

Mindfulness Reflection

Morgan Arritola

Department of Counselor Education, Adams State University

COUN 570: Introduction to Neurocounseling

Dr. Carol A. Cotter

March 31, 2024

What is mindfulness? I have asked myself this a lot in the last two years as I foster new relationships, both intrapersonal and interpersonal. How is it that my 86 billion neurons interact to make me unique? Mindfulness is likely something we have all done at an unconscious level and for me, it began at an early age in sport. I could get lost for hours in a focused task, so I was aware of every movement, my breath, my heart rate, and how I was interacting with my environment. Going into the mindfulness practice, I wanted to make habits and new neural connections that would stick with me. As such, the golden egg meditation and the gratitude practice were two very different and powerful tools that I plan to continue to use. Having read about the Dorsal Attention Network (DAN) and its heightened activity during periods of time when you are choosing to pay attention to things in your environment was something I wanted to focus on. I found that to be truly grateful, I had to be present and then I would think, “hey, I just gave my DAN some love too”.

The mindfulness practice has perhaps given me more cognitive flexibility to know that multiple truths can be held. First, how far I have come in the last 15 years of learning and experiencing. I find that it can be easy for me to judge my growth and self-understanding in small increments, as when I reflect on the three weeks, I don't see much change. Dr. Seigel's *O tripod* lands with me when I think of how I changed. For this brief timeframe, I was more of an active observant of my own behaviors. For example, I think I too often am focused on the next thing that I take for granted very simple gestures. Walking my dogs and even how I use my language in conversation with my parents was something I wanted to make better, more present. I noticed I was able to adjust my attunement and explore my emotions. I recently started expanding my mindfulness to the concept of synesthesia. I will look at a green object,

like a ball and then try and conjure up the smell of something green, like a tart apple. It takes practice but being able to be so present and imaginative has been a fun journey.

Every choice has a consequence. I saw this with my mindfulness, and this is where I began to think about integration. And I will say, it's hard but that's okay I told myself. I think learning in parallel with mindfulness also gave me a tangible grasp on the 8 domains of integration, in particular the vertical integration. I did a lot of grounding and breath work and I feel as though I became more aware of who I am inside and how that gets communicated upward. But I will be honest, making good decisions is hard and even the practice of mindfulness felt like a to-do list for school. That made me angry at times because to some degree, it wasn't in my total control. This was a struggle for me, and I still am working to accept the situation and the discomfort to fully integrate my emotions and predictions. I have to say, Anne's story in *Mindsight* (Siegel, 2010) really reminded me that often when we are avoiding a feeling or an emotion it's because it's hard and that is a huge opportunity for mindfulness and growth. Stagnation and regression happen in the avoidance. The practice of mindfulness really helped me the most with my visualization as I feel like the details with which I can imagine or use in meditation have become more profound and just to see that growth is amazing. Thank you, mind!

The idea that we become what we think and how we process, perceive, and evaluate each and every moment of life. This learning is a continuous process that for me, when coupled with curiosity and self-inquiry, is how I have come to define mindfulness for myself. One thing I have learned, and will continue to learn more about, is the role of dopamine and other important neurotransmitters. When I was doing the cold water plunge, I could feel a similar sensation of reward to when I used to compete at sport at a high level. I believe that education and neuroeducation have been the overarching theme in this practice and program at large and that

applies directly to how I view neuroplasticity. This has been yet another way I can apply structure and function and use myself as patient zero. To circle back to attunement, with myself and eventually my clients, I believe that the Anterior Cingulate Cortex is likely growing new firing patterns with each and every emotion and prediction that experience brings. I truly believe connecting to the 5 senses is a powerful reminder to regulate the nervous system and just to find the present moment: be mindful shall we say?

Reference

Siegel, D. (2010). *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*. Bantam Books.