compassionate wellbeing

ABSTRACTS

The benefits and limitations of mindfulness and meditation (and their impacts on overall wellbeing)

Mia Forbes Pirie

The benefits and limitations of mindfulness and meditation have been shown to be many and powerful. Used well, mindfulness and meditation can change our lives for the better. Scientific research supports many health benefits of meditation mainly associated with stress reduction, and ability to focus. Cautiously promising research in its early stages even suggests that meditation may have some effect on a cellular level on patients in remission from cancer (http://www.sciencealert.com/world-first-evidence-suggests-that-meditation-alters-cancer-survivors-cells). Further evidence is needed to confirm that. So, maybe, in terms of health and focus, meditation is giving us an extra edge.

Meditation affects the quality of your attention and where you place it. And, as Stanford scholar and international meditation teacher B. Alan Wallace explains in his book *The Attention Revolution*, 'Our perception of reality is tied closely to where we place our attention'. What we focus on shapes our experience and the things we ignore, pale into insignificance for us. Meditation allows us to choose where we place our attention. That, in turn, gives us more control over how we shape our lives.

Meditation also helps us to navigate our emotions. Increased awareness and compassion developed through meditation connect us with ourselves and others allowing us to interact in a more balanced way. Neuroscientists debate whether regions of the brain perform specific functions or whether a more interconnected view is more accurate. It is, however, established that the amygdala (emotional centres) play a huge role in the fear response. In order to deal with the fear-causing – at an evolutionary level read 'life threatening' – situation, we dissociate. We stop using the logical, decision-making functions of our brains. Louann described this to me beautifully, using the analogy of a car with the clutch being pushed in. When we are in a state of stress and fear, the gears are unable to engage with the decision-making functions of our brains. Meditation helps us to press 'pause' on

our reactive patterns. It gives us perspective and choice. This allows us to be cool under fire.

However, meditation and mindfulness used badly, can become 'sticks', something else to beat ourselves up with, to help us not feel good about ourselves. This must be avoided. Given that much of the literature and information on meditation and mindfulness comes from Eastern cultures where the 'inner critic' may not be as developed as in more Western Cultures, there is perhaps not as much information about this as it could be needed. It is important for Western practitioners to be aware of this as well as to be given the tools to deal with such issues when they arise.

The popularisation of these paths can mean that their teachings are diluted. Have they become overused and lost their meaning? Does their use for 'stress relief' and 'wellbeing' defeat their purpose or is it a good thing that people are using them to support them in difficult times? Mediation and mindfulness also have their limitations in that they can be solitary practices and can lead us into spiritual materialism and spiritual bypassing. They help us relate better to ourselves which helps us to relate better to others, but we can become attached to those wonderful peaceful states and it is important to also develop spiritually in relation to others.

The other limitation is that sometimes people mistake meditation and mindfulness for destinations, when they are in fact, only vehicles for the journey, to be used and discarded as serves the deeper purpose of our paths.

Meditation in higher education: The effects of Loving Kindness Meditation and Mindfulness Meditation over an eight week period

Kimberley Sheffield, University of Northampton

One form of meditation which has not been as widely explored as other forms is Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM). This form of meditation has a specific focus on developing feelings of kindness towards oneself and others with research into this limited area being beneficial in furthering our understanding of LKM and to assess its effects and how they differ to other practices.

As part of a wider PhD project, of which the aim is to understand the effects of LKM, a study was conducted which explored the effects of Mindfulness Meditation (MM) and LKM across 8 weeks in a higher education setting. The program was designed to be as close as possible to a sitting meditation group with the focus of each weekly session being on meditating and reflecting on personal practice over the eight week period. The aim was to explore the effects of the practices over the period, as well as exploring the subtle differences between the practices, given their slightly differing focus. As such outcome measures included those that would be anticipated from both practices such as perceived stress, self-compassion, and levels of attention.

The background, design and methodology as well as the findings, implications and suggestions for future research will be discussed in the presentation.

Making mindfulness Work: The impact of an eight week Mindfulness at Work programme on stress, anxiety, depression and resilience amongst leaders

Gill Thackray, University of Aberdeen

Being a leader in today's economic climate can be rewarding, challenging and sometimes exhausting. In both the public and private sector, leaders face multiple challenges when leading teams in a time of economic crises where services and finances are increasingly stretched. The resulting impact upon the wellbeing of individuals in the workplace has been well documented. Stress-related absenteeism is currently at an all time high in the UK. This study investigated whether an eight week Mindfulness at Work Programme could potentially reduce stress and anxiety

amongst a Sport UK Directorate Team, whilst at the same time increasing levels of resilience.

Programme participants completed instruments to measure wellbeing, a self report DASS 21 and a resilience psychometric at the beginning of the eight week programme and again at the end. The data was quantitatively analysed. Participants were also asked to self report in their own words on the impact of practicing mindfulness upon their daily lives.

The results suggest that the eight week mindfulness programme resulted in a decrease in stress, anxiety and depression for all participants. There was also a marked increase in self reported resilience of up to 50% amongst participants. The conclusion can be drawn that practicing mindfulness increases resilience whilst reducing stress and anxiety. It is hoped that these results and appropriate recommendations will be used to inform future workplace wellbeing programmes.

