

Classical Mindfulness

An Introduction to Its Theory and Practice for Clinical Application

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Among the modern versions of mindfulness, mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) has played the key role in introducing mindfulness practice to the field of psychology and medicine. In fact, the efforts to integrate mindfulness into psychology have resulted in further adaptation of MBSR into more secular and psychological forms as well as the creation of a number of mindfulness measures such as the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, and the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale. At the same time there is increasing scrutiny of mindfulness that goes beyond the initial positive efficacy studies resulting in several important questions being raised. These range from the absence of an operational definition of mindfulness as well as little evidence for the mechanisms of mindfulness that account for outcome changes for various psychopathology and medical conditions. Questions about the defining characteristics of mindfulness are also being raised such as the lack of differentiation between the features called attention and awareness and the interchangeable use of the two terms in modern descriptions of mindfulness. Such questions resonate with traditional practitioners of Buddhist contemplative psychology for whom attention signifies an every-changing factor of consciousness, while awareness refers to a stable and specific state of consciousness.

Key words: mindfulness; Buddhism; awareness

Among the modern versions of mindfulness, mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) has played the key role in introducing mindfulness practice to the field of psychology and medicine.¹ In fact, the efforts to integrate mindfulness into psychology has resulted in further adaptation of MBSR into more secular and psychological forms as well as the creation of a number of mindfulness measures such as the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, and the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale.² At

the same time there is increasing scrutiny of mindfulness that goes beyond the initial positive efficacy studies resulting in several important questions being raised. These range from the absence of an operational definition of mindfulness as well as little evidence for the mechanisms of mindfulness that account for outcome changes for various psychopathology and medical conditions.³ Questions about the defining characteristics of mindfulness are also being raised such as the lack of differentiation between the features called attention and awareness and the interchangeable use of the two terms in modern descriptions of mindfulness.⁴ Such questions resonate with traditional practitioners of Buddhist contemplative psychology for whom attention signifies an

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every-changing factor of consciousness, while awareness refers to a stable and specific state of consciousness.

Researchers particularly in the field of depression and anxiety are also raising serious questions about whether mindfulness as a stand-alone treatment is appropriate for treating psychopathology.⁵ They assert that it is unlikely that mindfulness by itself can change the underlying mechanisms of psychopathology such as entrenched negative thinking and feelings. They go further and assert that the range of efficacy of mindfulness for psychopathology that some researchers such as Baer and others have suggested may be somewhat premature and unlikely since the modern versions of mindfulness do not focus on changing maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behavior.⁵ However, the researchers stress that mindfulness could be a clinical tool if it is modified to address specific and appropriate clinical issues.⁶

Questions about, and the need to re-evaluate, the use of mindfulness in general also come from other quarters for quite different but important reasons. Many researchers well versed in meditation as well as Buddhist scholars, teachers, and practitioners are expressing serious concerns about the potential misinterpretations of the nature and function of mindfulness in psychology and other disciplines.^{7,8} They note that in adapting versions of mindfulness from MBSR, no real effort has been made to understand the underlying comprehensive theory of mindfulness as presented in Buddhist psychology literature like the *Abhidharma*. In fact, much of the current application of mindfulness is associated with modern versions of mindfulness, which are often formulated to suit Western mindsets and often are watered down versions of the original practice. While there is no question that these versions have demonstrated their efficacy in clinical and research studies, they do diverge significantly from the original practice to the extent that significant concepts and components may have been excluded, modified, and minimized with potential consequences.

Of greater concern is the current movement to psychologize and secularize mindfulness without fully understanding the model of cognition and perception that explains mindfulness in the classical literature. At the outset it is important to make a distinction between MBSR and the emerging secular and psychological versions. MBSR is rooted in authentic Buddhist tradition particularly those practiced in certain parts of South East Asia.¹ However, it is important to mention that the particular Buddhist tradition from which MBSR is derived appears to be an adapted version of the original Indian practice of mindfulness. The author of MBSR in turn has further configured ways to change the adapted Buddhist practice into a multi-component intervention to suit the Western mindsets and needs (Figure 1).

Popularized versions of mindfulness, on the other hand, conceptually originate from the success of MBSR, but very rapidly began to redefine mindfulness by simply taking the basic features of mindfulness and disregarding some of the more comprehensive features that are described in MBSR.¹ It appears that the motivating reason is to further simplify and make the practice more accessible. They consider the formal practice of daily training and meditation required in MBSR as too demanding. In the process of adaptation, they changed mindfulness from a systematic practice based on a perceptual and cognitive model in Buddhism, to a more general concept of being mindful, i.e. attentive to present moment experience.

