

Mindful Psychotherapy

A mindful approach to therapy differs from conventional approaches because it is more concerned with opening directly to experience than with problem or symptom resolution. An emphasis on presence, what is happening moment-by-moment, instead of cognitive reflection, allows for a radically different approach to exploring experience. *Reflection* is an exploration of the contents of consciousness; while *presence* is the way we observe, hold, react to, contract in, strive toward, and ultimately experience the contents.

Welwood^[2] compares reflection to *content mutation* (Gendlin, 1964^[2]):

Anger unfolding to reveal fear, which in turn might unfold further, revealing itself as a desire to be loved, and then a sense of relief at realizing that one's anger was pushing away the love one wanted. I call these *horizontal felt shifts* [emphasis added], because even though deeper feelings and realizations may unfold, the process remains mainly within the realm of personality (p. 120).

Converse to reflection, mindful presence allows for a "*vertical shift* [emphasis added], where one moves from personality into a deeper quality of being, as... observer/observed dissolves, along with all reactivity, contraction, or striving"^[2] (p.120). Horizontal shifts mark changes in the personality (e.g., beliefs, behavior, thought patterns, defenses), while vertical shifting is an experience *beyond, but affecting, the personality*. Thus, vertical shifts are *transpersonal* and necessary for transcending content mutation for experiential transformation. This is not to say that horizontal shifts are not absolutely necessary for personal healing and growth. Often, long periods of horizontal unfolding and integration are necessary before differences in our presence and the way we live can be witnessed.

Mindfulness is beyond reflection; it is a meta-experience of presence, resting in, deepening, and accepting without having to solve or move forward. It allows for both horizontal and vertical shifts, whereas conventional therapy is commonly reserved to horizontal shifts. A client's vertical shifts are more likely with a therapist that has experienced integrated vertical shifts. Wilbur^[3] argues that without this integration, to which mindfulness can lead, attempting to hold clients through a vertical shift is like being the therapist to a client advanced beyond our level of development. For example, a therapist with an egocentric perspective working with a worldcentric, humanistic client would be less likely to produce vertical shifts.

Germer^[1] distinguishes between two different ways of integrating mindfulness as an intervention into psychotherapy: mindfulness-based and mindfulness-informed. *Mindfulness-based* is the explicit teaching of mindfulness as formal meditation or discreet skills (e.g., breath awareness, mindful eating) that can be imparted to our clients. *Mindfulness-informed* is mindfulness used as a theoretical frame of reference, but mindfulness isn't explicitly taught to clients. In mindfulness-informed therapy, the therapist's nonconceptual experiences and insights realized through mindfulness become interventions in therapy.

In addition to mindfulness-based and mindfulness-informed therapy, I suggest a third, equally important category of psychotherapeutic mindfulness integration: the therapist's being mindful in the moment with the client, which I call *mindful-being*. (See "[Mindful-Being Psychotherapy & Increased Therapist Efficacy](#)" on my website).

1. Germer, C. K. (2005). Mindfulness: What is it? What does it matter?. In C. K. Germer, R. D. Siegel, & P. D. Fulton (Eds.)

Mindfulness and psychotherapy. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

2. Welwood, J. (2000). *Toward a psychology of awakening*. Boston, MA: Shambala.

3. Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral Psychology*. Boston, MA: Shambala.