

Emotion-Focused Meditation and Therapeutic Presence

OCSWSSW

Annual Meeting & Education Day

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Objectives

- ▶ Learn how meditation can be used for own self care and for enhancing therapeutic presence
- ▶ Explore meditation from an emotion-focused perspective that is
 - ▶ More grounded in ordinary experience rather than idealized accounts
 - ▶ More emotionally friendly
- ▶ Introduce, experience, journal, and discuss a novel, experientially open form of meditation
- ▶ For newcomers: an introduction to meditation
- ▶ For those already practicing: refresh, deepen practice



What is mindfulness meditation?

- ▶ Attending to current experience
- ▶ Cultivating curiosity, gentleness and tolerance towards experience
- ▶ Discerning how to decrease suffering and increase happiness
- ▶ Pragmatic: the direction, the how, is based on your values and what works, not some underlying metaphysical view



Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

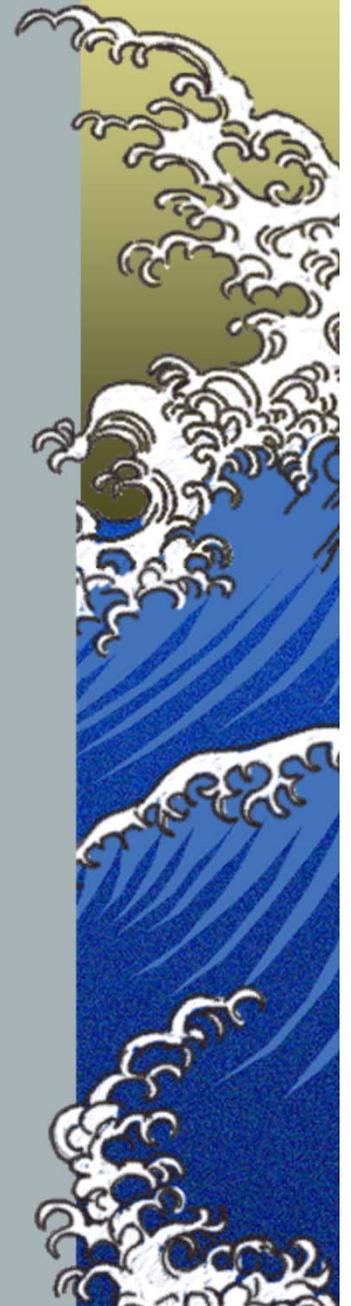
- ▶ 8-week meditation groups
- ▶ Initially for heterogeneous medical populations
- ▶ Took the mindfulness out of Buddhist context, put it into an evidence-based, mainstream approach
- ▶ Meta-analyses show effectiveness for a variety of clinical populations
 - ▶ Various specific medical populations especially cancer patients
 - ▶ Anxiety and depression
 - ▶ Medical, nursing and social work students



To teach mindfulness to clients

- ▶ Professionals need to develop our own meditation practice to enhance therapeutic presence:
 - ▶ Self care
 - ▶ Preparing for sessions
 - ▶ Empathy, authenticity, positive regard
 - ▶ Tracking own and client's emotional processes and interpersonal patterns

- ▶ Shari Geller & Les Greenberg, *Therapeutic Presence: a Mindful Approach to Effective Therapy*. APA, 2011