The equating of mindfulness with being mindful is further evidenced in some of the scales designed to measure mindfulness. Items in the scales appear to be assessing attentiveness to present moment experience rather than mindfulness. Furthermore, the proponents have ignored the significance of certain key functions of mindfulness such as labeling, cognitive regulation, and quiet stillness that help to increase the flexible use of mindfulness. These skills enable the practitioner to first

Classical Mindfulness	Modern Versions
attention and introspective awareness are key defining features	attention and acceptance are key defining features
goal oriented	without goals
process and phase-oriented	not phase and process oriented
perceptual in nature	cognitive in nature
present, past and future experiences	present moment experiences
attention and awareness training based	not necessarily training based
attention and awareness are differentiated states	attention and awareness are not differentiated states
active awareness	non-reactive awareness
simultaneous application of attention and awareness	sequential application of attention and awareness
mindfulness is free of preconceptions such as values	mindfulness is value based such as active acceptance
no affective processes	affective processing

Figure 1. Differences between modern versions and classical mindfulness.

develop and then apply bare attention for experiential insight into the moment to moment workings of adaptive and maladaptive thoughts and feelings.

With the increasing interest in and popularity of the concept of acceptance based on the research in Acceptance Commitment Therapy by Hayes and colleagues,⁹ the concept of acceptance as a defining feature of mindfulness is receiving even greater attention.¹⁰ In fact, some proponents of secular and psychological mindfulness have extended their enthusiasm to encouraging their clients and subjects to not only accept whatever arises naturally to consciousness but also actively invite such experiences.¹⁰

The proponents of popularized mindfulness further consolidate their position of adaptation by arguing that mindfulness does not require formal training and assert that it is a function of daily life. They claim that mindfulness is, therefore, fundamentally a secular experience and thus seek to minimize its Buddhist roots. In fact, researchers like Hayes and Shenk question whether mindfulness as a meditative practice can be studied empirically since

it is a pre-scientific technique.¹¹ Others suggest that mindfulness is a universal practice that can be found in other religious traditions such as Christianity. However, the concept of mindfulness as a perceptual construct was unknown to the field of psychology prior to its introduction primarily through MBSR. Similarly, there is also no evidence that other religious traditions—while talking about being mindful—describe a theory based concept and practice of mindfulness as in the Buddhist tradition.

In the field of research in mindfulness, there is an increasing attempt to modify the concept of mindfulness to configure with cognitive theories and models. Some researchers now state that mindfulness is a form of a detached way of attending and observing experiences and suggest that it is a common factor found in all types of psychotherapy.¹² Others seek to explain mindfulness to fit the informational processing theory of psychological disorder.^{13–15} They propose that a form of mindfulness, which they call “detached mindfulness,” is employed as a meta-cognitive monitoring and control

over pathogenic internal processes. They argue forcefully that focusing on the information processing underpinnings of mindfulness may be more consistent with cognitive theory and practice and thus more in conformity with science.

According to classical literature, mindfulness is an active, engaged and not a detached, non-reactive process.¹⁶ It is through engagement with moment to moment experience of a mental event, that the objective of mindfulness, which is insight into the links between one mental event and another, is acquired. Real learning occurs when one is actively involved in the process. It is very much like that of learning to herd cows. One does not learn by watching someone else herd cows, but rather by actually herding cows.¹⁷

What is extremely encouraging in the field is the concerted effort by other researchers such as Bishop *et al.* to study and explore mindfulness more comprehensively. Bishop *et al.* describe mindfulness, as a continuum of mental processes that seeks to understand how maladaptive and adaptive thoughts, feelings, and behavior occur in order to increase adaptive and decrease maladaptive ones in daily life.¹⁰ However, in order to facilitate scientific study, the authors operationalize mindfulness into the two basic constructs of attention and acceptance. The approach has resulted in major problems. Hayes and Shenk rightly state that this would mean any mental or other activities that induce or involve self-regulated attention and acceptance would necessarily be a mindfulness method.¹¹ The question then arises whether guided imagery or even hypnosis if used to regulate attention on a particular object while being open to whatever arises in the process, would be considered a mindfulness practice.

The presentation of mindfulness by Bishop *et al.* is probably the most accurate representation of a Buddhist version of mindfulness to date in the field of psychology.¹⁰ However, their interpretation varies from the classical presen-

tation. For one, the authors do not differentiate adequately between attention and awareness, the key defining features of mindfulness in terms of state and function. As a result, developing attention and awareness may be compromised in a number of ways. If the practitioners are unclear about the difference between the state and functions of the two, it raises questions about what exactly practitioners are doing when they are practicing mindfulness.

