



AWAKE TO WISDOM

CENTRE FOR MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS RESEARCH

NOTTINGHAM  
TRENT UNIVERSITY 

# Mindfulness at Work

Trent Occupational Medicine Symposium

Ven William Van Gordon

6<sup>th</sup> October 2016



# Overview

- About Ven William Van Gordon
  - What is mindfulness?
  - The evidence
  - Understanding the evidence
  - Issues and risks
  - Second-generation mindfulness-based interventions
  - Meditation Awareness Training
  - Integrating mindfulness into the workplace
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# About Ven William Van Gordon

- Operations Director, *Awake to Wisdom Centre for Meditation & Mindfulness Research*
  - Research Psychologist, *Nottingham Trent University*
  - Operations Director, *Bodhayati School of Buddhism*
  - 100+ academic publications on mindfulness and meditation
  - 2 books (plus 1 in press) on mindfulness in last 12 months
  - Editorial Board: *Mindfulness, Mindfulness & Compassion, International Journal of Buddhism, Annals of Yoga & Physical Therapy*
  - Buddhist monk for over 10 years (including higher ordination in Theravada tradition)
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# Mindfulness: A Bourgeoning of Interest

- One of the fastest growing areas of psychological research:
  - 700 scientific mindfulness articles in 2015 - more than the total number between 1970 and 2000 (Van Gordon et al., 2015)
- 72% of GPs in the UK believe that patients can derive health benefits from practising mindfulness and meditation (Mental Health Foundation, 2010)
- Over 80% of British adults believe that their health can be improved by learning to be more mindful (Ibid)



# Mindfulness: A Bourgeoning of Interest

- Advocated by the *National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (UK)* & the *American Psychiatric Association* for the treatment of recurrent depression in adults (MBCT)
- Advocated by the *Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists* as a non-first-line treatment for binge eating disorder in adults