THE THERAPEUTIC PRESENCE

A MINDFUL APPROACH
TO EFFECTIVE THERAPY



Shari M. Geller
Leslie S. Greenberg

**American
Psychological
Association
(2011)**

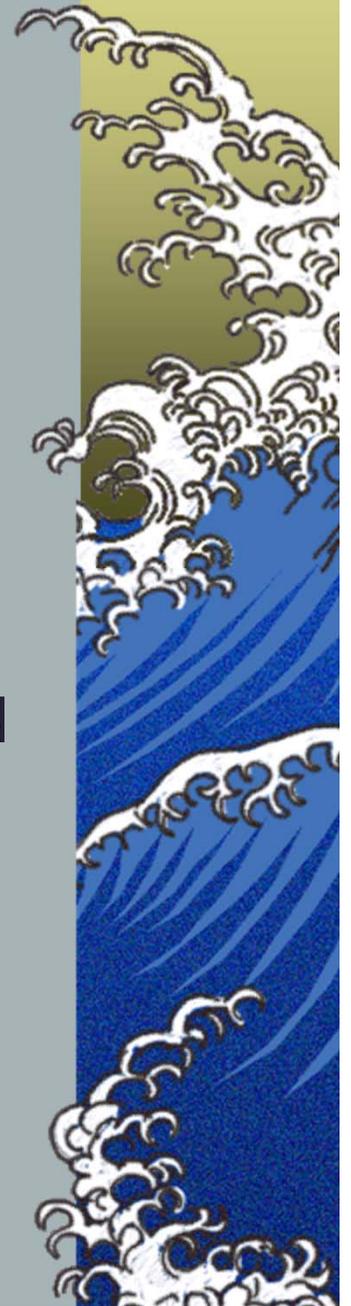
Befriending Ourselves

- ▶ We helping professionals tend to be better at focusing on other people than ourselves
- ▶ Difficulties acknowledging our own needs and feelings
- ▶ Meditation - a way of cultivating towards ourselves the same sustained positive regard, authentic concern, and empathic attunement we aspire to give to our clients



Background

- ▶ 25+ years meditation practice: own journey of healing and growth
- ▶ 10+ years providing, researching and adapting mindfulness for HIV+ gay, bisexual and MSM
- ▶ 8 years training professionals in mindfulness-based interventions and meditation



MBSR for gay, bisexual, MSM, HIV+ men

- ▶ Previous studies indicated immune system improvements
 - ▶ Robinson et al., 2003; Creswell et al., 2009
- ▶ Randomized-controlled trial, intent-to-treat analysis
- ▶ Two thirds received treatment, one third treatment-as-usual
- ▶ n=117
- ▶ Bill Gayner, Mary Jane Esplen, Peter DeRoche, Jiahui Wong, Scott Bishop, Lynn Kavanagh, Kate Butler.
 - ▶ A randomized controlled trial of mindfulness-based stress reduction to manage affective symptoms and improve quality of life in gay men living with HIV. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, DOI, published online first, 2011.



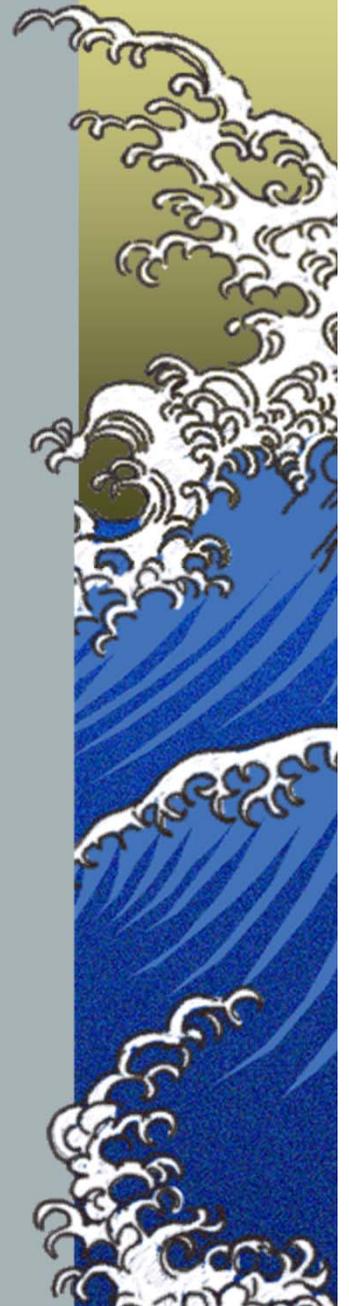
MBSR for gay, bisexual, MSM, HIV+ men

- ▲ First to show psychological change
- ▲ Post intervention and six-month follow-up:
 - ▲ Increased positive affect (PANAS)
 - ▲ Increased mindfulness (TMS)
 - ▲ Decreased avoidance (IES)
- ▲ Changes in mindfulness positively correlated with change in positive affect and negatively with avoidance and depression at 6 months



Promising but...