Helping Others Helps You: A practical approach to compassion practice

Maureen Cooper

Even though we may have the wish to develop compassion it is not easy. There are many aspects of modern life which could lead us to wonder if it is even advisable - will we be taken advantage of? The answer may be to start in a small way - by considering what practicing compassion brings you. The Dalai Lama called this being 'wisely selfish' rather than stupidly selfish, which is how we are most of the time. We can look at it this way - if everyone wants happiness and to avoid suffering, and you manage to show some kindness and compassion to others, then they will respond in the same way towards you and you will be happier. This also works the other way around - causing pain to other people means they will want to respond in kind. In addition - having a compassionate attitude puts your own problems into perspective because we see them in the light of the suffering of the rest of the world. When we focus on just wanting to solve our own problems we can become narrow in our outlook and highly sensitive to every dip in our fortune, making ourselves unhappy. Through compassion we come to realise the truth of interdependence and how we do not exist solely as an individual but in the context of all the individuals on the planet. We can see this clearly by examining research carried out on volunteers. This shows that volunteers generally experience an

immediate surge in their sense of wellbeing, followed by a deeper sense of calm and peace of mind. Volunteers suffering from conditions such as arthritis report a decrease in their pain experience after volunteering. We all want peace of mind - we see clearly that when we are not compassionate and indulge in emotions such as greed, hostility and aversion we do not feel good in ourselves. Scientific research bears out that these kind of feelings undermine our health and wellbeing. Emotions such as kindness, love and tolerance add to our peace of mind and even enhance it, thus increasing our wellbeing. Finish with a short practice to bring this into the rough and tumble of everyday life.

Spontaneous extraordinary experiences and the concept of wellbeing: An exploration.

Dr Madeleine Castro, Leeds Beckett University

What can accounts of spontaneous 'extraordinary' experiences (under this rubric are experiences sometimes also called paranormal, supernatural, transcendent, etc.) tell us about compassion and wellbeing? This is an interesting question. Whilst there has been some support for the idea that extraordinary and/or spiritual experiences are associated with increased wellbeing (e.g. Greeley, 1975; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Parra & Corbetta, 2014; Palmer & Braud, 2002; Smith, 2006; Wulff, 2000) there are few that have taken a critical look at the concept of wellbeing itself. This paper therefore, seeks to explore various questions. Firstly, what do we mean by wellbeing and how can we measure or assess this? Secondly, how convincing is the evidence to suggest a relationship between extraordinary experiences and wellbeing? And thirdly, what are the implications of this possible relationship for a compassionate approach to those reporting experiences such as these? In exploring these questions, this paper draws some tentative conclusions about the sharing and reporting of extraordinary experiences and argues for sensitivity towards and the increased normalisation of both these experiences and those that report them.

"Most people think you're a fruit loop": An exploratory study of clients' experiences of seeking support for anomalous experiences

Dr Elizabeth C. Roxburgh and *Rachel E. Evenden, University of Northampton*

Anomalous experiences (AEs) are those that "depart from our own familiar personal experiences or from the more usual, ordinary, and expected experiences of a given culture and time" (Braud, 2010, p.1). White (2001) has listed over 500 different types of anomalous experiences1, including meaningful coincidences, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, mystical or peak experiences, and extrasensory perception, to name just a few. Research has shown that a high proportion of the general population believe in or experience AEs (e.g. Haraldsson, 2011; Pechey & Halligan, 2012; Ross & Joshi, 1992), that AEs can occur after negative life events (Rabeyron & Watt), and that common reactions can include fear, anxiety and distress (e.g. Eybrechts & Gerding, 2012; Parra, 2012; Siegel, 1986). In addition, individuals may have existential questions following the experience and not know where to seek support or worry that they will be labelled mad if they do. Few studies have explored the perspectives of clients who report AEs in terms of the process of therapeutic intervention and how this is managed by mental health professionals. This seems pertinent given a recent study investigating the counselling experiences of bereaved people who sense the presence of the deceased found that the majority of participants felt their counsellors were not accepting of their experiences or neglected to explore the cultural and spiritual aspects of the experience (Taylor, 2005).

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of clients who report AEs in secular counselling services so we are better informed about how AEs impact on mental health and how therapists have responded to such clients (e.g., What experiences have clients found helpful or unhelpful in terms of therapeutic intervention? Did they feel listened to and understood by their therapist?). Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee and ethical guidelines of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) were adhered. Semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with eight clients (three males and five females aged between 21 and 52 years with a mean age of 37 years) whom had experienced at least one AE which they had discussed in counselling. A thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to the data and produced four themes: "You have to go digging to get support", "Why are you looking at that airy fairy crap?", "It kind of shut the door", and "Having someone to normalise and say you're not crazy, you're not weird". Findings highlight the importance for clients of finding an

open-minded counsellor so they can explore the meaning of the anomalous experience without being ridiculed or pathologised. Themes will be represented by participant extracts to demonstrate how they are grounded in the data and findings will be discussed in terms of their implications for the therapeutic relationship, the accessibility of mental services to meet the needs of diverse clients, and the growing field of 'clinical parapsychology'.

