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## **Types of approaches to mindfulness in young adults. Insights from original research\***

Typy podejścia do uważności młodych dorosłych  
w świetle wyników badań własnych

**Summary.** With the increasing interest in mindfulness (mindful presence) across various areas of human functioning, this paper presents findings from qualitative research on the understanding and practice of mindfulness among individuals in early adulthood. Considering both theoretical and practical aspects, four types of approaches to mindfulness are identified. Type A individuals can describe what mindfulness is and practise it; Type B individuals can describe what mindfulness is but do not practise it; Type C individuals cannot describe what mindfulness is but practise it; and Type D individuals cannot describe what mindfulness is and do not practise it.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, practising mindfulness, early adulthood

**Streszczenie.** W związku z coraz większym zainteresowaniem uważnością (uważną obecnością) w wielu obszarach funkcjonowania człowieka autorka przedstawia wyniki badań jakościowych dotyczących rozumienia pojęcia uważności i jej praktykowania przez osoby w okresie wczesnej dorosłości. Uwzględniając aspekty teoretyczne i pragmatyczne uważności, autorka tworzy typy podejścia do uważności: typ A – potrafi określić, czym jest uważność, i ją praktykuje; typ B – potrafi określić, czym jest uważność, ale jej nie praktykuje; typ C – nie po-

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trafi określić, czym jest uważność, ale ją praktykuje; typ D – nie potrafi określić, czym jest uważność, i jej nie praktykuje.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uważność, praktykowanie uważności, wczesna dorosłość

## Introduction

Contemporary times are characterised by profound global economic crises, diminishing natural resources, and enforced personal and professional self-development, all aiming at enhancing human economic productivity (Sennet, 2010). A growing number of individuals exhibit a decline in mental health, manifested in low self-esteem, job burnout, depression, and suicide. Perhaps in response to this situation, mindfulness is gaining widespread popularity in numerous countries. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to present findings from research on the understanding and practice of mindfulness among individuals in early adulthood.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2009), a psychiatrist and the creator of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programme, defines mindful presence as a specific state of awareness that involves paying attention on purpose to what is occurring in the present moment in both the external environment (sensory experiences) and internal reality (emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations), without judging the content of those experiences. In the relevant literature, mindfulness is explored in various domains. Psychologists highlight its importance for mental health prevention and therapy (Jankowski & Holas, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Radoń, 2014, 2017; Segal et al., 2017). In an individual's professional life, mindfulness is associated with deliberate efforts to professionalise activities (Akinola, 2010; Dane, 2011; Hülshager et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2015). There is even discussion of management by mindfulness, particularly in the context of leading work teams within organisations (Krishnakumar & Robinson, 2015; Cacioppe, 2017).

In education, mindfulness is regarded as a process of conscious and reflective learning that arises from listening intently to one's emotions, needs, thoughts, and sensory perceptions, and from responding to external stimuli. It is also treated as a set of mental exercises designed to improve concentration, build a didactic community, respond skilfully, and adapt to situations (Radoń, 2014; Hassed & Chambers, 2018; Wajsprych,

2018; Góralaska, 2019). It should be noted, however, that due to its Buddhist origins, mindfulness has its opponents, particularly in educational institutions. In each of these areas, mindfulness is practised to improve individual well-being, as supported by research findings (Williams et al., 2001; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Creswell et al., 2019).

## **Methodological assumptions**

The understanding of Kabat-Zinn's concept of mindful presence adopted in this study takes into account its constitutive elements. Firstly, mindfulness is personalised, meaning it is owned, directed, and practised by each individual. Secondly, it is intentional, meaning individuals purposefully direct their attention to a specific element of reality, as well as to their current experiences and what is happening to them at a given moment. Thirdly, in the state of mindfulness, the focus of attention is on what appears to consciousness in the present moment. Fourthly, regardless of the emotional or cognitive meaning contained in experience, it is accepted by individuals in the state of mindfulness (Shapiro et al., 2006).

The aim of the study was to explore individuals' understanding of the concept of mindfulness in early adulthood. The research questions posed in the study were: How do the respondents define mindfulness and how do they relate mindfulness to practical action? The research employed a phenomenographic approach (Męczkowska, 2003), utilising structured interviews as a research technique to reconstruct the ways in which twenty female undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education at the University of Warsaw perceived the world. The study was conducted in June 2019 in Warsaw.