- ▶ Positive but mixed results
- ▶ Mindfulness capacities dramatically lower than mixed medical patients and cancer patients at baseline
- ▶ Suggested more attention needed to help with difficult emotional issues related to internalized stigma around HIV and sexual orientation



Stigma

- ▶ Structural oppression, social exclusion
 - ▶ Systematic socially constructed challenges
 - ▶ For example, HIV, sexual orientation, gender, race, ability and health
 - ▶ In addition, when internalized can create significant emotional challenges
 - ▶ Preoccupation with potential rejection
 - ▶ Self criticism and difficulties in generating self warmth
 - ▶ Difficulties in engaging in life
 - ▶ Anxiety and depression



Emotion-Focused Therapy

- ▶ Short-term psychotherapy approach
- ▶ Activates emotions' innate adaptive potential to help clients change problematic emotional states or unwanted self-experiences
- ▶ Research
 - ▶ EFT can help clients to better identify, experience, explore, make sense of, transform and flexibly manage their emotional experience (Pos & Greenberg, 2008)
 - ▶ Depression (Greenberg & Watson, 1998; Goldman, Greenberg, & Angus, 2006; Watson et al., 2003)
 - ▶ Complex trauma (Pavio & Pascual-Leone, 2010)



Emotion-Focused Meditation

- ▶ Adapt mindfulness to better address difficult emotions associated with internalized stigma of HIV and sexual orientation
 - ▶ Emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, Elliott, Watson etc): enhance emotional processing in meditation and in the group
 - ▶ Self compassion practice (Paul Gilbert)
 - ▶ Develop self warmth and soothing
 - ▶ Recollective awareness (Jason Siff)
 - ▶ Develop curiosity, gentleness and tolerance towards all of experience
 - ▶ Help people develop a meditation practice based on their specific needs, emotional patterns and goals
 - ▶ Pilot study



Theories of Psychotherapy Series
Jon Carlson and Matt Englar-Carlson, Series Editors