There is an emerging group of scientists from the field of neuroscience and cognitive psychology who after years of extensive dialogues and discussions with leading Buddhist teachers conclude that there are areas within the Buddhist tradition that can be empirically studied. This group is exemplified by the work and efforts of Richard J Davidson and other members of the Mind Life Science Institute inspired by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the late Francisco Varela. They recognize that Buddhism cannot simply be dismissed as an ancient religious tradition but rather more than any other religious tradition; the Buddhists' presentation of a systematic and structured model of perception and cognition can potentially facilitate empirical study. While they recognize that there are many areas in Buddhism such as the concept of emptiness and enlightenment that are beyond the scientific field of inquiry, there is a growing understanding that to truly study mindfulness and other Buddhist practices, one needs to study the traditional versions in their appropriate context in order to authentically determine the efficacy of these methods and techniques.¹⁸

The authors recognize the need for understanding classical mindfulness according to the original sources in order to conduct scientific studies about the functions and use of mindfulness for clinical application. This paper is probably the first effort in the field of psychology to introduce the concept and practice of classical mindfulness in a form that can be understood in psychological terms while making every effort to retain its originality.

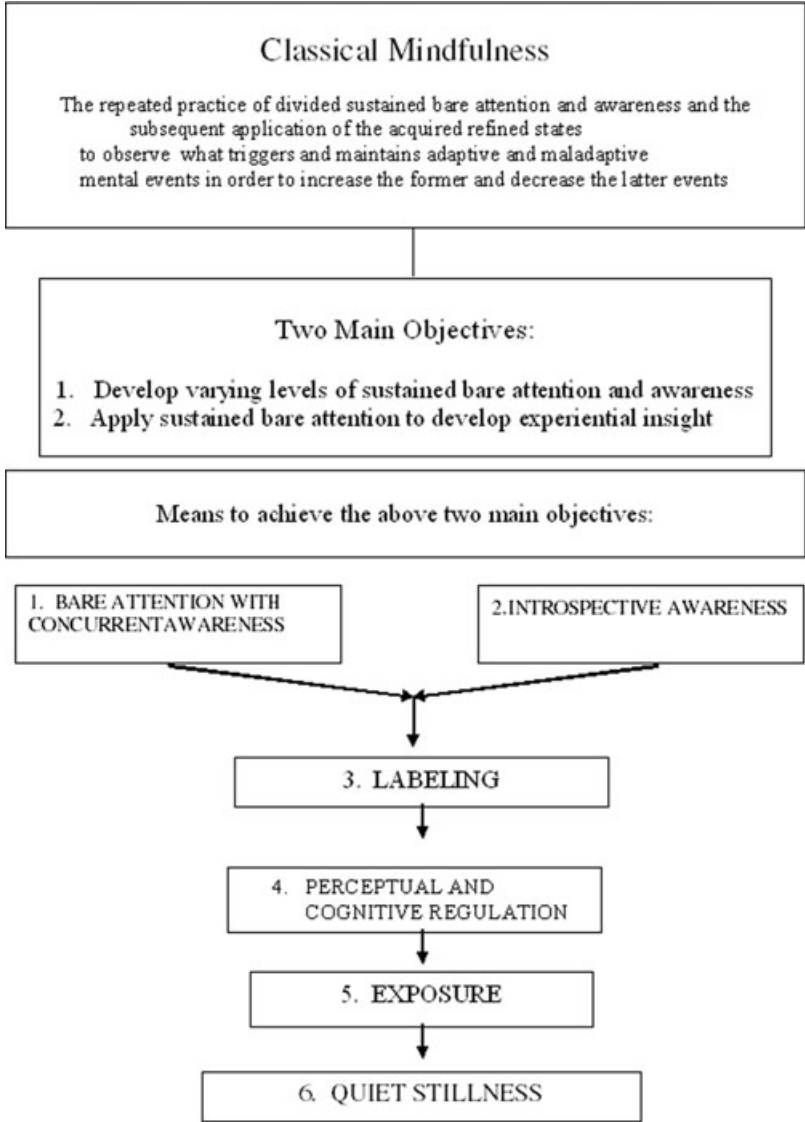


Figure 2. Classical mindfulness and its six functions.

The Conceptual Definition of Classical Mindfulness

Classical mindfulness is based on the original teachings of the Buddha as found in Pali, which is the earliest language in which the teachings were recorded.¹⁹ As Buddhism spread to other countries, the teachings of mindfulness were modified to suit the social and cultural needs of the particular country. However, all Buddhists

uphold the presentation of mindfulness in Pali, the oldest language extant that documents the original teachings of the Buddha (Figure 2).

