

Mindfulness: A Finger Pointing to the Moon

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It is said that the Sixth Patriarch Huineng once instructed nun Wu Jincang that a finger pointing to the moon is not the moon; to see the moon, one must actually go beyond the finger and look at the moon. Therein lies the difference between thinking and experiencing. *Mindfulness* will publish articles on both thinking about and experiencing mindfulness. We intend for *Mindfulness*, the journal, to be the finger pointing to mindfulness, the experience. As is traditional in the social sciences, our authors will discuss models and concepts of mindfulness, develop and test competing hypotheses about the nature and effects of mindfulness, and slice and dice the components of mindfulness. At the same time, we hope *Mindfulness* will prove instrumental in focusing the attention of our researchers and readers alike on the experience of mindfulness as a method of self-transcendence. We hope to avoid the situation in which we eventually know more and more about the concept of mindfulness, but less and less about the personal experience of mindfulness.

It is *de rigueur* for an editor to justify the publication of a new journal. Fortunately, this is not a difficult task for *Mindfulness*. Although Jon Kabat-Zinn founded the field of mindfulness as a therapeutic modality over 30 years ago, its acceptance was slow but finally gained traction following the publication of his two seminal books (Kabat-Zinn 1990, 1994). An Internet search of mindfulness research papers over the last 30 years shows an exponential growth from a few papers every year to a few dozen papers a year to hundreds of papers a year. The papers are published in virtually all social science and medicine journals, as well as

on blogs, and mindfulness lectures are presented as podcasts.

Mindfulness aims to bring some of this research and practice together in a readily accessible single source so that scholars and practitioners can more easily stay current on the topic and connect with each other in an effort to grow the field in meaningful directions. *Mindfulness* will be broad and inclusive in its approach to accepting papers for publication. While there will be strong emphasis on research that is methodologically rigorous, it will be balanced by other research that may be less rigorous but breaks new ground, is creative, or has heuristic value for future investigations. Examples of areas that will find a home in the journal include, but are not limited to, those described below.

It would be overstating the case to say that there are about as many definitions of mindfulness as there are serious academic researchers in this field, but there is a kernel of truth in this statement. Although attempts are beginning to be made to define mindfulness so that researchers are using the term consistently (e.g., Bishop et al. 2004), the field has yet to reach a consensus on its definition. Whether this is practical or desirable is moot because the concept of mindfulness has multiple originations, complex dimensions, and is understood differently across wisdom traditions. A consensus may emerge over time on well-defined dimensions of mindfulness as opposed to a single unidimensional definition.

There has been intense activity in terms of developing instruments to quantify mindfulness. For example, self-report measures have been created to assess mindfulness during formal sitting meditation, the experience of mindfulness, everyday mindfulness, mindfulness skills, and individual differences in the propensity to be mindful. These tools suffer from one or more forms of validity—construct validity (e.g., the nature of the underlying construct of mindfulness is still amorphous), external validity (e.g., the rating scales are based

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on responses from samples of convenience, particularly college students with little understanding of mindfulness), and criterion validity (e.g., the absence of objective measurement against which self-ratings can be compared) (Singh et al. 2008). Mindfulness has also been measured in terms of its neurophysiological correlates, its effects on others, and qualitative and quantitative changes on specific behaviors or disorders (Grossman et al. 2004).

A related issue is the measurement of not only quantitative aspects of mindfulness but also its qualitative effects on the participants in the short and long term. At its core, mindfulness is experiential, and we need ways of reporting this experience. Simple procedures such as asking the participants of their experiences are a good start. For example, in a series of studies with parents and care staff, Singh and colleagues (e.g., Singh et al. 2006; 2010) interviewed the participants regarding their experience of mindfulness. In a much more sophisticated study, Allen et al. (2009) interviewed participants 12 months following termination of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for relapse prevention for recurrent depression and used thematic analysis to identify key patterns and elements arising from the interviews. There is a lot of exciting and creative work being done on assessment that would find a welcome home in *Mindfulness*.

Mindfulness will publish research across the gamut of study designs, including individual case studies, single-subject experimental designs, group designs, and randomized controlled trials. Each type of study design serves a different function, and with mindfulness being in its nascent phase of development as a research field, all approaches will be encouraged. However, papers will be accepted on the basis of the contribution they make to the field rather than on the nature of the experimental design used per se.

