

system that offers a radical way of being in the world, runs through this book and indeed the whole mindfulness movement. Can mindfulness be extracted from the Buddhist context in which it originated as a concept? If so, what is it and what is the new context in which we locate it in Western clinical practice? But another dilemma also runs through the whole of this book: how it is possible to use words to describe a way of attending that is ultimately non-conceptual and experiential.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part 1 “Theory, conceptualization and phenomenology” the basic concepts of mindfulness are discussed. There is a very accessible chapter by Siegel and colleagues on what mindfulness is and where it came from and a concise summary by Treadway and Lazar of the neurobiology of mindfulness. Part 2, “Clinical applications: general issues, rationale and phenomenology”, is a rather mixed section, where I suspect the editor placed a number of chapters that were not easily classified. It contains an interesting chapter by the editor on how mindfulness can be used with feelings of emptiness – a symptom reported in a number of personality disorders, and difficult to work with using traditional cognitive methods. There is a chapter by Baer and colleagues that helpfully reviews the instruments for assessing mindfulness. This part also includes a timely reminder by Kocovski and colleagues that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is not a general purpose therapeutic technology, but may work best when applied within a specific problem formulation for a given disorder. Part 3, “Mindfulness-based interventions for specific disorders”, covers several disorders: anxiety disorders, OCD, depression, borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, addictions, PTSD, ADHD, psychosis, chronic pain, and oncology. This may be the section that is of most interest to the cognitive behaviour therapist who wishes to understand how to apply MBCT and MBSR in clinical practice. The therapist will find some useful tips on how the standard programme is adapted for different problems. Most, though not all, of these chapters contain case examples that bring to life the application to real individuals. The final section, “Mindfulness-based interventions for specific settings and populations”, describes mindfulness in individual psychotherapy, with children, older adults, inpatients, and with health care professionals. The appendix, “Mindfulness practice”, gives brief guidance to the forms of meditative practice within this tradition.

Inevitably a book with so many authors is variable in style, but I found all the chapters very readable, and all open a window onto one or more aspects of the practice. This volume will probably be of most interest to a clinician who already has some understanding of mindfulness and who is interested in a clinically based overview of how it is blossoming in ever increasing areas. I was struck, however, by how few randomized controlled trials there still are for an approach that has attracted so much attention. And, for a way of being that cannot be put into words, there are a lot of words in 523 pages.

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The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions

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Recent years have seen the inclusion of Eastern ideas into Western therapies and an increasing awareness that the cognitive behavioural emphasis on effort and activity can sometimes

prove an incomplete treatment paradigm for mental health problems. An increasing literature on “third wave” cognitive behavioural therapies moves away from control and emotional avoidance and emphasizes the role of acceptance. In an insightful contribution to the literature, Germer provides a book full of ideas and techniques aimed at the reduction of self-critical thinking using self-compassion and mindfulness. He describes his book as “un-self-help book”, highlighting this notion of working less.

The book achieves a good balance between theory and practice. Explanations of different aspects of mindfulness and compassion are placed alongside “Try This” boxes containing strategies that relate to them. It is written for the client rather than the clinician and the author uses clear, everyday language to break down difficult and sometimes esoteric ideas. He illustrates the material with a wealth of different experiences from his own background, including cases from his clinical practice as well as his own Buddhist training in India and Sri-Lanka. In his subsequent life he has been a founding member of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy and a Clinical Instructor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, both of which have informed the writing.

The book is broken down into three parts. The first, “Discovering self-compassion”, describes the fundamentals of both self-compassion and mindfulness. Included here is a wide range of mindfulness exercises that every practitioner should have in their tool-box: mindfulness of sound, the breath, body sensations and emotions. Germer describes how thought, images and how we relate to others may all be used to develop loving-kindness, and a section here details how the reader may cultivate positive emotions.

The second part, entitled “Practising loving-kindness”, explores loving kindness meditation as a means to increase self-compassion. The approach emphasizes that although we might sometimes construe compassion as an innate quality, it is actually a skill that can be acquired and increased through practice. The book seamlessly weaves ideas from the Western school, for example labelling emotions and Young’s schema theory, with Eastern concepts such as common humanity, the creation of suffering and nourishing the spirit.

The final part is a briefer section, called “Customising self-compassion”. It explores how self-compassion can be tailored to 12 different personality types: the caregiver, the intellectual, the perfectionist, the individualist, the survivor, the workhorse, the butterfly, the outsider, the floater, the moralist, the introvert, and the extrovert. The types are described and the challenges for each one are stated, together with suggestions for overcoming them. Finally, more general obstacles are noted, such as compassion-fatigue, disillusionment and how one can measure progress.

One of the things that make the book interesting and engaging is the eclectic source material, which is built into a rich tapestry. Throughout the book, grey boxes describe research from social, clinical and neuro-psychology relating to the topics covered. Quotations from such disparate sources as the Bible, poets and philosophers sit alongside amusing newspaper-like cartoons, providing changes in tone and pace, which make the book eminently readable. Although positioned within the self-help literature, the book offers pragmatic strategies that could be adapted to fit a wider treatment program. Given this adaptability, I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in self-compassion, both clinicians and clients, whether they are beginners or experienced practitioners.

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