# Mindfulness: A Bourgeoning of Interest

Apple

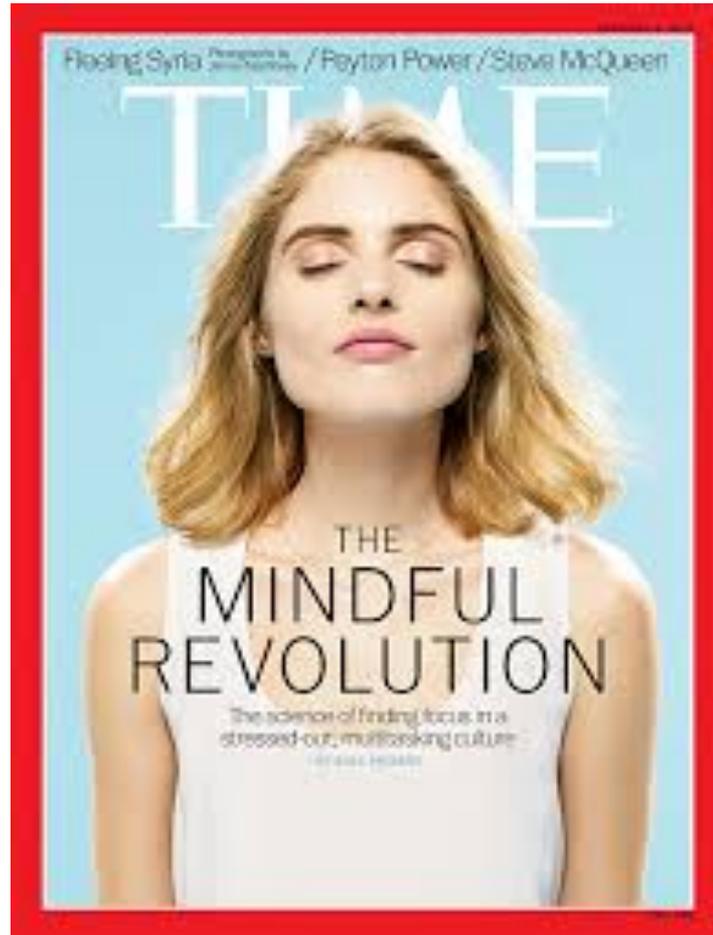
Target

General Mills

Google

Carlsberg

Transport  
for London



Sony Corporation

Ikea

Nike

Procter & Gamble

AOL

Goldman Sachs

Monsanto

# What is Mindfulness?



# What is Mindfulness?

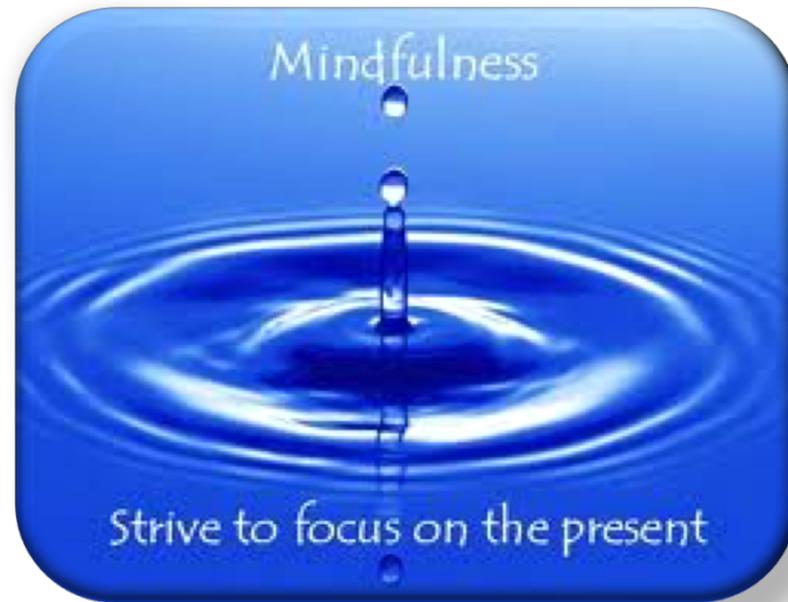
- Mindfulness
- Mindlessness
- ‘Mindwithness’



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(Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2015)

# What is Mindfulness?



“Do not pursue the past. Do not lose yourself in the future. The past is history. The future yet to come. Looking deeply at life as it is in the here and now, the practitioner dwells, unshaken, and free in heart. We must be diligent today, as death may strike tomorrow. For there is no bargaining with the lord of death”

(The Buddha, 500 BCE)

# Mindfulness and Mindlessness

Hallucination = “*the perceiving of that which is not*”

Mindlessness = A form of inverted hallucination: “*the non-perceiving of that which is*”



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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014)

# First-Generation Mindfulness-Based Interventions

*“Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”*



“Mindfulness is not a spiritual practice”

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(Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2015)

# Second-Generation Mindfulness-Based Interventions

*“The full, direct, and active awareness of experienced phenomena that is: (i) spiritual in aspect, and (ii) maintained from one moment to the next”*



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(Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016)

# Mindfulness: Some Wrong Ideas

We do not have to go to the Himalayas to practise mindfulness



We do not have to sit with legs folded

We can practise in any position and anywhere:



# Mindfulness: The Evidence

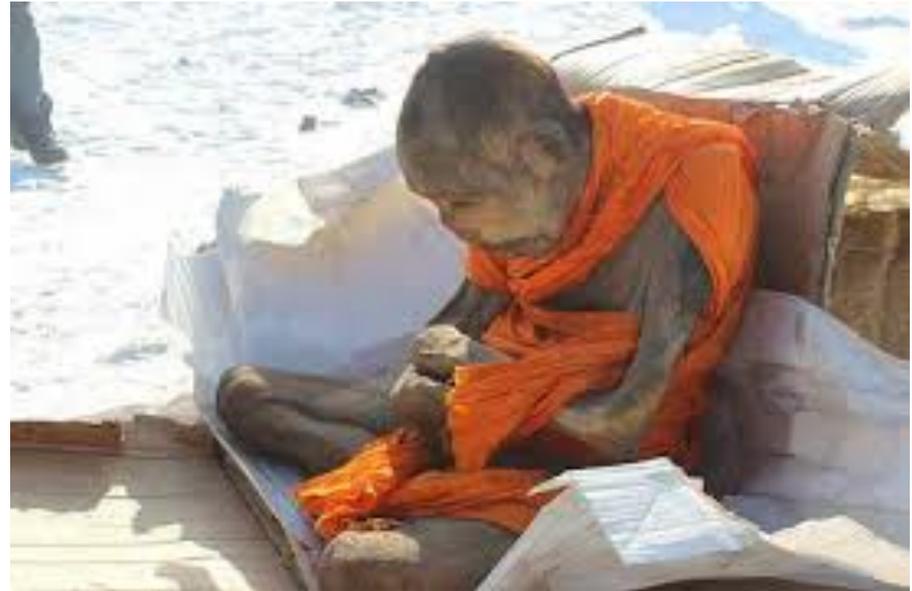
- Effect sizes typically in the strong range for the treatment of mood and anxiety disorders (i.e.,  $d \sim 0.8$ ) (Hofmann et al., 2010; Vollestad, 2012)
- Effect sizes typically in the moderate range for the treatment of somatic illnesses (Arias et al., 2006; Grossman et al., 2004)
- Claims that 8 weeks of mindfulness training can induce meditative insights that are typically only experienced by advanced meditation practitioners (Grabovac, 2014)
- Claims that mindfulness can create an enlightened workplace (the Trojan Horse metaphor)
- Claims that we are currently experiencing a mindful revolution!