In classical literature, mindfulness is defined on the basis of concentration and insight meditation. These are the two major types of meditation practice recognized by all Buddhist traditions. The variation in the practice of mindfulness in Buddhist traditions comes from the priority given to either of the two in

defining mindfulness. Some assign centrality to concentration while others give priority to insight meditation as the basis of defining mindfulness practice. The classical literature states that mindfulness practice involves the integration of the two. The analogy of the two oxen pulling a cart is used by the Buddha to make the point that both the complementary factors of concentration and insight should be equally cultivated in mindfulness practice.²⁰

Mindfulness is commonly associated with the Pali word *sati* (*smṛti* in Sanskrit; and *denpa* in Tibetan). While both the original Indian and later Tibetan Buddhist traditions in general share broad agreement about the theory of mindfulness, there are subtle differences between the two in the context in which mindfulness is understood and practiced. It may be helpful to understand these differences in order to determine the strength of the points being raised by various scholars and to understand the context of where each scholar is coming from in making their arguments.

Current attempts to understand classical mindfulness and how it differs significantly from modern versions can be furthered by exploring how the original Theravadin and the later Tibetan Mahayana versions understand and present mindfulness practice. In Tibetan Buddhism, mindfulness theoretically is understood in terms of Abhidharma and its commentaries, which define and classify mental state based on a psycho-philosophical model of perception and cognition. Basically, mindfulness is classified and defined as one of the ascertaining mental factors that are responsible for all mental activities. In this context, mindfulness has a universal function in that it is one of the five factors responsible for ascertaining how we know an object of experience.²¹ However, in terms of applying mindfulness as a practice, mindfulness is used in two circumscribed contexts. In the first approach mindfulness is primarily used as an antidote to deal with forgetfulness encountered during the practice of single pointed

concentration practice rather than a separate practice of its own.²² The second context in which it is used is as a practice of introspective awareness of the four foundations as a part of a larger body of practices known as the 37 Altruistic Practices.²³ Here mindfulness is used as a non-forgetful attention and introspective awareness of the body, feelings, thoughts, and phenomena. The process involves using a reflective, discerning form of attention and introspective awareness to understand that the body is not as pure as one thinks it is, that thoughts are ever changing, and phenomena in general is relative.²³

The original Indian Theravadin tradition, while ascribing to the Abhidharma definition and classification model, however, trace the actual practice of mindfulness to the *Anapanasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing*,¹⁷ *Mahāsatipāṭhana Sutta: The Great Frames of Reference*,²⁰ and *Kāyagata-sati Sutta: Mindfulness Immersed in the Body*²⁴ which describes the actual steps of the practice of mindfulness. In fact, the *Mahāsatipāṭhana Sutta* is regarded as the most important text traced to the Buddha in this tradition. Based on the description of the practice of mindfulness in these texts, mindfulness is a complete practice of its own with distinct features that according to the Theravadin teachings not only lead to achieving samatha and vipassana but also more importantly to the final end goal of Buddhist practice.

Ven Bodhi, one of the foremost scholars in the West in Pali clarifies that though *sati* literally means *recollection*, the above authoritative texts attributed to the Buddha establishes that in reality mindfulness practice entails a continuum of phases.⁸ These phases are broadly subsumed into two major ones. The initial phase of mindfulness is the cultivation of sustained bare attention resulting from the practice of non-forgetful attention, followed by the main phase with introspective awareness to understand the moment to moment workings of adaptive and maladaptive

thoughts and feelings. While the Tibetan versions describe attention in mindfulness as one of the five ever-present mental factors, the Theravadin description of attention goes well beyond to mean a level of refined attention that is able to engage in direct experience.

The Theravadin tradition further describes the mindfulness practice of attending as involving the concurrent engagement in peripheral awareness of the spaciousness of consciousness. However, the Tibetan tradition describes the initial phase of the practice of mindfulness that is more consistent with samatha practice in which sustained attention is developed by attending to the target object to the total exclusion of all other objects and experiences and does not suggest the inclusion of awareness. The Theravadin tradition traced their version of the practice to the preceding classical texts which describes the Buddha teaching mindfulness as a process of attention to the breathing in and breathing out while simultaneously being aware of the experience of the body as the breath flows in and out through it. Bhikku Thanissaro confirms the above presentation by using the analogy of the cool spring water suffusing into the surrounding lake to describe the concurrent practice of attention with awareness.

From a classical perspective then mindfulness is a process of first developing a perceptual mode of knowing referred to as bare attention or direct experience. Bare attention is cultivated through repeated and extended periods of practice in attention and awareness. It is regarded as an objective and reliable way of knowing since it helps to perceive an experience in its stark form stripped of its projective and associative meanings.¹⁹ Having acquired bare attention, the state with the help of introspective awareness is then used to facilitate the observation of when adaptive and maladaptive experiences arise and when they do not so that the practitioner can learn to increase adaptive and decrease maladaptive ones in his or her daily life.²⁰

There are varying levels of sustained bare attention depending on the level of training and skill of the practitioner. At a basic level, sustained bare attention is the ability to experience an event stripped of one's habitual projections and associations. For instance, sustained bare attention training allows one to experience the police car's siren, as a sound made aware by the mental activity of "hearing." By repeatedly training to experience the mental process of hearing rather than focusing on the content that it is a police car involved in an accident or crime, one can experience the event as mere vibration, a function of hearing. At a more advanced level, sustained bare attention refers to a higher level of being at one-ment with the experience. At this level, the practitioner experiences sustained bare attention as an immersion in or at one-ment with the object while being aware that the two are distinct.¹⁹ This advanced level of sustained bare attention is not readily accessible for clinical application and therefore falls outside the scope of this paper.

