

Mindfulness and Mental Health
Open University, Camden: 1st November 2013

Programme

10.00: Introduction and welcome

10.15: The revolutionary talk that will save your life!* A rhetorical analysis of self-help books about mindfulness - Steven Stanley

11.15: Mindfully Disappointed and Disappointedly Mindful? - Duncan Moss

12.15: Mindfulness at the Museum: An example of practice in a cultural space - Steve Davies

13.15: Lunch

14.15: Mindfulness and Systemic Approaches - Leah Salter

15.15: An Embodied Integration of Mindfulness and Existential Therapy - Jyoti Nanda

16.15: Tea break

16.30: Mindfulness and Consumerism - Alison Armstrong, Present Minds

17.30: Mindful Anarchy - Jamie Heckert

18.30: Book launch for Barker, M. (2013). *Mindful Counselling and Psychotherapy: Practising Mindfully Across Approaches and Issues*. London: Sage.

19.30: End

Map of venue: <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/maps.aspx?contactid=1>

Abstracts and Biographies

The revolutionary talk that will save your life!* A rhetorical analysis of self-help books about mindfulness - Steven Stanley

In this session, I will talk about my work-in-progress rhetorical analysis of popular books about mindfulness, which are examples of the contemporary genre of self-help. I have been reading the content of these books, as well as their front and back covers, looking for patterns in what the writers and publishers say about mindfulness, as well as how they say it. I have been pursuing my rhetorical analysis by paying careful attention to how they describe mindfulness, address their readers, make promises to readers, and persuade readers that mindfulness is beneficial. So far, I have found that there is a close relationship between description and promotion; when writers describe mindfulness, they are also often promoting it. Indeed, research on mindfulness often serves a promotional function and is recruited for the purpose of promoting mindfulness more effectively. As well as looking at patterns of what is said in the books, I will be suggesting patterns in what is routinely *not* being said about mindfulness and mindfulness research. I will also speculate about what might lie behind the promotional rhetoric. In my conclusion, I will consider the role these self-help books play in the emerging commercial culture of mindfulness, and pose questions about the compatibility of the practice of mindfulness and the practice of promotion.

* This talk may be changed prior to registration on the day, and bear little resemblance to its Abstract. In the event of any change, the talk is not guaranteed to save delegates' lives. Indeed, it might even be a bit of a disappointment.

Steven Stanley has worked as an academic at a university for ten years. As a social psychologist, he is interested in the social aspects of how mindfulness is practised and studied. He has practised meditation for quite a while, and has recently started teaching mindfulness classes and retreats both inside and outside of the university. He is interested in the broad vision and radical challenge to modern life, including higher education, hidden in the Buddhist traditions and which are at risk of being lost in their secular mindfulness adaptations. He also appreciates the irony of promoting himself in the third person for a talk in which he will analyse how people - including himself - promote mindfulness.

Mindfully Disappointed and Disappointedly Mindful? - Duncan Moss

We must surrender our hopes and expectations, as well as our fears, and march directly into disappointment, work with disappointment, go into it, and make it our way of life, which is a very hard thing to do. Disappointment is a good sign of basic intelligence. It cannot be compared to anything else: it is so sharp, precise, obvious, and direct. If we can open, then we suddenly begin to see that our expectations are irrelevant compared with the reality of the situations we are facing.

— Chogyam Trungpa

In this discussion I want to present some reflections on 'being disappointed'. A sense perhaps of things not quite working out or not quite adding for us in everyday ways, can be interesting to sit alongside our desires to be mindful and aware. On the one hand perhaps I can try and use mindful practices to resolve my weaknesses, failings and disappointments. On the other hand perhaps I might find this doesn't work? I'm interested in exploring between us how we might bring expectations to becoming a

'mindfulness practitioner' or in selling mindfulness to others, and how our expectations sit with our disappointment.

Duncan Moss is an Associate Professor in Clinical Psychology at Plymouth University as well as a freelance Mindfulness facilitator in a range of contexts including the NHS – with both staff and Service Users. I was introduced to mindfulness in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, more than 15 years ago, and since that time has been exploring hopefully simple and accessible ways of bringing mindfulness into contemporary life. I have been involved in a number of qualitative research studies looking at participants' experiences in practicing mindfulness and also have particular interests in linking mindfulness ideas with Systemic and Social Constructionist approaches. I am currently also exploring 'Mindful Photography' as an approach to Practice. In relation to this discussion I have written a chapter called 'Missing the Point – The Shy Story of Mindfulness' in a forthcoming book by Karnac Publications called: 'Outside in/Inside out: Creative Positions in Adult Mental Health'.

Mindfulness at the Museum: An example of practice in a cultural space - Steve Davies

With Mindfulness practice being increasingly promoted as a psychological therapy within NHS settings, there is also a growing interest as to how more non-sectarian forms of meditation based teaching might be delivered in public and cultural spaces such as museums, galleries and community centres. In this presentation we will be looking at one such example, a dynamic community based project that has been taking place over an 18 month period in rural North Devon.

We will also consider the following issues:

- The beginnings of the collaboration that took place between mindfulness practitioners and local Museum services.
- The method and style of teaching employed in seeking present mindfulness practice as an effective psychological tool.
- The type of feedback provided by participants and how this helped us evolve our approach.
- Issues that arose as a result of the project with regards the continued support of practitioners and the development of community.

There will also be time for questions and discussion around the further development of similar preventative resources that might take place outside of institutional health and social care settings.

Steve Davies is a mental health social worker and systemic/family psychotherapist who works in a community mental health team with in the NHS. He has been involved in meditative practice for over 30 years and is especially interested in how bodily practices can be used in helping people connect to their lives more fully. He currently lives in Devon and plays drums in a Thrash metal band.