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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015)

# A Dilemma

The traditional Buddhist view is that sustainable improvements to health and wellbeing typically require daily mindfulness practice over a period of many years (i.e., they do not arise after attending just eight weekly classes of a few hours duration)



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(Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2015)

# Mindfulness: Understanding the Evidence

Recently commissioned by the *British Medical Journal* to provide an opinion on whether the evidence matches the momentum.

- Most meta-analysis of mindfulness have included uncontrolled trials and RCTs with an inactive control condition
- Effect sizes fall to the small-to-moderate range when only RCTs with active control conditions are included

The logo for the British Medical Journal (BMJ), consisting of the letters 'BMJ' in a large, blue, serif font.

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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015b)

# Mindfulness: Understanding the Evidence

- Meta analysis including 37 RCTs of mindfulness-based interventions (each with active control conditions):  $d = 0.33$  (Goyal et al., 2014)
- Equal to using anti-depressants in a primary-care population, but without the observed toxicity
- Except for depression, anxiety and chronic pain, there is currently insufficient high quality evidence to support the wide scale implementation of mindfulness into applied settings, including the workplace



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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015)

# A Popularity Effect?

- Outcomes may be influenced by participants' belief that they are receiving a fashionable/proven psychotherapeutic technique
- This is a difficult confounding variable to control for because it is almost impossible to blind patients from the fact they are utilising therapeutic mindfulness techniques



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(Van Gordon, Shonin, Lomas, & Griffiths, 2016)

# Are There Any Risks?

- Few studies have specifically sought to assess risks
- Increased false-memory susceptibility following mindfulness (Wilson et al., 2015)
- Some techniques (e.g., meditative breathing, transcendental meditation, qigong) that use mindfulness have resulted in:

- Panic attacks, anti-social behaviour, impaired reality testing, dissociation, musculoskeletal pain, suicidal feelings, psychotic episodes, exhaustion



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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015)

# Are There Any Risks?

- Meditation addiction (Shonin et al., 2014a, 2015d; Van Gordon et al., 2016a)
- Cautionary notes in the traditional Buddhist literature:
  - Asociality
  - Nihilistic and defeatist outlooks
  - Dependency on meditative ‘bliss’ (Skt: *prīti*)
  - Engaging in compassionate activity beyond one’s spiritual capacity
  - Trapped ‘spiritual wind’ (Tib: *lung*) – a possible consequence of forced/incorrect breathing



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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015)

# Are There Any Risks?

- Cautionary notes in the Traditional Buddhist literature:
  - Spiritual addiction – a form of self-deception in which meditation increases ego-attachment
  - Too mindful: *“A personality affectation whereby an individual makes excessive efforts to master the art of appearing to ‘be mindful’ (e.g., adopting an overly-pious demeanour, constant/inappropriate smiling, etc.) without actually having any presence of mind.”*



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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015)

# Other Issues: Teaching Mindfulness

- Qualitative findings have shown that participants respond more favourably when they feel the mindfulness instructor is able to impart an authentic-embodied transmission of the mindfulness teachings
- Important because there is growing concern that some MBI instructors may lack the necessary experience to teach mindfulness



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(Van Gordon, Shonin, Lomas, & Griffiths, 2016)

# Other Issues: What infrastructure is required to effectively integrate mindfulness into the workplace?

- To introduce employees to authentic mindfulness, an indispensable requirement is an authentic mindfulness teacher
- All other considerations (e.g., type of mindfulness intervention, program length, protected time for employees, space designation, amount of instructor-participant contact time, range of meditation techniques employed, change management initiatives, etc.) are of lesser importance.