Emotion-Focused Therapy



Leslie S. Greenberg

APA, 2011

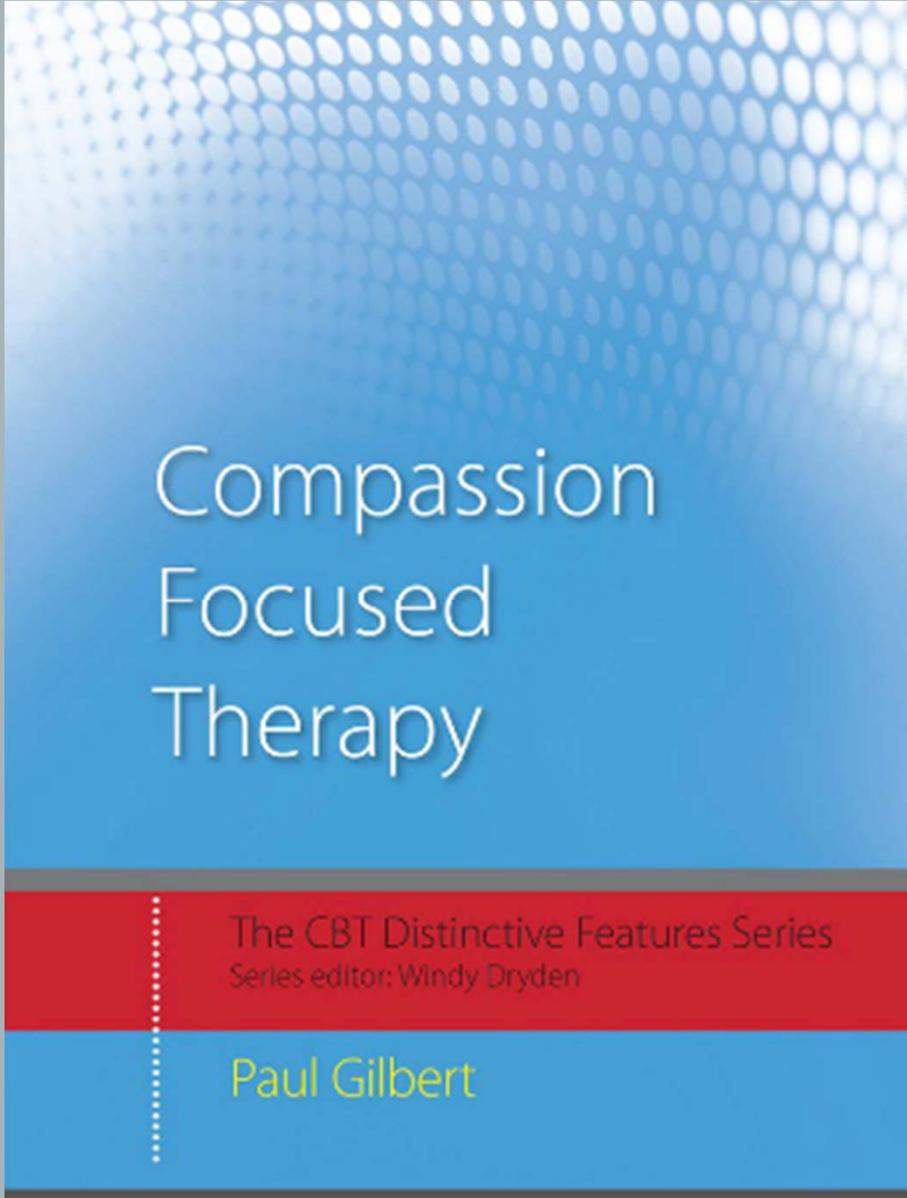


Emotion- Focused Therapy

Coaching Clients to Work
Through Their Feelings

Leslie S. Greenberg

APA, 2001



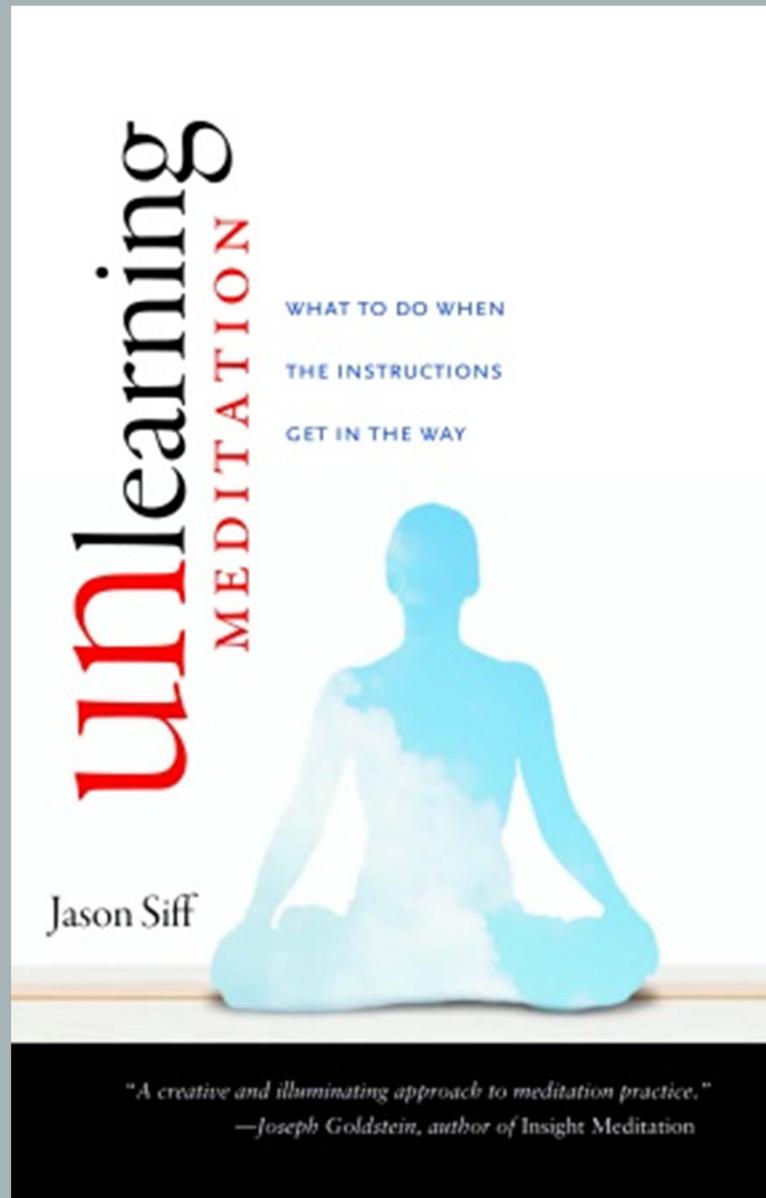
Compassion Focused Therapy

Routledge, 2010

The CBT Distinctive Features Series
Series editor: Windy Dryden

Paul Gilbert

Shambhala, 2010

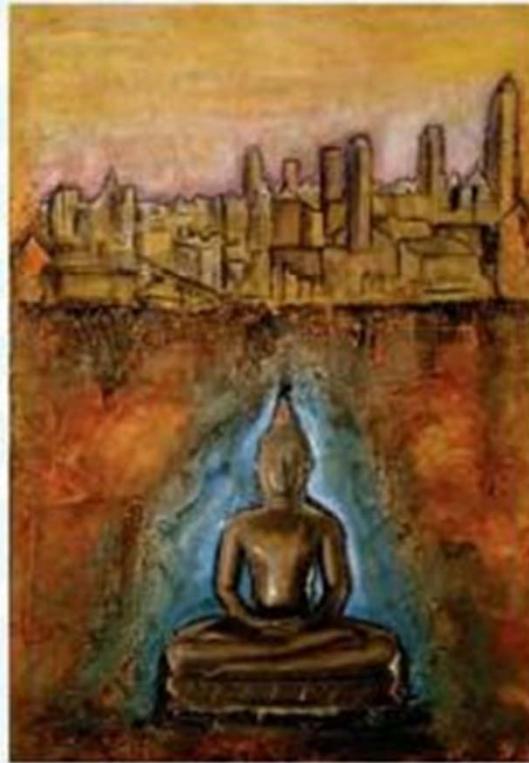


Buddhist Modernism

- ▶ Various forms of Buddhism significantly shaped by engagement with dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity
- ▶ A global network of movements created by Asians and Westerners
- ▶ Not simply “Western Buddhism”
 - ▶ David McMahan, 2012: 160



THE MAKING OF
BUDDHIST
MODERNISM



DAVID L. McMAHAN

Oxford
University Press, 2008

Buddhist Modernism

- ▶ Popular image of Buddhism in the West:
 - ▶ Emphasizes meditation, exploration of the mind, and compassion