Having acquired sustained bare attention skills, the practitioner uses it to obtain insight into the workings of the mind. According to Buddhist psychology, the type of insight that sustained bare attention provides is different from those that are derived from inferential analysis as in psychoanalytical therapy when an interpretation is given to the patients about their repressed anger. However, insight acquired through observing one's anger when one is in the midst of it, is a different way of knowing the same phenomenon. The difference between the two ways of knowing may be likened to the insight into an emotion derived from reading about it in a text, as compared to knowing it through actually seeing a person display the emotion.

What exactly does one do to develop mindfulness? Classically, the training primarily involves sustained bare attention on the breath while peripherally being aware of the body as one breathes in and out.^{16,17} To explain the process, the Buddha uses the analogy of the

way in which water permeates and mixes with the flour as a person begins to knead the dough. Just like the water blends into the flour, similarly breath is experienced permeating in the body as one inhales and exhales. Attention and awareness is engaged simultaneously, with attention in the foreground and awareness fading somewhat into the background. Clearly the ability to flexibly apportion mindfulness between primary attention to the foreground and secondary awareness to the background requires extensive training. When sensations, thoughts, and feelings arise during the practice of divided attention and awareness, introspective awareness is applied to label them before returning attention to the breath.

The appropriate level of bare attention is determined by indicators such as the ability to sustain bare attention for a period of time and experience the target object in its bare form stripped of its associative meanings. Sustained bare attention along with introspective awareness is then applied to observe moment to moment experience of the four foundations, which are bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and mental contents. The moment to moment experience of a bodily or mental event facilitates insight into when an event arises, how long it lasts, and then when it ceases on its own without any conscious effort to do so. One also observes what thoughts and feelings precede and what follows a mental event. In particular, one observes the triggers and consequent events of adaptive and maladaptive thoughts, and feelings. Such insights facilitate increasing adaptive and decreasing maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

The Functions of Mindfulness According to Traditional Mindfulness

The authors have broken down the practice of classical mindfulness into six functions in order to facilitate training of and use by

patients with psychological and medical disorders. However, there is no direct source for the classification in the classical literature. The first two of the six functions, attention with concurrent awareness and introspective awareness, are the foundation of mindfulness. The two serves as the basis of developing the other functions (Figure 3). Modern versions of mindfulness such as MBSR do not differentiate adequately between the two as separate states and functions. The interchangeable use of the two in current literature on mindfulness suggests potential serious conceptual and, more importantly, practical problems. Brown and Ryan rightly question Bishop *et al.*'s assertion that in mindfulness one is sustaining attention on the breath while inviting experiences to occur.^{4,10} The authors rightly raise doubts about how one can sustain attention on a target object while actively inviting and being open to other experiences at the same time.⁴

The objective of attention is to develop stability—the skill to hold the object of attention steady in a sustained manner. Only when the mind can hold an object stably for a sustained period can the object be fully and vividly experienced.²² When the subject can hold the object of bare attention such as an angry feeling steady in the present moment, one can identify and label it more accurately. The means by which bare attention helps to achieve stability depends on developing skills in sustained focus on the target object.²² Once a level of stability has been achieved, then the amount of effort used to maintain sustained bare attention is reduced. Acquiring such attentional skills may be applicable to the treatment of psychopathology. Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson suggest that anxiety patients could benefit from sustained attention and awareness training which helps to reduce reliance on rigid verbal rules to respond to a threatening stimulus by increases in experiencing whatever comes up in the moment.⁹

Awareness training is also critical to acquiring skills in sustained bare attention.

<i>The Prerequisites of Mindfulness Practice</i>
Develop sustained bare attention skills: a basic ability to attend to an event for at least 30 seconds uninterrupted
Develop awareness skills: a basic ability to sense the spacious and containing nature of awareness and apply introspective awareness in an engaged way
<i>The Practice of Mindfulness</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustained bare attention on the breath while secondarily being aware of the body through which the breath flows during exhalation and inhalation. 2. Introspective awareness of extraneous thoughts and feelings. 3. Instantly label the mental activity and then returning to the practice of divided bare attention and awareness 4. Experience each mental event fully in order to let it go completely so that you can be totally open to the new experience 5. Descending into a place of spacious, quiet stillness during the pause between distraction and divided attention and awareness 6. Applying the above 5 skills to threatening and aversive experience in order to develop greater tolerance of aversive stimuli 7. Use the above skills of refined attention and awareness to develop experiential insight into the moment to moment workings of adaptive and maladaptive thoughts and feelings

Figure 3. The practice of classical mindfulness.