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(Van Gordon, Shonin, Lomas, & Griffiths, 2016)

# Other Issues: 'Inner change' versus changes to 'external' working conditions

- Claims of a corporate rhetoric that 'stress is in the mind'
- Believing that 'inner change' induced by mindfulness can cause immunity to toxic work conditions is unrealistic
- In reality, 'external changes' to human resource management systems will always be required (e.g., flexible work schemes, innovative appraisal and reward systems, etc.)

# Other Issues

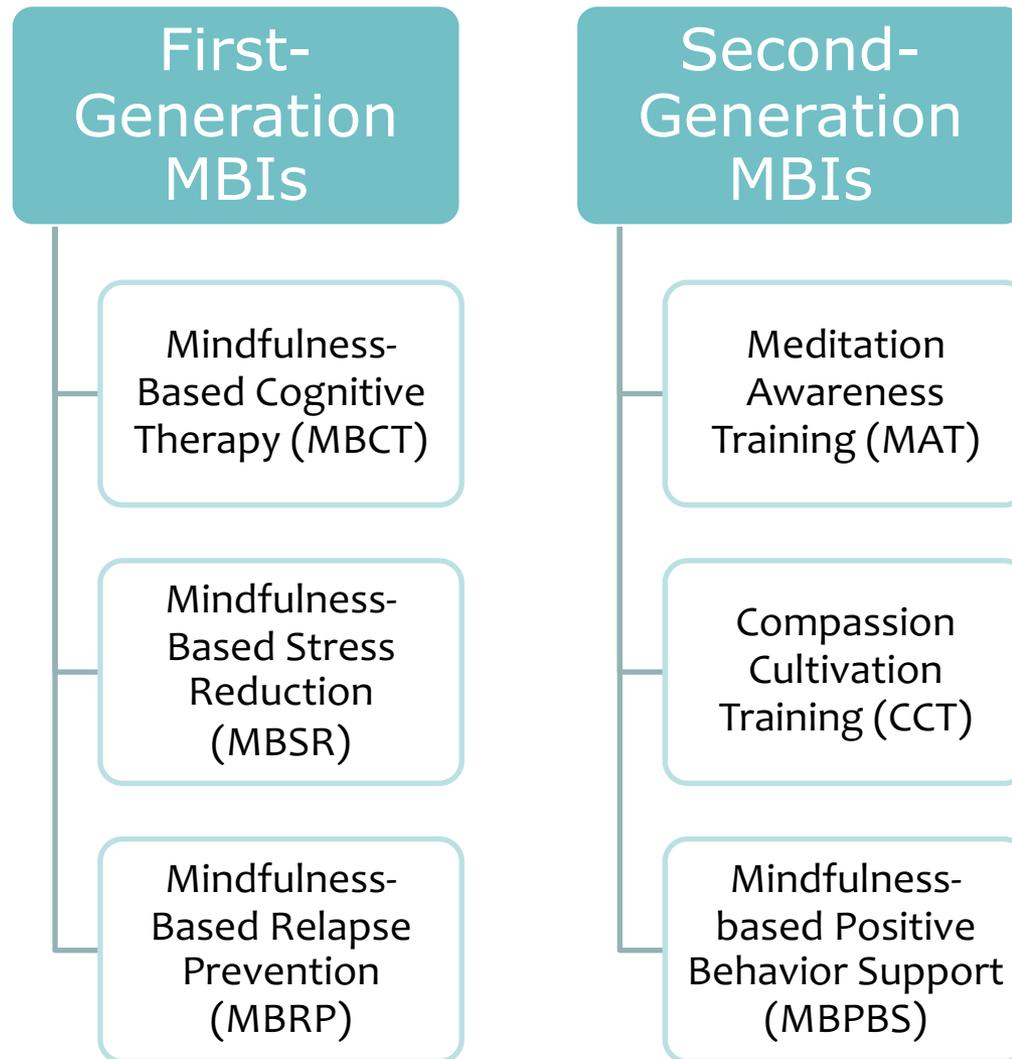
- Are we propagating ‘McMindfulness’?
- Can mindfulness still be called mindfulness?
- Do we need to take the ‘spiritual’ out of mindfulness?
- Has mindfulness been reduced to an attention-based psychological technique?