'A glass of sherry in one hand and a cigar in the other!': Spiritualism and wellbeing beyond the healing encounter.

Dr Sara MacKian, Senior Lecturer in Health and Wellbeing, The Open University

There have been moves within health and social care practice over recent years to pay more attention to the diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds which patients and service users may have. The intention is to approach each case from the individual's perspective rather than a medical or practitioner-based framing. As a result, most practitioners in health and social care today will have some degree of confidence in acknowledging and understanding the experiences of mainstream religious groups. But less commonly understood spiritual frameworks might be less easily accommodated. For example, counsellors and end-of-life carers often have sympathetic approaches to patients or family members experiencing visions or messages from deceased loved ones around the time of death and bereavement. As we entered the 21st century, there was a 60 per cent rise in reported 'spiritual' experiences and encounters in normal everyday contexts – including such things as communication with deceased loved ones, spirit guides and angels. However, recent research has noted that there is less ready acceptance of such extraordinary encounters beyond the contexts of death, dying and bereavement.

Spiritualism is a religion based on the belief that the soul continues to live beyond the death of the physical body, and according the 2011 Census it is the UK's fastest growing religion. Nonetheless, Spiritualism is poorly understood by the wider community and overshadowed by a legacy of theatrical Victorian séances and fraudulent mediums. Spiritualism is not only about speaking with the dead, however; a core part of the Spiritualist philosophy and religion centres around healing. Several NHS hospitals now offer 'healing' to alleviate the pain and

symptoms of some chronically ill patients, and many of those healers will have come from training in a Spiritualist context. Whilst person-focused and directed healing in this way is perhaps the most obvious manifestation, for Spiritualists, healing is about more than the 'laying on of hands' in a one-to-one consultation. Healing and the quest for wellbeing are central concepts in the everyday life of Spiritualists and form a fundamental part of their wider lifeworld. This paper explores the lesser known side to Spiritualism and healing and raises some questions about what wellbeing might look like through the lens of spirit, and what the implications of that might be for practice beyond end-of-life care.

Loneliness: A spiritual approach to a 21st century epidemic

Michelle Audouard

Loneliness recently hit the headlines with the announcement that this potentially chronic problem is as detrimental to our health as obesity or smoking. Research over recent years has revealed that loneliness causes not only emotional and psychological ill effects, but also has a physiological impact that accelerates ageing and shortens life expectancy. And, at least for the foreseeable future, the problem is not going away.

With a growing and ageing population, families living further apart, the collapse of the community and a 21st century society that places value on individualisation and self-reliance, loneliness seems set to grow to epidemic proportions. The effect on individuals can include depression, distorted thinking, maladaptive emotion regulation and physical ill-health, which in turn has a knock-on effect on society as a whole with, for example, additional pressure placed on our National Health Service and employers experiencing the negative effects of lower productivity and higher employee absence.

While improved social connection may be considered the answer, in reality and particularly for those for whom loneliness has become chronic, merely spending more time with family or increasing friendship networks may not actually solve the problem. According to John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, in their 2009 book, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, chronic loneliness can induce feelings of hostility, vulnerability, threat, distrust and fear of rejection, making attempts at social connection at best difficult and at worst

counterproductive. For those for whom loneliness is both the condition and the cause of self-defeating behaviour, it may appear as though there is little hope of change. However, there is perhaps another possibility.

Though research at present is minimal, there are encouraging indications that spirituality and spiritual practices may have a positive impact on loneliness, both in terms of emotional and psychological well-being and positive changes in physiology. My speaking presentation, Loneliness: A spiritual approach to a 21st century epidemic, based on my written paper of the same name (presently a work in progress), is therefore an examination of research evidence, theory and considerations into the role of spirituality in offering a new and welcome approach to loneliness.

Spirituality in organisations: Connecting with core values

Dr John Darwin, University of Aberdeen & Mike Pupius, Sheffield Hallam University

Enhancement (MBLE) into a major non-academic Department in a University. The MBLE programme is a non-therapeutic approach which integrates with mindfulness the Four Immeasurables [loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity] and elements of positive psychology such as optimism, hope, gratitude, forgiveness, savouring and challenging negativity.

The course has been run twice now for the Department, first with the senior management and subsequently with a group of middle managers. The former group did the course a year ago, and have since continued to meet together on a regular basis for mindfulness practice. The latter group were evaluated before and after the course using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, the Flourishing Scale, and the Perceived Stress Scale. These measures have indicated a significant increase in personal

While the course focuses on the individual, it was anticipated that there would be beneficial effects for the Department. Follow up work, including interviews with key individuals and focus groups to which all participants were invited, indicate that the Four Immeasurables do relate strongly to the core values of the department.

Spirituality and the challenge of evolution and compassion

Prof Paul Gilbert, University of Derby

Science is revealing more about the physical nature of our universe and more about the nature of biological life; for example how it came into being, takes the forms it does, can become diseased, and how all life-forms flourish, decay and die. Science offers challenges to spiritual beliefs but also opportunities for evolving spiritual orientations in line with our deepening understanding of the nature of life in the universe. Two key themes are linked to developing more insight and awareness. One is mindfulness of the kinds of minds nature has given us and the second is cultivating a particular kind of motivation within us which is to be aware of the suffering of self and others and to take steps to alleviate it. Opening our eyes to the reality of suffering is also to discover the meaning of compassion and its link to spiritualities past and present.