The findings were elaborated as follows: 1. Analysing individual interviews to determine familiarity with the concept of mindfulness and its constitutive features, and identifying statements that condensed responses regarding the same issue; 2. Grouping data according to topics and individuals' points of view on the given phenomenon; 3. Identifying similarities and differences in how mindfulness was framed and establishing criteria for categorising responses into specific types, while considering the contexts discussed by the respondents; 4. Analysing meanings in two dimensions: collective (identifying shared elements for a given group of respondents) and individual (identifying differences among individuals);

and 5. Developing a multidimensional map of description categories. The most important aspect of the analysis was to uncover and create categories that had emerged by, for example, combining extracts from the statements of all respondents that were homogenous in meaning.

## Analysis of research findings

Based on the content analysis of the interviews, four types of approaches to mindfulness were identified. Two criteria were considered: the first related to the understanding of the term mindfulness, and the second related to the practice of mindfulness in daily life. The understanding of the term mindfulness was determined by incorporating all its constitutive features into its definition.

- Type A – individuals can describe what mindfulness is and practise it;
- Type B – individuals can describe what mindfulness is but do not practise it;
- Type C – individuals cannot describe what mindfulness is but practise it;
- Type D – individuals cannot describe what mindfulness is and do not practise it.

The Type A approach characterises individuals who can define the concept of mindfulness, provide examples, and practise it in their daily lives. Mindfulness is defined as:

*[...] an intentional focus on what is happening, while refraining from judging the experiences in a given situation. (Edyta)*

*[...] thinking about mindfulness, an example that comes to my mind is walking down the street and being aware of what is happening around [...]. We can notice the types of people around us, what is happening around us, any ongoing construction or not, or who is honking. Basically, we are able to focus our attention on the surroundings and, besides the fact that we can see it, we are able to encode it in our minds and recall it later. (Matylda)*

The students largely refer to their current emotional states, focus on self-experience, and emphasise the importance of the external environment, observing and concentrating on the world around them.

*When I leave the faculty building, I can feel a breeze and immediately feel refreshed. I focus closely on what is going on around me, [...] for example, when I visited my mum yesterday, I felt uncomfortable in her apartment. I wondered what it was and what was wrong. It turned out that the clock had stopped. (Ewelina)*

*I pay very close attention to what is happening inside me and to my emotions, and I can name them. Even when interacting with friends, I always try to articulate my emotions to better understand them. It's not like I'm angry just because I'm angry and I stomp my foot, but I want to accurately describe what is happening to me at that moment. When these emotions arise, I accept them and contemplate what they are. (Halina)*

The Type A approach, therefore, is characterised by respondents who emphasise the importance of their own cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement. Mindfulness accompanies them in both educational and personal contexts.

In the Type B narrative, respondents define the concept of mindfulness in their own words:

*Mindfulness is about noticing different things, such as smell, sound, and so on. (Aleksandra)*

*It's like following the present, like being here and now. (Agnieszka)*

The respondents believe that mindfulness is important in life; however, they do not make any effort to practise it. Simply being aware of this phenomenon is sufficient to them.

*For me, it's enough to know what mindfulness is about. I don't practise it; I don't feel the need for it. (Elżbieta)*

*It's about noticing what surrounds us and what is happening around us at a given moment. It's about the ability to not only observe, but also analyse and encode these experiences somewhere in our minds. However, this requires a significant amount of self-work. One day, I'll definitely get around to it. (Agata)*

It may thus be concluded that the respondents consciously forgo self-observation and the observation of external circumstances, even though they do not deny their importance. This may result from the students prioritising the realisation of developmental tasks associated with early adulthood at this moment.

Respondents who practise mindfulness but cannot name it represent the Type C approach. These individuals have extensive experience in applying mindfulness and may have been practising it for so long that it has become a habit:

*[...] since I can remember, when I get nervous, I count to ten, take ten deep breaths, and then reflect on my emotions. It's not about managing these feelings, but about knowing them, being aware of their presence, and embracing them. (Maria)*

*In general, I like to reflect on what is happening within me. I enjoy observing myself, the thoughts and emotions that come to my mind. They simply are what they are, and I embrace them. (Antonina)*

Mindfulness is present in various daily situations:

*[...] we see the sky, and for an average person it is blue, but for us, it has five different shades of blue. Or when the wind blows, it moves every strand of my hair, and I can feel these waves of gust. I always focus on what is happening around me, and I always pay attention to the people nearby because I really enjoy observing them. I'm curious about how they look and how they behave. I really like focusing on such things, but I also enjoy observing myself and the way I breathe. (Julia)*

The respondents, while consciously observing their own internal sensations coming from the mind and body, as well as external factors, are not familiar with the theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness. They tend to associate its practice with meditation, relaxation, and yoga exercises.