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(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015)

# Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)



(Van Gordon et al., 2016)

# Second-Generation MBIs



## Second- Generation MBIs

- Greater range of meditative/spiritual techniques
- Overtly spiritual in nature
- Ethics is often explicitly taught
- Instructor training typically requires several years of supervised practice
- Generally secular but greater use of Buddhist principles

(Van Gordon et al., 2016)

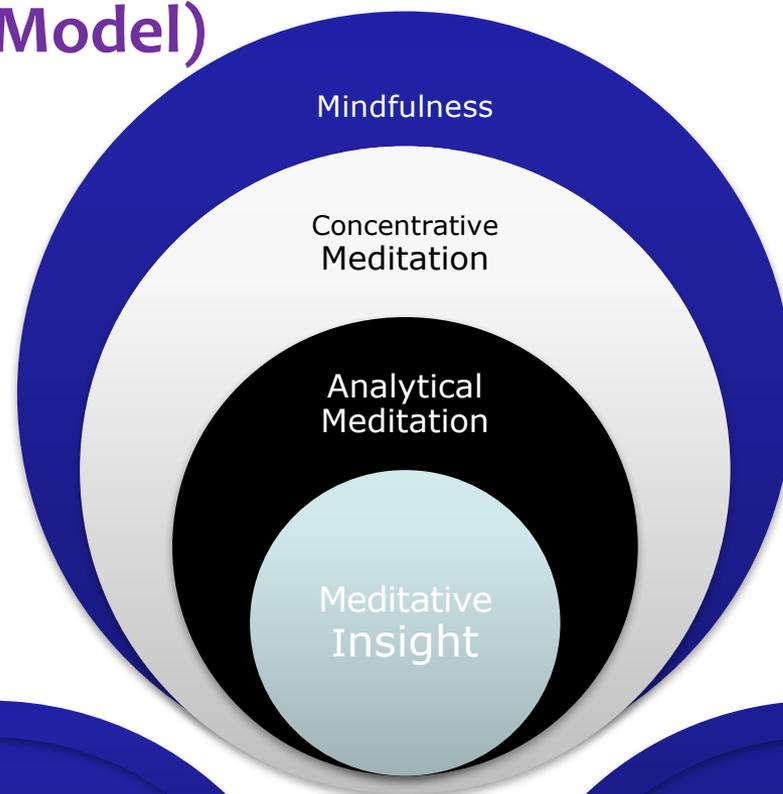
# Meditation Awareness Training (MAT)

1. Mindfulness
  2. Meditation
  3. Spiritual aptitude
  4. Self-practice: guided meditation CD & support materials
  5. One-to-one therapeutic support sessions (x2)
  6. Three year instructor training program
- 8 weekly full-group sessions (2-hours)
- Guided meditation & mindfulness exercises
- Seminars, discussion, group work