Metaphors for understanding the spiritual and religious needs of young people with cancer: reflections from an empirical research project

Revd Kathryn Darby and *Revd Paul Nash, Birmingham Children's Hospital* and *Revd Dr Sally Nash, St John's College, Nottingham.*

This paper draws on a small scale phenomenological research project undertaken at Birmingham Children's Hospital by the Chaplaincy team. Young people with cancer and the families participated in semi-structured interviews about their spiritual and religious needs and the data was thematically analysed identifying core themes of personal issues, relationships and attitude, and environment in relation to spiritual needs. Hope, providing religious rituals, faith community involvement, use of religious language and finding a worldview that fits the new season were identified as religious needs. A development of the initial research involved identifying and developing metaphors that facilitated understanding the needs of young people with cancer for adults involved in care as well as in working with young people themselves. A range of metaphors are explored in the paper with a caution noted of taking into account the demographical, developmental and cultural specificities in any encounter. We propose that these metaphors may have transferability or adaptability into other contexts where young people have experienced trauma.

Spirituality, wellbeing and ageing

Dr John Darwin, University of Aberdeen and *Mike Pupius, Sheffield Hallam University*

This presentation and paper will look at the contribution which spirituality and wellbeing can make to life enhancement as we age, in particular by exploring mindful ageing. It is founded on the following propositions:

* As we age, we should do all we can to keep active, both mentally and physically
* Both mental and physical wellbeing can be supported and enhanced by mindful practice
* This mindful practice should
    - Involve both mindfulness of the mind and mindfulness of the body
    - Incorporate both formal and informal mindfulness
    - Be strongly linked to qualities such as the Four Immeasurables: loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity
    - Be linked also to strengths identified in Positive Psychology, including optimism, hope, gratitude, forgiveness, savouring and a sense of purpose

*An important aspect of mindful ageing is that we challenge the restrictions and negativities which come with the Seasoned Mind1, encouraging the Beginner's Mind through mindful practice
* Wellbeing as we age involves also being open to new possibilities and new beginnings: accepting and embracing change, seeing ageing as bringing with it new opportunities, and even a new mindset.

The arguments and evidence supporting these propositions are to be found in Darwin [2014a and 2014b], and will be briefly reviewed in the paper and presentation. There are two aspects in particular which are worth developing further here. Firstly, while the Four Immeasurables originate in Buddhist philosophy and practice, it is not difficult to find them in all spiritual traditions, whether or not based on religious belief [Darwin 2014b]. Armstrong [2011] argues for the universality of compassion – the same claim can be made for the other three Immeasurables. All can be challenged by life experiences [Zimbardo 2007], but they are valuable practices to develop and enhance, and they both support and are supported by mindfulness practice [Darwin 2014b Chapter 3].

Secondly, research in Positive Psychology over the past two decades has reinforced the argument that wellbeing is enhanced through spirituality and a sense of purpose in life. Chickering identified six developmental goals, which include developing purpose and developing integrity [Snyder et al 2011:337]. Snyder et al

argue that "by adding a bit of intentionality to your belief that each moment has potential we believe you can actively pursue, on a daily basis, a richer life experience that includes more novelty [mindfulness], more absorption [flow] and attention to the sacred [spirituality]" [ibid:244] They cite Peterson and Seligman, who argue that spirituality is a universal strength of transcendence: "Although the specific content of spiritual beliefs varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate transcendent, sacred and divine force" [Peterson and Seligman 2004:601]

This general argument in favour of spirituality and purpose is reinforced in discussions of ageing. Vickery [2012] argues the need for a new mindset as we age, in which we "accept the unchangeable with grace and serenity, and change what we can change with courage, confidence, and determination. This means staying involved, staying positive, having a purpose, not taking things for granted, building spiritual strength, having close friends and family, and self-managing behaviors and exposures." Yount [2007], drawing on Erikson's work, argues that a key characteristic of negative resolution in Stage 7 is that the person "Finds little meaning or purpose in life other than their own self-indulgence".

Relating to anomalous experiences in the context of social threat or social safeness. Lessons for psychosis?

Dr Charlie Heriot-Maitland, King's College London

This talk will outline some of the research being carried out with populations who report anomalous experiences but never come into contact with clinical services. These studies typically sample from organisations involved with spiritual and psychic phenomena, recruiting people whose anomalous experiences resemble the 'symptoms' of those in psychosis services, but which aren't experienced as problematic, distressing, and which aren't associated with a need for care. This population may provide useful information for our interventions with people in psychosis services; for instance, insights into how experiences are integrated in a benign or helpful way, and what the protective factors / mechanisms might be in facilitating this process. The talk will particularly highlight the protective role of (internal and external) *social safeness* experience, outline the science of underlying

mechanisms, and present how this is being translated into promising new developments in helping people with distressing psychosis.