Students representing Type D do not understand the concept of mindfulness and do not practise it. During the interview, all of them attempted to define mindful presence, with some formulating their own terms or referring to familiar concepts that were similar to mindfulness in meaning. The following statements were categorised as Type D:

*[...] a signal flowing into our consciousness about what is happening to us, a sort of reflection. Sometimes I think about why I acted this way or why I said something like that. It was completely unnecessary. (Joanna)*

*I associate mindfulness with the ability to reflect on what I'm doing. Very often, I lose myself in thought; for example, I miss my stop on the underground because I'm absorbed in my own world. I'm supposed to get off at the Centre, but end up at Młociny, the last station. This often happens to me, especially when I start to organise step by step in my head what I need to do to ensure everything goes right. (Bożena)*

Although the respondents attempt to provide their own definitions of mindfulness, they primarily identify it with reflection, seeing it as a necessary means to plan their day. All statements are further linked by an evaluation of behaviour, leading to the conclusion that they do not understand the concept of mindfulness in its original sense.

In summary, the respondents treat mindfulness as an exercise aimed at personal development rather than as an internalised state of mind. They thus assign a pragmatic dimension to mindfulness, viewing it instrumentally as a practice for enhancing self-regulation of attention and for developing openness, curiosity, and acceptance of the contemporary world. Referring to the observations of Stanisław Radoń (2014), who notes a twofold understanding of mindfulness as both a trait and a state, it can be concluded that the respondents perceive mindfulness not as a trait – target quality of life – influenced by environmental factors, education, and genetic predisposition, but rather as a state of mental presence manifested through various meditation techniques.

## Conclusions

This paper presents a typology of approaches towards mindfulness, offering an initial, working framework for understanding mindfulness from the perspectives of its definition and application. The analyses are based on selected excerpts from the conducted interviews. In its present form, the typology serves to structure thinking about mindfulness, and it does not aspire to provide a basis for broad generalisations. However, it offers certain guidelines for incorporating mindfulness into practice.

Individuals who understand and practise mindfulness in their personal lives appear to have the greatest potential for working with others at this stage in their lives. From an educational perspective, they could benefit from workshops designed to enhance their skills. On the other hand, respondents who practise mindful presence but are unable to define it, could be invited to participate in a series of lectures on the subject. Additionally, they could further enhance their mindfulness through practical training sessions. For individuals who do not practise mindfulness but are able to define it, it is important to highlight the benefits of conscious practice of mindfulness. They could be encouraged to participate in workshops focused on self-improvement and to deepen their own knowledge of various aspects, such as the interdependence between mental and somatic phenomena, emotional awareness, learning methods, conscious responses to external stimuli, and observation of their own experiences. Particular attention should be directed to the last group, who neither understand nor practise mindfulness. These respondents should be offered the opportunity to attend lectures, workshops, and courses to learn about the theoretical aspects of mindfulness and to practise it. Mindful presence is a category that facilitates both more effective collaboration with others and personal development. In light of the above considerations, it is worth initiating a discussion on the question: Are being mindful and practising mindfulness the same?

The post-modern fluidity and uncertainty of existence, along with economic, health, financial, and political perturbations, significantly impact the individual. The subjective, individualised experience of one's own life, often accompanied by an identity crisis, a lack of reference points for self-understanding, and, above all, the inability to give meaning to one's experiences, positions mindfulness as both a cognitive and practical category. However, despite its meditative and contemplative origins, as well as its associated methodological approaches and ideological perspectives, is it worth promoting? I believe that subjecting one's own opinions to critical reflection, including the practice of mindfulness, is becoming a defining feature of modernity.

It appears that being mindful is increasingly essential in contemporary times. Conscious and in-depth self-development, understood within a social context, enables individuals to maintain a distance from reality and reduces the risk of becoming overwhelmed by it. Mindfulness allows individuals to be present with themselves, within themselves, and along-



side themselves. The practice of mindfulness develops the ability to construct one's identity and create one's own biography. It facilitates profound reflection on the methods used to form one's subjectivity, enabling individuals to navigate skilfully between contexts and to assimilate the effort of existence, as Paul Ricoeur (2003) describes. However, there is a risk that mindfulness may become a fad, potentially reinforcing the culture of individualism. Continued self-reflection can isolate individuals from others, leading them to focus exclusively on the individual dimension of existence. This can, in turn, contribute to the relativisation and diminution of community and public objectives.

In conclusion, it is essential to undertake diligent academic efforts to understand and practice mindfulness, and thus ensure that it becomes a category encompassing both individual and social developmental possibilities.

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