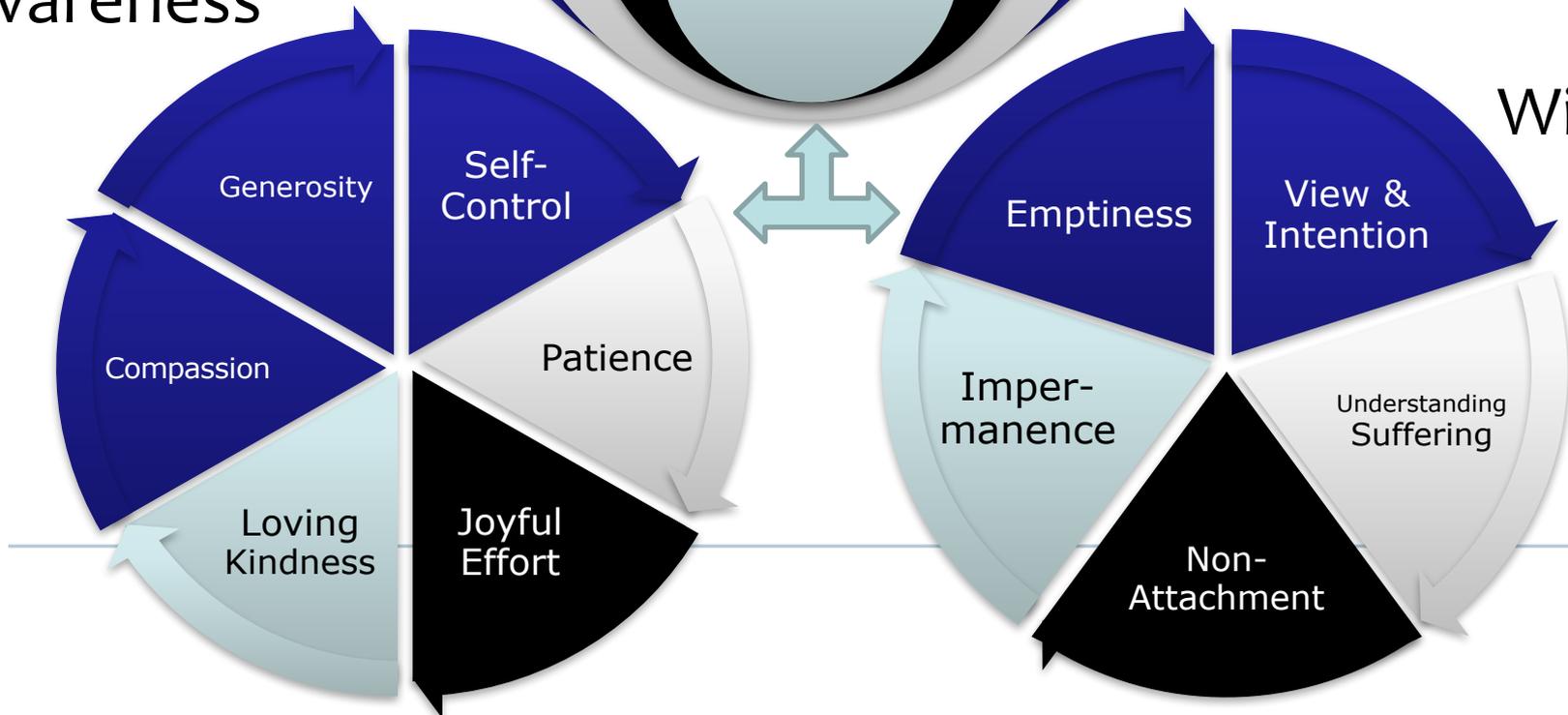
# (MAT: Detailed Model)

