Significant at $p < .05$	Post-test	*Significant at $p < .05$	
DASS-S					
CMT	M=3.94	$p = .17$, two-tailed	M=6.28	SD=5.56	* $p = .04$, two-tailed
MT	M=1.74		M=9.29		
PSS					
CMT	M=2.97	$p = .88$, two-tailed	M=13.94	SD=6.10	$p = .32$, two-tailed
MT	M=2.76		M=15.52	SD=7.60	

Implications:

- Results partially suggest that Christian accommodated mindfulness may enhance the effectiveness of the treatment for reducing perceived stress in a Christian sample
 - Participants in the MT group were acquainted with the personal faith of the researcher and may have presumed an inherent Christian worldview
 - Participants in the MT group may have implicitly integrated a Christian worldview

Results: Additional Findings

- CMT participants reported significantly greater treatment compliance* compared to the MT participants

*Number of days out of 21 the participant reported completing the mindfulness exercise

Observation	Post-Treatment		**Significant at $p < .01$
Treatment Compliance			
CMT	M=.99	SD=.04	** $p < .001$
MT	M=.83	SD=.21	

Implications:

- Preliminary results suggest that Christian accommodated mindfulness may enhance treatment compliance in a Christian sample
- Multicultural sensitivity may help avoid unnecessary resistance toward treatment
 - Reminder texts and emails sent every few days by the researcher to encourage compliance
 - Personal interactions with the researcher in a small college campus context allowed opportunities for feedback and verbal encouragement

Results: Additional Findings

- CMT participants reported significant within and between group differences compared to MT participants on the DASS and the DASS-D

Measure	Change	Pre-test	Post-test	**Significant at $p < .01$ *Significant at $p < .05$
DASS				
CMT	M=5.86	M=18.89 SD=15.29	M=13.03 SD=11.41	** $p = .01$
MT	M=3.10	M=23.40 SD=15.87	M=20.31 SD=16.27	$p = .20$
DASS Between Groups Post-test Mean Difference				* $p = .03$, two-tailed
DASS-D				
CMT			M=3.39 SD=3.74	* $p = .03$, two-tailed
MT			M=6.19 SD=6.47	*

Implications:

- Suggests that Christian accommodated mindfulness may enhance the effectiveness of the treatment for a variety of mental health concerns in a Christian sample
 - Participants in the MT group were acquainted with the personal faith of the researcher and may have presumed an inherent Christian worldview
 - Participants in the MT group may have implicitly integrated a Christian worldview

Results: Additional Findings

- MT participants were asked three questions in a preliminary investigation of implicit integration
- Likert-type scale from 1-7 (1=*Not at all*, 7=*Very much*)
 - When learning about mindfulness, did you find yourself using your faith to understand it?
 - When practicing mindfulness, did you find yourself using the exercise to experience or think about God in the moment?
 - If so, did the experience of integrating your faith naturally with the experience of mindfulness enhance it in some way or not?

Results: Additional Findings

- Item 1: 62% of MT participants responded >4
- Item 2: 64% of MT participants responded >4
- Item 3: 64% of MT participants responded >4

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