 - ▶ Undogmatic, non-ritualistic, encourages creativity and freedom of thought
 - ▶ More an inner science or 'spirituality' than a religion
 - ▶ Democratic, espouses social and political freedoms, human rights, and environmental activism
 - ▶ McMahan, 2012: 160
- ▶ MBSR discourse
- ▶ Positive effect on Buddhism, but also obscures more orthodox, patriarchal assumptions in Buddhist practice



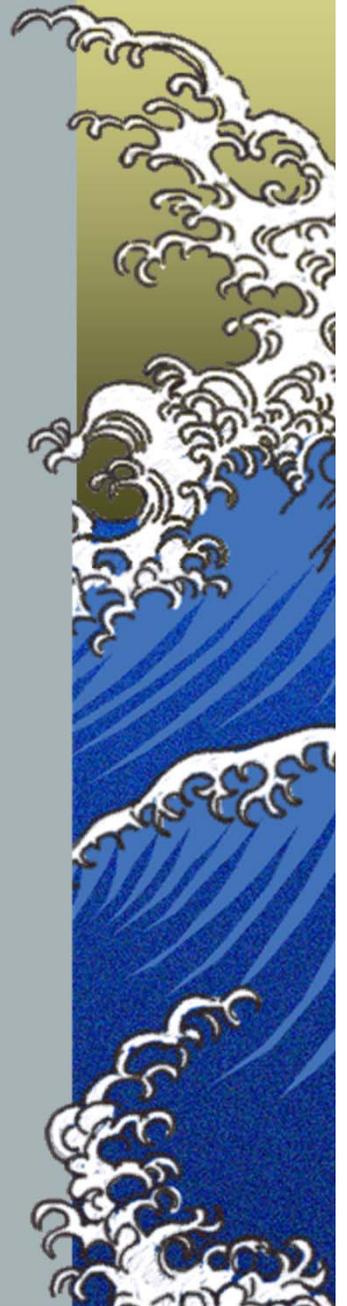
Beyond Buddhist Modernism

- ▶ Lots of outcome studies, but not much exploration or questioning of the meditation forms
- ▶ Tend to idealize Buddhist roots, without questioning assumptions that may underlie the practices
- ▶ Interest in querying, contextualizing and enriching existing mindfulness-based approaches
- ▶ Grounding it in ordinary experience of meditation rather than idealized descriptions



How can meditation help us navigate emotions?