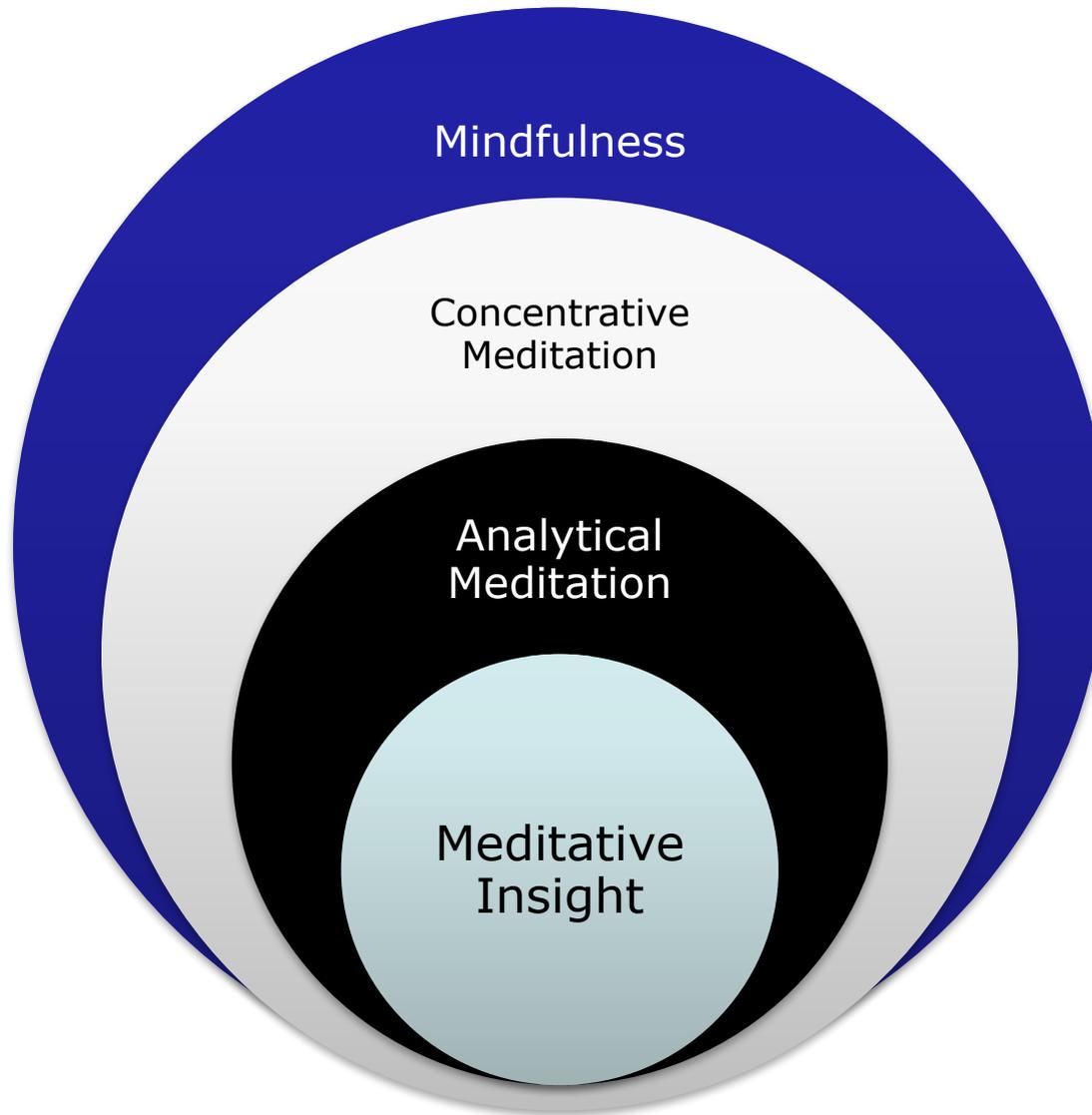
(Shonin & Van Gordon, 2016)