Awareness refers to a state of consciousness as well as a function.²¹ The main function of awareness in mindfulness is to be aware of experiences that arise to the consciousness while one is attending to the breath/object. The function is referred to as introspective or observational awareness, which is the process of using the observing ego to monitor one's immediate experiences. Its purpose is to make the person aware of the immediate moments of experience so that if distractions are occurring, mindfulness helps to bring the person back to the practice of divided attention and awareness. On the other hand, awareness as a state, refers to the nature of consciousness. The nature of consciousness is spacious, expansive, and capable of containing a variety of experiences. Awareness training helps the patient to develop these features of awareness. In fact, practitioners traditionally

are trained to observe the expansive, spacious, and containing nature of the sky or ocean in order to get an experiential sense of the nature of consciousness.

Labeling, the next function of mindfulness involves the process of notating the mental function that generates the content of an experience.¹⁹ When a thought occurs, the practitioner labels the process, which produces it, which in this case is thinking. Labeling helps to separate process from content and helps to realize that much of our daily reality is dependent upon mental processes such as thinking, sensing, feeling, recalling, etc., and that if one reduces their occurrence one can decrease exposure to the contents of thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness helps to increase awareness of the habitual patterns of preoccupation with mental content. Instead of experiencing the hearing

of a sound when a person hears a police car's siren, he or she instantly becomes preoccupied with the content. The person immediately associates the police car with something threatening which in turn activates a series of anxiety based thoughts and feelings. With repeated labeling of and focusing on the mental process rather than engaging with the mental content, one reduces habitual response patterns. Labeling skills can help psychiatric patients particularly those with anxiety in recognizing and identifying their thoughts and feelings since they have difficulty in doing so resulting from their constant efforts to avoid or suppress aversive experiences.

The next function of mindfulness is perceptual and cognitive regulation. Perceptual and cognitive regulation involves the repeated switching between attention and introspective awareness experiences.¹⁹ In order to do so one trains to let go of one experience fully in order to be totally open and present to the new experience of awareness. Repeated practice of letting go is likened to that of a child learning to let go of the mother's hands in order to take the first steps on its own, and enables the practitioner to terminate his or her current experience in order to approach a new one. At the heart of letting go is the need to give up control in order to be fully present to a new experience. Roemer and Orsillo suggest that cognitive regulation helps to develop mental flexibility which reduces the rigidity and narrow focused selectivity in a number of psychiatric disorders, particularly anxiety.²⁵

Developing the above functions helps to attend and be aware of threatening and unpleasant thoughts and feelings with an increasing degree of tolerance.²⁴ Unlike cognitive behavioral therapy which is an intentional process of exposing oneself to a hierarchy of negative events, while inhibiting conditioned responses, no such processes are involved in mindfulness based exposure. Mindfulness is a natural process of experiencing whatever arises when the event is threatening. No forced exposure to the threatening stimulus or inhibition of other con-

trary responses such as a distraction is engaged in. This flexibility in responding to a threatening stimulus helps to develop tolerance of the threat rather than eliminating the threat altogether. By seeking to tolerate the threat, one can reduce the threat to a level where it may not interfere with the performance of the primary perceptual or cognitive task. Mental flexibility developed through mindfulness-based exposure also helps to reduce the use of covert coping strategies to avoid threatening information.²⁵ The use of covert coping strategies such as cognitive avoidance is a problem that is often encountered in the use of conventional cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) exposure for patients with anxiety disorders.

Having developed the length and breath of mindfulness, the practitioner then seeks to descend into the depths of awareness. Quiet stillness involves the process of entering into a deeper, spacious, quiet, still place. When an experience arises to the consciousness attending to the breath, one observes the experience, labels it, and before returning to attending to the breath, one pauses and descends into quiet stillness. Refined levels of quiet stillness eventually help one to get underneath the surface of a thought or feeling to hear and feel what is below. One is no longer simply aware of the surface, automatic thoughts but begins to sense the underlying beliefs, assumptions, and schemata that trigger the surface thoughts. Quiet stillness is like the silence one enters into when one dives into the depth of the water away from the noise on the surface. The silence provides a quiet stillness that enhances the perceptual and cognitive processes.

The above skills facilitate experiential insight into how deeper mental functions like cognition produce surface mental contents like thoughts automatically, without being noticed, allowing consciousness to get easily caught in the turbulence of its surface contents.¹⁹ Such insight into maladaptive and adaptive thoughts, feelings, and behavior help the individual to increase thoughts, feelings, and behavior that

result in adaptive and decrease those that result in maladaptive experiences.