Traditional Chinese Religion and Wellbeing

Professor Charles F Emmons, Gettysburg College

What most Westerners would consider traditional Chinese religion and magic (especially Confucianism, Taoism, feng shui and ancestor worship) constitute an eclectic and holistic perspective in which spiritual and scientific approaches to wellbeing overlap, as seen in both folk medicine and scholarly medicine. Wellbeing depends upon proper balance and harmonious relationships with the environment (feng shui), the spirit world (spirit mediumship and ancestor worship) and the vital forces (chi, yin/yang etc.). Broadly speaking the wellness goals are health and wealth. This presentation, based primarily on ethnographic research in Hong Kong in the 1980s, will illustrate how these Chinese beliefs and practices relate to what Westerners would call integrative medicine and a New Age (New Spiritual) world view.

The Linking Of Hearts: Transmission of Compassion in Four Faith Traditions and in Psychotherapy

Sarah Lionheart

In this paper we explore how traditions increase compassion in the practitioner - what work is required, how they are taught, the rituals involved and the significance, if any, of the teacher-student relationship. Interviews with practitioners reveal what being compassionate means for them in their particular tradition.

We will investigate the linking of hearts in Sufism, in Hinduism the path of Bhakti/love/devotion and how this is used to open the heart, in Christianity the

path of the heart, recognising the compassion of Christ and the way the disciple/student attempts to become like Christ. In Tibetan Buddhism we examine the physical, verbal and mental transmission and the impact of the teacher.

In psychotherapy we analyse how the therapist attempts to be a mentor or exemplar of kindness, acceptance, compassion and thus through limbic resonance and subtle nuances the client becomes attuned to the heart/mind of the therapist.

Could it be that a person of exceptional compassion can transmit that sense of compassion to a student/client if the student/client is open and receptive enough? Many teachers say that the students need to have done sufficient ground work first but some aren't prepared to and just want to 'hang out with the teacher as a sort of groupie picking up a good vibe'. Perhaps the seeds are always being sown in such a situation/relationship but each tradition also recommends specific practices that speed up the process and enhance the opening of the heart.

The Psychological Benefits of Practicing Humility

Dr Roger Bretherton and *Rebecca Park, University of Lincoln*

Numerous religious traditions and spiritual practices over the millennia have endorsed the value of humility (see, Worthington 2007). Far from being a state of low self-esteem or self-hatred, the humble attitude is more adequately defined as an 'accurate or grounded view of oneself', neither grandiose nor ashamed (Tangney 2000). In recent years some consensus has emerged among psychologists as to the five hallmarks of a humble state, which are: a secure sense of identity, an accurate view of self, openness to feedback, orientation to others and an egalitarian attitude (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013). Research in humility has rapidly accelerated in recent years, with roughly a hundred peer-reviewed interdisciplinary articles published in the last decade (Davis & Hook, 2014). Numerous psychological benefits have been associated with the attitude of humility, including greater life satisfaction and helping behaviour (LaBouff et al, 2012), enhanced work engagement (Ou et al. 2014), increased gratitude (Dwiwardeni et al., 2014), reduced defensiveness towards others (Tongeren et al., 2014), and more effective leadership (Collins, 2001). A workbook intervention designed by Lavelock et al, (2014), has also demonstrated evidence of increased humility in those who complete it relative to a control group, with numerous accompanying benefits to psychological

wellbeing. This presentation therefore offers a brief summary of empirical work on humility so far, and a synopsis of the first UK-based pilot study of the humility workbook conducted with undergraduates at the University of Lincoln.

Art and Spirituality: An Encounter with Rothko's painting *Red on Maroon, section 4* (1959)

Ann Bridge Davies

In April 2015, Paul, a young businessman in London with time between meetings, came upon a Mark Rothko painting in the Tate Modern, London. Paul recalls "The Tate created a room with the same atmosphere as the Seagram restaurant for which the murals were created. I went in for 20 mins and stayed for 2 hours." During an interview Paul recollects that as the painting took hold of his sensibilities and the background noises mellowed, he was enraptured by the spirituality of the painting. Paul said he had a "spiritual encounter" (Transcript; PC, 1-4).

Roger Lipsey considers 'There is no orthodox spirituality in this century, [20th] and the [art] culture at large has been amazingly unreceptive to the spiritual aspect of the artist's thought and work' (Lipsey; 1988, 3). Lipsey considers that the naming of art as spiritual or owning spirituality is a significant aspect of the spiritual in art referring to it as 'a burden for artists who acknowledge a metaphysical dimension but do not wish to be misconstrued as "spiritual," as if they were wearing a clerical garb and must behave' (307). Referring to contemporary art, Jungu Yoon uses the word numinous instead of spiritual as, he says, 'a more appropriate choice' since the word allows the art to 'transcend' from a religious-historic form (Yoon; 2010, 6). It seems that spirituality in art is still a factor which maybe unrecognised or misunderstood.

Lipsey and Yoon here give rise to the idea that it is the art which inherently contains spirituality, however, what of the spectators' spirituality? The presentation will examine the "affect" (O'Sullivan, 2001) Rothko's painting *Red on Maroon, section 4* (1959) had on Paul; Rothko's spiritual background as well as consideration as to whether Paul's reaction was accentuated by the painting (as spiritual object) or his own innate spirituality.