Given the diversity of mindfulness approaches being developed in addition to the standard treatments (e.g., Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy), authors will be encouraged to provide replicable descriptions of their procedures. These procedures may well be manualized or customized. *Mindfulness* will encourage the publication of brief manuals as an appendix to data-based papers.

A related issue is that mindfulness-based procedures are typically multicomponent. The history of clinical psychology is replete with calls for and devotion to assessing the impact of single and multiple components of therapies via component analysis. Undoubtedly, this will be a feature of mindfulness research as well. While encouraging research into the anatomy of mindfulness, it behooves us to remember that unlike technique-based psychological procedures, mindfulness brings with it specific cultural and spiritual dimensions that may help or hinder component analysis. All too often, in removing the context of the intervention, we lose the holistic nuances that may have

produced the healing experience, and what had been effective in the lives of many people is now found to lack efficacy in a randomized controlled trial.

The anthropology of mindfulness is another topic that will be encouraged—the various methods of achieving mindfulness across wisdom traditions, either formally or informally, through or without meditation. Langer's (1989) work clearly shows that focused attention can enhance mindfulness by using psychological or cognitive strategies. Researchers whose work is based on meditation have used different kinds of techniques, such as concentration or contemplation meditation, and within these they have used a wide range of approaches. Some of the common techniques involve focus on breathing, passages from inspirational texts, chanting, dancing, prayer, sitting and walking meditation, direct transmission of spiritual energy from spiritual masters (e.g., siddhas), and so on. In contrast, other researchers have developed strategies that do not use meditation techniques to enhance mindfulness, and this work will be explored as well.

Although much of the current research has focused on Buddhist origins of mindfulness, let us not forget that mindfulness is ubiquitous in all wisdom traditions (e.g., Easwaran 2005; Michaelson 2007; Shapiro 1993), and there is much to learn from these traditions. Even within the Buddhist tradition, the West has only just started exploring the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness without touching the rest of the Eightfold Path or the Middle Way for methods that lead to self-transcendence (Dalai Lama 2009; Gunararana 2001).

This leads us directly to the issue of whether personal practice is a basic requirement for researching and teaching mindfulness. Most but not all current researchers believe that it is essential for building a therapeutic relationship and for clinical validity, among many other reasons (Kabat-Zinn 2003; Segal et al. 2002; Shapiro and Carlson 2009). Mindfulness is a multifaceted practice, and without personal engagement in meditation, the therapist is unable to fully relate to the experiences of the participants and to provide individualized feedback. As noted by Kabat-Zinn (2009), it requires:

the authentic *embodiment* of presencing, of mindfulness, of kindness and compassion... these qualities are continually developed, refined, and understood through *practice*... The art of mindfulness also requires sensitivity to languaging the meditation practices appropriately and situating them, at least for oneself, in a credible universal dharma context supported by science and clinical medicine" (p. x; italics in original).

The impact of personal practice on research, delivery of clinical services, and outcome of therapy should be priority areas of investigation in mindfulness research.

In addition to these areas, there are others of equal importance, including a focus on how and why mindfulness has its purported effects, mindfulness as a treatment modality alone and together with other treatments (e.g., Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy) for a wide variety of diseases, disorders, and deficits, as well as its use to enhance wellness in people without psychopathology or medical disorders. However, as we have noted before (Singh et al. 2008),

... mindfulness meditation has always been more than a psychological construct that mediates or moderates human behavior. The end point of mindfulness meditation is not in the alleviation of psychological or physical distress. At its core it is about gaining insight into the nature of our own minds, thereby enabling each of us to differentiate between our conditioned and unconditioned self. It provides a method for enlightenment, the *summum bonum* of existence (p. 663).

Some of this will entail philosophical discussions, analyses of the writings of spiritual masters, delving into the science of mindfulness, and the personal experience of deep meditation. *Mindfulness* welcomes research and philosophical papers that extend our knowledge and experience of human existence. Finally, *Mindfulness* invites practitioners to write about their mindfulness practice and the lessons we may learn from their experience and teachings.

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