Critical Differences between Classical and Modern Versions of Mindfulness

In the traditional literature, mindfulness is described not only as a technique of attending and observing, it is defined in terms of a number of processes each with specific functions and objectives.⁷ Attention and awareness is not an end in itself, but rather a means to acquire levels of perceptual skills that enables the practitioner to carry out progressive mental processes to meet short and long-term objectives.

Conversely some of the modern versions define mindfulness simply as a process of being aware of whatever arises in the present moment in a non-judgmental way. They reject the idea of mindfulness having goals that the practitioner strives toward, and consequently non-judgmental awareness of the present moment is seen as the essence of the practice.^{26,27} Observing events unfold in a non-judgmental manner certainly has benefits since the process is an alternative to the habitual, reactive way of responding. However, according to Buddhist psychology, change can only occur when maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behavior are decreased and corresponding adaptive means are developed, reinforced and increased. Non-judgmental awareness does not possess mechanisms to change deeply entrenched thoughts, feelings, and behavior even though such awareness may provide some relief from negativistic thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Buddhists view non-judgmental awareness much like relaxation and positive affirmations in that they have therapeutic benefits but certainly not the capacity to change underlying distorted thoughts and beliefs that maintain psychopathology.

Another major variation between the modern and classical presentations of mindfulness

is associated with identifying the nature of mindfulness.

Modern versions associate the practice of mindfulness with cognitive and affective features. Some researchers associate mindfulness primarily with acceptance and others have described mindfulness as a meta-cognitive process.²⁸ In these versions, subjects are instructed to engage in cognitive processing such as experiencing a musical sound as a pleasant sound, or thoughts as thoughts not facts. Classical mindfulness, on the other hand, is primarily a perceptual process particularly during the initial phase.⁴ Perception involves the bare experience of an event such as the police siren as a sound without qualifying the sound with associations such as it being loud, threatening, or that the sound is from a police car. Any form of cognitive processing associated with mindfulness such as “it is a mere thought not a fact” is contraindicated since cognitive processes inhibit the efforts to develop attention and awareness primarily as perceptual processes. The suggestion that repeated observation of thoughts, feelings, and sensations will lead to cognitive insight such as “thoughts are not facts” or that “My feeling that I am a bad person is simply a thought,” etc. is unlikely according to Buddhists. They state that such cognitions would at the best lead to an intellectual understanding that may have some benefit much like positive affirmations, but do not have the means to change the ingrained belief that thoughts are facts. According to Buddhist psychology, to be truly convinced that thoughts are not facts would take much more processing than mindfulness at this level is capable of doing.

Another main attribute that modern proponents assert is that mindfulness is a practice without goals—a state of non-striving without any specific objective. They assert that such an approach provides an alternative from the habitual process of working toward goals.²⁶ However, classical mindfulness has specific goals associated with each of the phases.¹⁹ For instance, during the initial phase of mindfulness the

practitioner attends to the breath while secondarily observing the body through which it flows. When extraneous thoughts and feelings arise, they are observed with the intent to reduce external stimuli in order to increase sensitivity toward internal stimuli. By identifying objectives, the practitioner becomes more attuned to knowing what, how, and when to attend and observe as compared to simply observing events as they occur.

Modern versions such as MBSR highlight the centrality of present moment experiences. Roemer and Orsillo even go to the extent of suggesting that past memories and future fears should be avoided during mindfulness.²⁵ Classical mindfulness on the other hand involves mindfulness of present, past, and future experiences. While the breath is used as the anchor, whatever experiences arise to consciousness is subject to mindful observation. One does not control what arises in consciousness, since that would inhibit the understanding of the full range and depth of how the mind works.⁷ In fact, the key function of mindfulness is not so much about the content of its objects as much as how one trains to perceive and relate to them.

Another critical variation between the two versions is the degree of training required in attention in order to practice mindfulness. In modern versions, while sustained is recognized as a key defining feature of mindfulness, no specific detail is provided as to how to train in sustaining attention. In classical mindfulness, sustained bare attention concurrent with awareness training is specified. The objectives of attention with concurrent awareness training, and the obstacles of distraction and boredom are identified and strategies of how to correct them in order to learn attention skills are clearly spelled out.

Wells raises the question about mindfulness being a self-focused attentional process that could increase symptoms of psychopathology and quotes a number of studies that show self-focused attention approaches do indeed increase symptoms of psychopathology. Conse-

quently, he suggests that his attention training is more appropriate for the treatment of anxiety disorders since it is externally oriented and thus avoids the likelihood of triggering symptoms.²⁸ However, in classical mindfulness, there are regulatory mechanisms in place that are precisely designed to overcome the very concerns that Wells has raised about the likelihood of self-focused attention increasing anxiety, etc. Consequently, the concern he and others raise about mindfulness may not be relevant to classical mindfulness.

