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Ludwig Grepmaier, Dipl. Psych.
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Re: Book Review, Grepmaier und Nickel, Achtsamkeit des Psychotherapeuten

Dear Ludwig,

Below is my book-review for your terrific publication!

Sincerely,

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Rezension, Grepmaier und Nickel, Achtsamkeit des Psychotherapeuten Guido K.W. Frank, M.D., University of Colorado Denver

The relationship in the therapeutic process is of crucial importance for the treatment outcome (Karver et al 2006). Early therapy forms such as psychodynamic approaches have consistently worked with the client-therapist relationship and terms such as transference, and various defense mechanisms that reflected interpersonal problems and that were brought to light in the treatment process. More modern and so called evidence based – that is research founded - therapy directions emphasized behavioral and cognitive approaches while the therapeutic relationship has not always been emphasized as much (Priebe et al 2008). Such a relationship is based on trust from the side of the patient and the sense that the therapeutic counterpart is helpful. The concept of mindfulness, that is a “moment-to-moment, dispassionate, non-judgmental awareness - listening mind” (Kabat-Zinn), has in

psychotherapy been mostly thought of as a skill to teach patients, and in general thus as a tool to modify or improve psychotherapeutic treatments. Great attention has this concept received for the treatment of the Borderline Personality Disorder with Linehan's use of mindfulness techniques (Linehan 1993). Those techniques are in part grounded in Buddhism and have been described in detail in the past (Kabat-Zinn 1990; 2003; 2004).

Grepmaier and Nickel now present a book with the mindfulness not as a tool to teach the patient, but rather a method to teach the psychotherapist to develop a more in depth and productive therapeutic relationship with the client. This is a novel idea and has since been supported by others (Hick and Bien 2008). Grepmaier and Nickel's book is structured in four parts. Section one describes various forms of psychotherapy, the state of the therapist that is part of the client-therapist interaction, and how ZEN techniques may improve mindfulness. The second section describes the first published studies that investigated prospectively the use of ZEN meditation applied to a group of psychotherapists in training. Those studies show how the therapist group that underwent mindfulness training on a regular basis had significantly better treatment outcomes compared to the control group. Section 3 then describes how the therapist may use mindfulness as a treatment aid. The important aspect here is that mindfulness is not applied in a mechanistic manner, but rather that the therapist lives mindfulness so that this technique becomes a part of the health professional and the mindful approach to the patient becomes a natural aspect of treatment. Lastly, section 4 integrates the previous sections and provides a research as well as clinical agenda for the use of mindfulness in psychotherapy.

This book provides an in-depth review of the mindfulness' original roots in old asian teachings, particularly Soto Zen, and leads the reader to the modern world of mindfulness research and how such a technique may be crucial in the application of psychotherapy. The most important aspect here is that mindfulness is not detached from the therapist and just being made the agenda of the patient, but rather the psychotherapist has to be in touch with her/himself in order to provide better treatment. This approach in fact may be much more cost effective since motivating patients to mindfulness training can be difficult for various reasons, while a mindful psychotherapist may be able to provide meaningful and important impact even with a few interventions if he works mindful enough. This may then translate into better treatment effectiveness. This is supported by the only up to date research based studies that were performed by Grepmaier and Nickel. Those studies that are reviewed in detail in the book. Mindfulness is seen as a well defined instrument in order to enhance the therapeutic process. Mindfulness is described as way of living and relating to the outside world, and this enables the therapist to develop a level of therapeutic interaction with the client that other therapy forms do not foster or see as important. My personal clinical experience is that the best treatment outcomes are when there is a skillful combination of therapeutic technique (cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, etc.) with a mindfulness driven approach to the patient. This involves that the therapist is in tune with the patient, being aware of oneself as well as the client. Mindfulness provides the skills and personal development to be able to interact with the patient on that level and is in my opinion not only crucial to improve therapy quality, but is in the end also more cost effective with in my opinion an earlier treatment success. Grepmaier and Nickel refer in their book to various citations from ancient to modern teachers who seemed to have been "mindful" in their everyday work. The accomplishment and novelty of Grepmaier and Nickel's work, however, is that they for the first time integrate and describe the psychotherapist's work as an art of Zen, and how the therapist can learn and use mindfulness. The authors review critically in that context teachings that reduce the human to a biologic machine and that does not take individuality and spirituality into account, aspects that make us humans, what and who we are, and that are essential when working successfully in psychotherapy.

In summary, Grepmaier and Nickel's book "Achtsamkeit des Psychotherapeuten" provides the first systematic and research based publication that reviews theoretical as well as practical aspects of mindfulness taught to and applied by the psychotherapist. It lays out an emphatic statement why this is not only a worthwhile but necessary method to improve the work of the psychotherapist. I believe that this here described method and suggestion for methodical training in mindfulness of the future psychotherapist generations, may one of the most important advancements in this field to come.

