



Loving-kindness and compassion meditation: Potential for psychological interventions[☆]

Stefan G. Hofmann^{a,*}, Paul Grossman^b, Devon E. Hinton^c

^a Boston University, MA, United States

^b University of Basel Hospital, Germany

^c Harvard Medical School, MA, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 February 2011

Received in revised form 8 July 2011

Accepted 13 July 2011

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Loving-kindness meditation

Mindfulness

Compassion meditation

Anger

Anxiety

Depression

ABSTRACT

Mindfulness-based meditation interventions have become increasingly popular in contemporary psychology. Other closely related meditation practices include loving-kindness meditation (LKM) and compassion meditation (CM), exercises oriented toward enhancing unconditional, positive emotional states of kindness and compassion. This article provides a review of the background, the techniques, and the empirical contemporary literature of LKM and CM. The literature suggests that LKM and CM are associated with an increase in positive affect and a decrease in negative affect. Preliminary findings from neuroendocrine studies indicate that CM may reduce stress-induced subjective distress and immune response. Neuroimaging studies suggest that LKM and CM may enhance activation of brain areas that are involved in emotional processing and empathy. Finally, preliminary intervention studies support application of these strategies in clinical populations. It is concluded that, when combined with empirically supported treatments, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, LKM and CM may provide potentially useful strategies for targeting a variety of different psychological problems that involve interpersonal processes, such as depression, social anxiety, marital conflict, anger, and coping with the strains of long-term caregiving.

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Therapies derived from Buddhist practices, mindfulness-based therapy (MBT), such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-

Zinn, 1982) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), have become a very popular subject in contemporary psychotherapy (for reviews, see Baer, 2003; Bishop, 2002; Hayes, 2004; Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2005; Roemer & Orsillo, 2009; Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, & Sephton, 2009; Siegel, 2007; Thera, 1962).

Mindfulness is a construct that is difficult to define (see Bishop et al., 2004; Grossman, 2008, in press; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Melbourne Academic Mindfulness Interest Group, 2006). It has been described as a form of participant-observation that is characterized by moment-to-moment awareness of perceptible mental states and processes that include continuous, immediate awareness of physical sensations, perceptions,

[☆] Author Note Dr. Hofmann is a paid consultant by Merck/Schering-Plough and supported by NIMH grant 1R01MH078308 for studies unrelated to the present investigation.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Boston University, 648 Beacon Street, 6th Floor, Boston, MA 02215-2002, United States. Tel.: +1 617 353 9610; fax: +1 617 353 9609.

E-mail address: shofmann@bu.edu (S.G. Hofmann).

¹ The term *therapy* does not here imply that MBT is a treatment for an illness or disability. Instead, MBT teaches individuals to cope with universal aspects of being alive.