A Transpersonal exploration of epilepsy and its numinous, cosmic states

Louise King, University of Northampton

Transpersonal experiences offer personal transformation by highlighting the contrast between felt experience and a previously held sense of self-identity and world (Walsh & Vaughn, 1980). They are highly subjective — often labelled as irrational or pathological (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993), thus posing difficulty for 'objective' approaches to human research (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

My research explores spiritual experiences in epilepsy – Transpersonal experiences that are difficult for traditional empirical research methods to investigate. For many, epilepsy involves an altered state of consciousness, unusual feelings and sensations - 'auras' (Fenwick & Fenwick, 1996). Some auras have a very particular quality; a 'numinous' feeling, or 'cosmic-spirituality' (Dolgoff-Kaspar Ettinger et al., 2011). The medical model pathologises these experiences, regarding them as, at best, hallucinations (e.g. Sacks, 2012) and at worst, a symptom of seizure-associated psychosis (e.g. Dolgoff-Kaspar, Ettinger et al., 2011). Transpersonal psychology takes such altered state of consciousness seriously, rather than rejecting them as anomalous (e.g. Tart, 1975; Tart, 1977: Grof, 1975).

I am using auto-ethnography, a qualitative research method, to explore epileptic experiences from the perspective of a group insider (Hayano, 1979) – both researcher and researched. Auto-ethnography is highly pertinent to Transpersonal psychology, as it emphasises embodied expression and rejects the Cartesian mind-body split (Muncey, 2010). In this talk I will discuss how auto-ethnography enables me to employ an altered state of consciousness – a waking dream technique (Hamilton, 2014) - to explore the specific character and intensity of the feelings that accompany these epileptic events (Trimble & Freeman, 2006).

BIOGRAPHIES

Michelle Audouard is a stress management professional and a health & wellbeing writer and researcher. She has a background in social care working with people with mental health problems and learning difficulties, including 10 years at management level. Michelle has a particular interest in loneliness, having directly observed the negative impact of loneliness on wellbeing and quality of life, and is presently researching the effects of spiritual practices and beliefs on the experience of loneliness. She trained in health and well-being cognitive behavioural coaching with a British Psychological Society Learning Centre approved provider and also holds an Executive Performance Coaching Diploma, an INLPTA Diploma in Neuro Linguistic Programming, and a City and Guilds Advanced Care Management qualification. She is presently studying for a Masters in Mindfulness-based Approaches at Bangor University and, for her thesis, is researching the efficacy of a mindfulness-based approach as a treatment option for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). With her writing cap on, Michelle is Editor of *Performance Coaching: A Complete Guide to Best Practice Coaching and Training* written by Carol Wilson, and is co-author of two chapters of the book on the subjects of Resilience and Corporate Social Responsibility. Michelle is a member of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality.

Dr Roger Bretherton is Principal Lecturer for Enterprise in the School of Psychology at the University of Lincoln. His current research is funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, entitled 'Are Humble Leaders Better Leaders?' in which he is examining the benefits of a workbook approach to developing a humble attitude in academic leaders.

Dr Madeleine Castro is Senior Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Psychology at Leeds Beckett University. She teaches on a wide variety of subjects including Parapsychology, Transpersonal Psychology, Emotion, Gender and Feminism, Jung, Methodologies and Critical Social Psychology. Some of which is part of the highly successful and unique MA in Interdisciplinary Psychology (http://courses.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/interdiscpsychology). Her research interests include the sociology and psychology of transcendent, transpersonal and extraordinary experiences, contemporary spiritualties and methodology in the social sciences. She completed her PhD in 2009 at the University of York looking

at how people made sense of their transcendent or mystical experiences. Her most recent work has focused upon the concept of transcendent experiences (outside of a religious context) as catalysts for personal transformation in contemporary society. She co-directs an interdisciplinary network for researchers interested in topics such as the paranormal, spiritual and transpersonal called Exploring the Extraordinary (http://etenetwork.weebly.com/) with Dr Hannah Gilbert. The network is a supportive forum and hosts an annual conference with an eclectic international following. She is also currently the Honorary Treasurer for the Transpersonal Section of the British Psychological Society (http://www.bps.org.uk/networks-and-communities/member-microsite/transpersonal-psychology-section).

Maureen Cooper is the author of *The Compassionate Mind Approach to Reducing Stress*, which was published by Constable Robinson and is part of the 'Compassionate Approaches to Life Difficulties' series edited by Prof Paul Gilbert. She combines more than thirty years of experience as a professional educator and senior manager in a non-profit organization with a hands-on education in Buddhism. In 2004 Maureen founded Awareness in Action (http://www.awarenessinaction.org), which is a consultancy dedicated to the secular application of mindfulness, meditation and compassion in the workplace.

Rev Kathryn Darby has been a chaplain at Birmingham Children's Hospital since 2006 and is a trained Counsellor. She has co-authored a book and various articles on spiritual care.

Dr John Darwin is has been running in courses in Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement at Sheffield Hallam University (and elsewhere) since 2010, to date training over 300 people. After taking a Master's degree in Mathematical Logic and a PG Diploma in Community Organisation, John's first career was in community work in north east England; he then joined Newcastle City Council as a local government officer, later becoming a Chief Officer with Sheffield City Council; and then became an academic, teaching on Masters and Doctoral programmes at Sheffield Business School. During this time he took an MBA, and completed a Doctorate on *"Complexity Theory and Fuzzy Logic in Strategic Management"*. He has written a number of books, including *The Enterprise Society* and *Developing Strategies for Change* (with Phil Johnson and John McAuley).