In fact, relying solely upon external stimuli such as music to train in attention as suggested by Wells may pose problems particularly in applying the approach to anxiety disorders.¹⁵ External attention on music can trigger anxious patients to use covert coping strategies either to avoid aversive experiences or overly engage in the sound as a result of the positive or negative valence of the music. On the other hand, attention concurrent with training in classical mindfulness, which seeks to focus on more neutral internal events, is less likely to trigger the use of the extreme forms of covert coping strategies.

One of the central features of mindfulness modern versions is acceptance.²⁹ While there is no question about the fact that acceptance is an effective therapeutic strategy, acceptance in mindfulness is refuted for other reasons. Acceptance is a value or preconception that inhibits the development of bare attention. Coming into the practice of attention and awareness with a preconceived intent to be accepting, colors the perceptual process by infusing it with an intention. According to classical mindfulness one does not come to mindfulness with the intent to be this way or that way. Rather one focuses entirely on the power of the perceptual powers of attention with concurrent awareness to experience things as they are rather than the way we wish them to be.

While Bishop clarifies that acceptance refers to the act of being experientially open, he like many others, attributes the practice of mindfulness with functions of generating curiosity

and actively inviting mental experiences.¹⁰ This function, however, is contrary to classical mindfulness. One only observes experiences that arise on their own and no effort is made to be curious or actively invite experiences since doing so would conflict with developing refined attention and awareness skills. Furthermore, the monkey mind is inherently overloaded with mental and external stimuli. There is, therefore no need to actively invite experiences that are already occurring in abundance. The focus is more on reducing sensitivity to external stimuli in order to develop sensitivity to internal experiences that are normally overshadowed by more external and surface stimuli.

Some modern versions of mindfulness have further suggested that mindfulness facilitates emotional experience and regulation. Adele Hayes and Feldman see mindfulness as an emotional balancing technique to help regulate mood, and increase clarity of affect.³⁰ They quote Buddhist teachers like Chodron and Kabat-Zinn to describe how mindfulness can be used to feel the full force of an emotion as a way to overcome it.^{1,31} Marsha Linehan as well as Kabat-Zinn also imply that mindfulness practice involves affective related practices such as compassion.^{1,32} However, in Buddhist psychology affect is regarded as a primal state that is explored only after one has developed skills in mindfulness and concentration practices. Using mindfulness to experience powerful emotions is contraindicated since doing so would prevent sustaining attention, which is essential to refine the practice. Rather in classical mindfulness when an affect arises, it is observed and immediately labeled as a feeling. The objective is to observe the arising of the emotion but not to get caught in it so that one can further observe what triggered the emotion as well as notice what consequences follow. The experiential insight thus gained into the triggers and consequences of the emotion helps to regulate habitual reactive patterns and increase more adaptive ways of responding.

The above attempt to differentiate between classical and modern versions of mindfulness will, the authors hope, help to reduce some of the present misconceptions about mindfulness. In particular, the authors hope that researchers will appreciate that many of the concerns that they have raised about the limitation of the clinical utility of mindfulness will be re-examined in light of the introduction of classical mindfulness into the field. Teasdale *et al.*, Wells, and Craske and Hazlett-Stevens have all raised serious questions about whether mindfulness as a stand alone intervention has specific built in therapeutic mechanisms to address psychopathology.^{5,6,15} Craske and Hazlett-Stevens have raised the question whether it is really another cognitive exercise to control aversive experiences.⁶ These concerns are legitimate when raised in terms of modern versions of mindfulness since these versions do not include specific mechanisms to identify, modify, and reduce maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behavior. However, this is not the case in classical mindfulness whose purpose, in a very broad sense, is similar to cognitive therapy, which is to identify maladaptive experiences in order to replace them with adaptive ones. Furthermore, classical mindfulness lays out a step-by-step process to bring about change by using the acquired skills in attention and awareness to initiate experiential based insight into the process of how we create maladaptive experiences and how they can be overcome.

Conclusion

If the empirical study of mindfulness is to progress, it is important to address the emerging challenge of operationalizing mindfulness before the field becomes even more confusing with the proliferation of mindfulness practices. Since MBSR is an adapted version with multi-interventional components, advancing its empirical study is problematic since it would require time-consuming efforts and costs to

dismantle its various mechanisms. On the other hand, classical mindfulness as a perceptual and cognitive construct is based on a theory of cognition and perception that could more readily facilitate empirical study. The authors hope that the above introduction to classical mindfulness will provoke discussions and further the empirical study of mindfulness.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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