1. Calming, soothing, self compassion
 - ▲ Helps modulate emotional intensity and soften defences
2. Emotional facilitation and processing
 - ▲ Deepening embodied experiencing of emotions
 - ▲ Transformation of maladaptive schemas/schemes
 - ▲ Patterns of implicit belief, emotion, motivation, sensations, and action tendencies sensitive to developmental contexts



Brief Mindfulness for Calming

- ▶ Refocus attention on a neutral or pleasant area of experience such as
 - ▶ Contact points
 - ▶ Sensations of breathing
 - ▶ Repeated word or phrase (*mantra* - Sanskrit for “mind tool”)
- ▶ Unhooks from difficult thoughts, emotions or sensations and fills attention with neutral or pleasant experience
- ▶ Characteristic of some longer forms of meditation including some mindfulness approaches

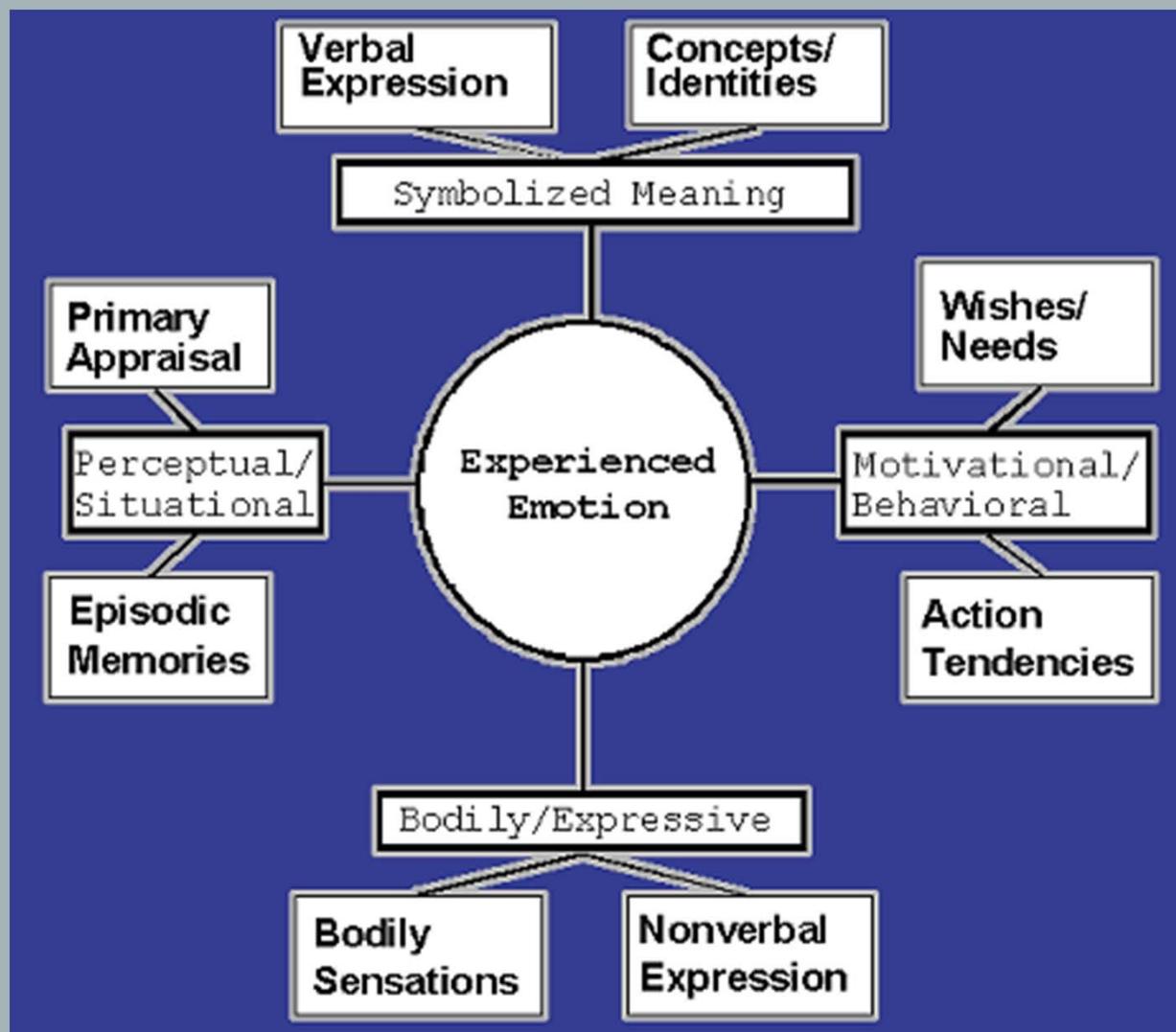


Meditation for deeper emotional processing

- ▶ To explore emotions in meditation, we need to develop empathy, warmth, authentic concern and positive regard towards ourselves
- ▶ Mindfulness correlated with secure attachment
- ▶ Compassion for self and others depends on developing a certain relationship towards difficult emotions:
 - ▶ Gentleness
 - ▶ Curiosity
 - ▶ Tolerance
 - ▶ Sensitivity
 - ▶ Responsiveness
- ▶ Clinical example