John has practised meditation (in the SotoZen tradition) for more than 25 years, and is an enthusiastic practitioner of yoga and QiGong. Since retiring from full time employment he has been studying, practising, and teaching mindfulness. He has a Postgraduate Certificate in Mindfulness Based Approaches from Bangor University, and an MSc (with distinction) in Mindfulness Studies from the University of Aberdeen. He has written a book on *Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement* which explains its rationale and content, and several Discussion Papers on *Mindful Ageing* – in which he has an obvious personal interest! John is currently a Visiting Fellow at Sheffield Business School, and a Teaching Fellow at the University of Aberdeen.

Ann Bridge Davies attained a Bachelor degree in Educational Psychology and Art from Nottingham University in 1971, and was Head of Art in Toxteth, Liverpool for 20 years and Chair of the North West Examining Board. Relocating from Liverpool to Stafford, where she had her daughter Rebecca at the age of 40m she then reinvented her working life and began her business "Young Artists Groups" which she ultimately managed for the Weekend College at Stafford College. She has organised and run workshops and classes in art and meditation worldwide for over 25 years alongside helping others to do the same. Ann's numinous development have been life-long through the experiences of Roman Catholicism, Spiritualism, and Buddhism and more recently through the making and seeing of Art. She is at present undertaking a PhD research degree at Derby University in the Philosophy and History of Spiritualist Art.

Prof Charles Emmons has an MA in Anthropology and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Illinois, Chicago. He is a Professor of Sociology at Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania, USA. His latest book, coauthored with his wife, Penelope Emmons, is *Science and Spirit: Exploring the Limits of Consciousness* (2012). They also collaborated on *Guided by Spirit: A Journey into the Mind of the Medium* (2003). Other publications by Charlie include *Chinese Ghosts and ESP: A Study of Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences* (1982; new edition *Chinese Ghosts Revisited*, 2015), and *At the Threshold: UFOs, Science and the New Age* (1997). He is active in Exploring the Extraordinary, is an honorary member of the Board of Reviewers of the journal *Paranthropology,* and a member of The Society for Scientific Exploration. He has also made three documentary DVDs in the area of science and spirituality: *Drum Dreams (Drum Circles in North America) (2008), Roll Your Own Religion (New Spirituality in North America) (2010),* and *Science and Spirit(s)* (2012). He appears in the TV documentaries *Ghosts of Gettysburg.*

Rachel Evenden is a certified Integrative Counsellor, lecturer and Research Associate within the centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes (CSAPP), at the University of Northampton. Her research and lecturing covers a broad range of subject areas surrounding Counselling and Positive Psychology domains. Her current research focuses on Clinical parapsychology in the UK to investigate the range and incidence of clients seeking advice for anomalous experiences (AE's) in a secular counselling service, and the training needs of student counsellors and clinical psychologists.

Prof Paul Gilbert OBE is head of the Mental Health Research Unit, and Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Derby, where he developed Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) and Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT). He has a BA in Economics (1973), a Diploma in Clinical Psychology (from the BPS), and an MA in Experimental Psychology (1975), and a PhD in Clinical Psychology (Edinburgh, 1980). He was made a fellow of the British Psychological Society for contributions to psychological knowledge in 1993, and was president of the British Association for Cognitive and Behavioural Psychotherapy in 2003. He served on the government depression NICE guideline committee. Prof Paul Gilbert has published and edited 21 books, including the bestselling *Overcoming Depression*, *The Compassionate Mind*, and *Mindful Compassion* (co-authored with Choden). He is the series editor for the 'compassionate approaches to life difficulties' series, published by Constable Robinson. Paul was awarded an OBE in 2011 for his contributions to mental healthcare.

Louise King is a transpersonal psychotherapist who volunteers with the Spiritual Crisis Network. Her PhD research, which she is undertaking at the University of Northampton, explores spiritual experiences encountered during epileptic events. Louise is interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of these experiences, as well as examining them in comparison with other types of spiritual experience.

Sarah Lionheart was raised as a Roman Catholic. She academically trained in literature and spirituality (Warwick and Stanford Universities) before becoming a novice in the Carmelites, and later a novice in a teaching order. In 1987 her academic study of Spirituality and Consciousness at Durham University led to a novitiate in the Hindu tradition. This included a period of time in India which proved challenging and life altering. In 1988 she met Sri Vandana Mataji (who had trained alongside Jon Kabat Zinn in the 70's) and who began to train Sarah in mindfulness and heart opening. Since 1989 Sarah has been leading retreats and teaching yoga. Sarah worked for The Westminster Interfaith Programme in

London 1991-3 and in 1995 she began her training in the Sufi tradition, graduating as a teacher of the Dances of Universal Peace in 2012. In 2000 Sarah started a 13 year training in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition - with regular one month long retreats. Her main teachers were Akong Rinpoche and His Holiness 17th Karmapa. She has also been a client of psychotherapy, is married with two adult children, two cats and an ocean-going yacht. She sings semi professionally in a choral choir and dances for the sheer exhilarating joy of it.