Mindfulness and Systemic Approaches - Leah Salter

Leah considers herself to be a mindful therapist as well as a mindfulness practitioner with cross-over in between. The space between these 2 positions will be explored appreciatively in this workshop, inviting participants to consider their own position and take up space where they feel most comfortable.

The workshop will be collaborative, interactive and experiential, and there will be opportunity to explore and reflect on the specific context of mindfulness in adult mental health; and the connections between mindfulness and systemic ideas; and mindfulness and psychotherapy.

Leah Salter is a UKCP registered systemic psychotherapist based currently in Guernsey, Channel Islands working in Adult Mental Health. In this context Leah's practice includes individual psychotherapy, couples and family therapy; and in addition Leah facilitates Mindfulness Group specific to the needs of service users in adult mental health.

Leah's areas of interests include mindfulness but/and also women's wellbeing; couples work; abuse, violence and trauma; parental mental health and eating disorders.

An Embodied Integration of Mindfulness and Existential Therapy - Jyoti Nanda

Attentive, present, open, receptive, curious, non-judging, accepting, empathic, grounded, relational, kind... The embodiment of being qualities is at the heart of Mindfulness and Existential Therapy. Both traditions, Mindfulness and Existential Therapy share several fundamental philosophical underpinnings. Change, impermanence, uncertainty, suffering and death, are seen as givens. Both see self as inter-relationally arising. Clients' presenting problems are seen as inter-relational difficulties, rather than intra-psychic problems to be cured. These problems are not viewed as pathological, but as the inevitable difficulties of life and living. Paradoxically, the more fully we are able to embrace suffering, the greater the chance we have of experiencing wellbeing. Client distress is an opportunity for therapists to enquire into their lived experience and the client's way of being in the world with self and others.

In exploring unexamined beliefs and values, in recognising choice, possibilities and limitations, in seeing the value of courage and compassion in creating meaning, and indeed in taking responsibility to *choose* to give direction to life, the embodied mindfulness and existential approach examines life itself. It is a challenge in the art of living with courage and compassion.

Embodied Mindfulness and Existential therapy is the art of tuning into the moment with the client, and responding in that moment. It is not a formulaic approach. Practising mindfulness is a choice for clients, and their choice is respected.

This workshop will highlight the therapeutic aspects of the embodiment of Mindfulness and Existential Therapy - the bringing together of two rich traditions in synergy with each other and its huge potential for healing.

Jyoti Nanda is a Chartered Psychologist, an Associate Fellow of the BPS, and an Existential Psychotherapist, Coach, Supervisor, and Mediator. Her interests are in the area of teaching Mindfulness and Existential Therapy. She is on the Visiting Faculty at Regent's University, London, and is in Private Practice seeing individuals, couples, and groups. A long term practitioner of meditation, Jyoti's published work focuses on an Embodied Integration of Mindfulness and Existential Therapy. Correspondence Jyoti@mindfultherapy.co.uk web: www.mindfultherapy.co.uk

Mindfulness and Consumerism - Alison Armstrong, Present Minds

We must consume to live. However, the consumption of goods and resources in developed countries is so considerable that it is actually associated with low psychological wellbeing, and is a contributor to several social and ecological problems. The psychological motivators that sustain such consumption relate to attempts to resolve affect or identity difficulties, whereby consumer activities and goods offer emotional or symbolic functions. At an extreme, compulsive buyers are addicted to buying, and thus experience a range of psychological, relationship and financial difficulties.

This talk explores the concept of mindfulness as a distinctive way of thinking and being: non-judgementally aware of the present moment. Empirical evidence is presented confirming that mindfulness is negatively related to variables connected with consumption, and positively related to wellbeing measures. Qualitative findings show that learning mindfulness brings reported change in areas related to affect regulation and sense of self experiences such that there is a decreased emphasis on consumer goods being sought for their emotional or symbolic properties. The implication is that increasing mindfulness is potentially beneficial for individual, social and ecological wellbeing.

Alison Armstrong's first degree was in Maths with Engineering, and she followed that with several years working in engineering-related roles. During that time she became increasingly aware that human consumption behaviour was a considerable contributor to environmental damage, and that technological solutions alone would not prevent human-induced climate change. She also, during that time, trained as a yoga teacher, and noticed that as yoga/meditation became a larger part of her lifestyle, her own behaviour as a consumer seemed to change. So she left engineering to study for an MSc in Sustainable Development, studying as her dissertation topic a proposed link between Spirituality and Consumerism. She followed that with a Social Psychology PhD that investigated Mindfulness and Consumerism, taking particular interest in the compulsive buyer, where consumption has become an addiction. She completed her PhD in 2012, and now runs Present Minds, a company she founded, and through which she offers mindfulness training and research, and sustainability consultancy. She is also currently writing a book on resilience and coping. alison@presentminds.org www.presentminds.org

Mindful Anarchy - Jamie Heckert

Spiritual activist Sian Sullivan has referred to anarchy as a fractal democracy. At every level of social order, there is the possibility of relating freely as equals. What gets in the way of this is an attachment to representation, both in the sense of speaking for others and as an idea or an image of how things are or should be. On the larger scales, anarchy involves various direct forms of democracy rather than representation by elites. Likewise, it means direct, empowered action rather than asking others to enact policy. On the interpersonal level, it means direct relationship rather than with the mental representation of who someone is or should be. Psychologically, equipment to mindfulness, or presents, enables all the above to developing a direct, clear relationship with the experience itself.

The talk will be preceded by a guided heart-centred meditation in order to experience the concepts to be discussed.

Jamie Heckert is an anarchist scholar, yoga teacher and healer. He is coeditor of *Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (Routledge, 2011) and contributor to numerous publications including the *European Journal of Ecopsychology*, *Educational Studies* and *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*.