Emotion schemes (schemas, patterns) are shaped from co-constructing processes



Recollective Awareness

- ▶ An emotionally friendly, psychologically minded form of meditation practice
- ▶ Developed by Jason Siff, Buddhist meditation teacher who is having an increasing influence on MBSR and MBCT teachers
- ▶ Has same roots as the Buddhist movement that inspired Jon Kabat-Zinn in developing MBSR



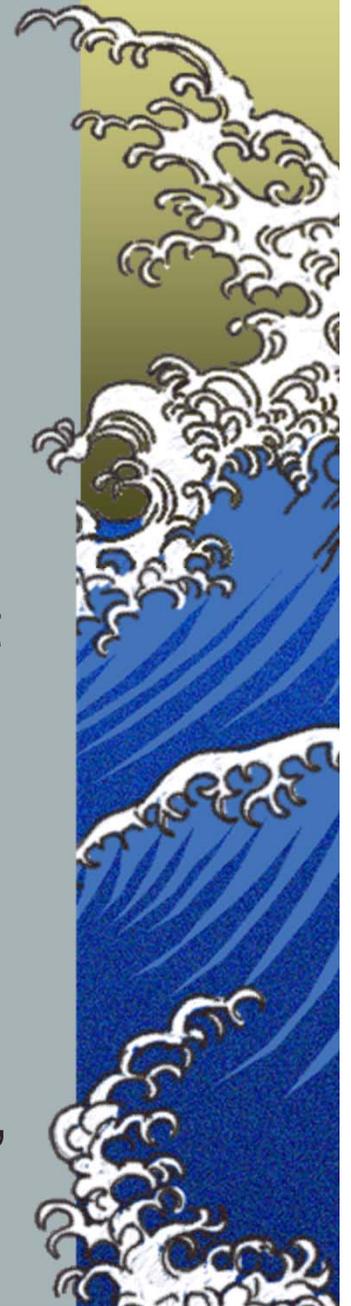
Two *Suggested* Sets of Instruction

1. Do a form of meditation with which you are already familiar or to which you feel drawn
 - ▶ Loosen around the instructions
 - ▶ Notice what is happening when you think you are not following the instructions
 - ▶ What are the implicit assumptions governing practice?
 - ▶ How do they fit with your experience?



2. Same as #1 with the addition of:

- ▶ Choose an anchor
 - ▶ Typically, contact points
 - ▶ Sensing the body's pressure on the chair and whatever hands are touching
- ▶ Start by attending to the anchor, but when attention wanders, simply participate in the next process that unfolds
 - ▶ You can do a to-do list, plan out your day, worry, ruminate, follow visual imagery or memory
- ▶ See if you can notice various dimensions of the experience, e.g., what your thinking about, feelings, sensations, motivations, images etc



Recollective Awareness

- ▶ Even sleepiness welcome
 - ▶ Raise curiosity slightly but without snapping out of the sleepiness
 - ▶ If you feel like slumping, slump
 - ▶ Hypnagogic imagery, waking dreams
- ▶ If you remember, you can come back to the contact points and see how long attention stays there, but there is no reason to push this
- ▶ Find a posture you can maintain, but if you become uncomfortable, you can move



Journalling

- ▶ No need to try to remember everything
- ▶ Try to get a sense of the general themes of your thoughts (work, relationships, plans, memories, etc.) and how these themes shifted in the sitting (from work to relationships to memories, for example).
- ▶ Generally, although not always, better to use
 - ▶ Ordinary rather than technical words
 - ▶ More differentiated language than broad labels
- ▶ Metaphors can be helpful



Journalling

- ▶ A way of reflecting on and deepening your practice
- ▶ Can be used as a basis for discussing practice with a teacher
- ▶ Reflects post-modern sensibility curious about specific discourses, encounters, processes and contexts rather than general descriptions taken to be universal





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