Dr Sara MacKian is a geographer by training, and currently holds a position as Senior Lecturer in Health and Wellbeing at The Open University. Her research is wide ranging but the driving theme is a curiosity for how people and organisations interact around issues of health, wellbeing and meaning-making. Recently she has been exploring the use of alternative spiritualties by individuals and organisations to enhance wellbeing and the role of spirituality more broadly in contemporary British society. Using social science and art combined, she explores the relationship between the real and the imaginary, the body and the spirit, this world and the otherworldly. Sara has a particular interest in qualitative methods and creative approaches to social science research and learning.

Rev Paul Nash has worked at Birmingham Children's Hospital since 2002 and has been Chaplaincy team leader (Senior Chaplain) since 2004. He is co-convenor of the Paediatric Chaplaincy Network of Great Britain and Ireland and has published a range of books and articles on chaplaincy and work with young people.

Rev Dr Sally Nash is Director of the Children's Institute for Children, Youth and Mission and is the academic lead for the Birmingham Children's Hospital chaplaincy team on research. She has published a range of books and articles on spirituality, wellbeing, youth work and ministry.

Rebecca Park is an Undergraduate Student at the University of Lincoln. She piloted the workbook approach to humility on a group of undergraduate students as part of a research elective project. She is currently completing her final year dissertation on the psychology of humility.

Mia Forbes Pirie helps make change happen. Mia is an international mediator, facilitator and executive health coach. She helps to resolve inner and outer conflict. Mia is a facilitator in the Church of England's 'shared conversations' on LGBT issues and has spoken at Chatham House on conflict resolution. She has Masters of Science and Law and teaches yoga and meditation at some of London's top studios. See more at foodforthejourney.com and miaforbespirie.com

Dr Charlie Heriot-Maitland is s a clinical psychologist, researcher and trainer. He is currently researching the social context of anomalous experiences and the application of Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) for people experiencing distress in relation to anomalous experiences. He provides psychological therapies in NHS psychosis services, and in private practice. He also runs various compassion training workshops for practitioners and the general public.

Mike Pupius is a co-founder of the Centre for Mindful Life Enhancement and has successfully completed an MSc in Mindfulness Studies at the University of Aberdeen. His dissertation topic was Mindful Ageing. He is a lead trainer and co-facilitator on MBLE and Mindful Ageing programmes, working with local organisations including Sheffield City Council, Kier Services, Manor and Castle Development Trust and the Facilities Directorate at Sheffield Hallam University. He had a long career with Royal Mail with roles including District Head Postmaster Sheffield and Regional Director Business Excellence and Planning. He was seconded to the European Foundation for Quality Management in Brussels where he was European Public Sector Manager before joining Sheffield Hallam University as Director of Organisational Excellence. He founded the Centre for Integral Excellence at Sheffield Hallam University which promoted the principles of excellence to the Higher Education sector and worked with organisations across Europe and in the Middle East. Now retired, he is a Volunteer Park Ranger with the Peak District National Park and a Visiting Fellow at Sheffield Business School.

Dr Elizabeth Roxburgh is a senior lecturer in Psychology at the University of Northampton and was recently appointed as course leader for the BSc Psychology and Counselling degree and as a board member for the Parapsychological Association. She was awarded her PhD by the University of Northampton for research exploring the phenomenology and psychology of spiritualist mediumship. Elizabeth previously worked for the National Health Service as an Assistant Psychologist in a variety of clinical settings, including mental health, forensic and learning disability services. She is now a BACP registered counsellor and volunteers for a charity organisation.

Kimberley Sheffield is a PhD student at the University of Northampton, where she is exploring Loving Kindness Meditation, a less widely researched form of meditation, which has impacts on social and relational aspects as well as attention and wellbeing measures. She's using mixed methodologies (IPA, Q-Methodology and quantitative methods) to explore how the practice is understood and experienced by those who practice on a regular basis and what changes might occur over time with a group of novices. Kimberley also lectures in Psychology at

the University of Northampton, and is a meditation teacher, co-facilitating mindfulness and loving kindness based sessions for staff at her university.

Gill Thackray is the director of Koru Development, and is a business psychologist, coach, lecturer, writer, mindfulness teacher and regular conference speaker. Gill writes for national publications, including the *Guardian* and *Financial Times* on the application of psychology and neuroscience in everyday life. She has worked internationally with government bodies, companies and organisations to improve performance and develop individuals to reach their potential. Specialising in wellbeing, resilience and mindfulness Gill has worked with a wide variety of clients including the United Nations Iraq, BBC, Barclays, The Football Association, Water Aid, Breast Cancer UK, Royal College of Arts, NHS, Age UK, British Heart Foundation, British School of Osteopathy, Pakistan Government, Kenyan Tourist Authority, Deloitte, Nigerian Communications Commission and Battersea Cats and Dogs Home. She is a member of the Association of Business Psychologists, Institute of Leadership and Management, British Neuroscience Association and Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. She has practiced mindfulness for over twenty years, having lived, worked and studied in China, Tibet, India and Thailand. Gill is also Visiting Professor at CHE University in Phnom Penh Cambodia.

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