Ethical  
Awareness



Wisdom



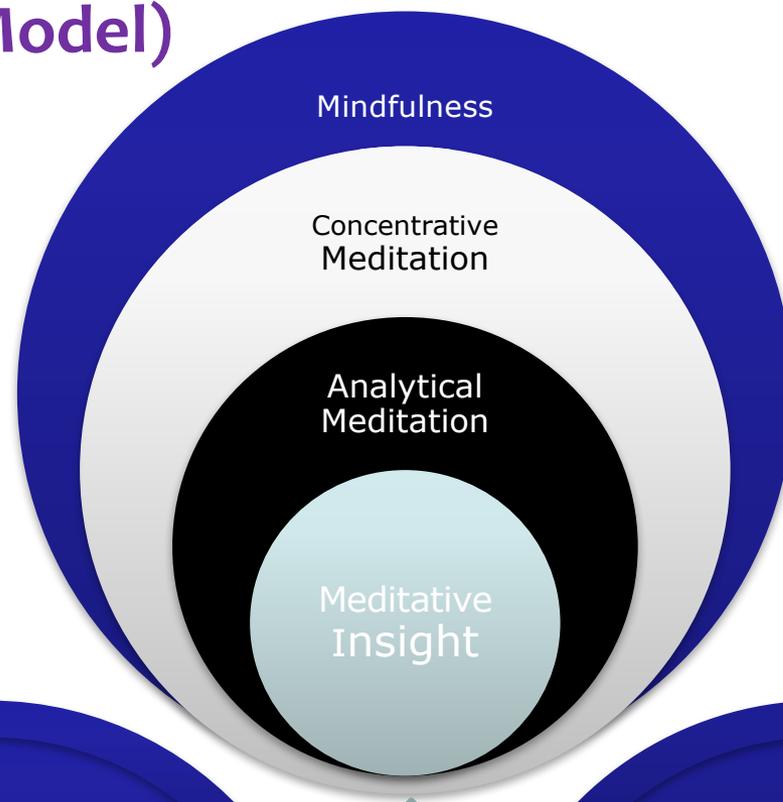


## Meditation

# (MAT: Detailed Model)

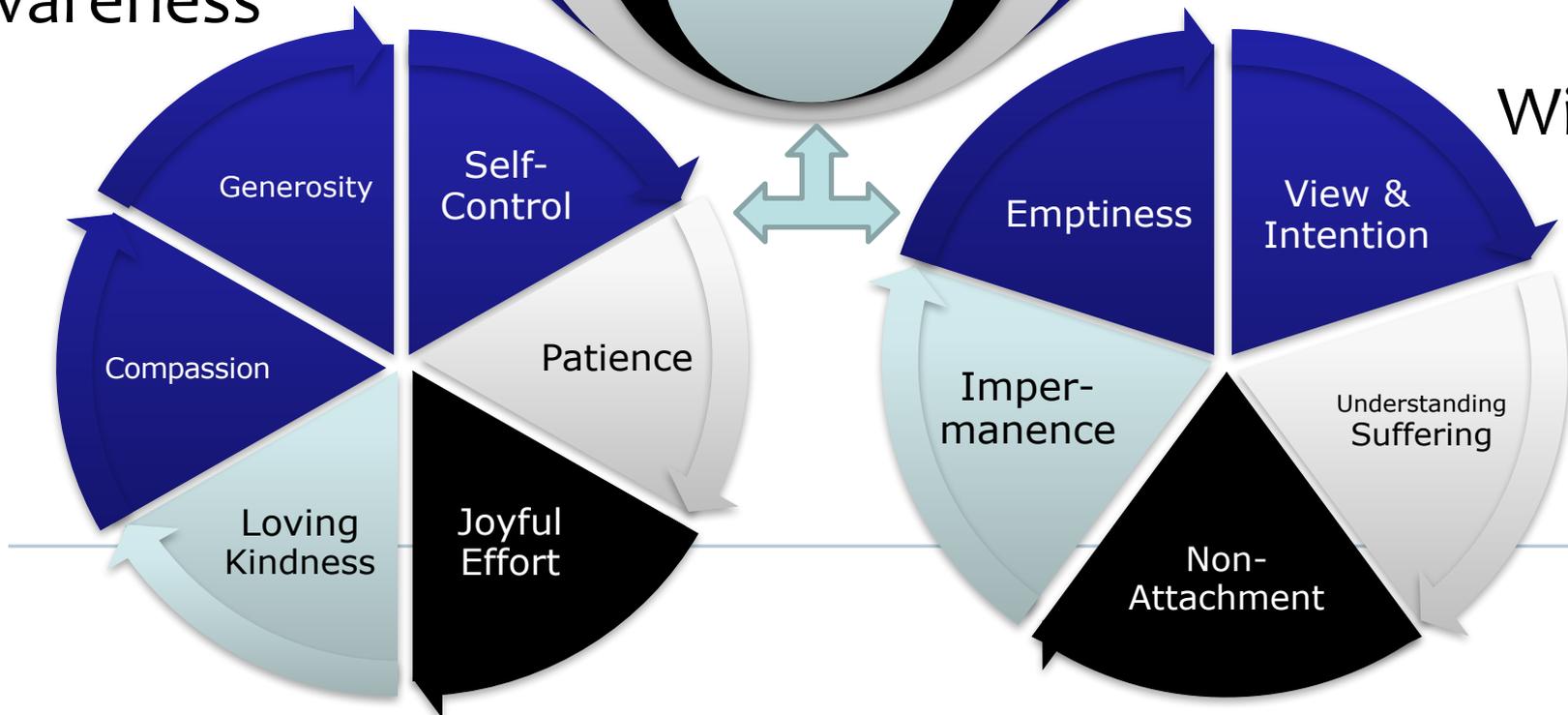
(Shonin & Van Gordon, 2016)

Ethical  
Awareness



Meditation

Wisdom



# MAT: Some Findings

Randomised controlled trial:

- Middle managers ( $n=122$ )
- CONSORT guided
- Active control condition

MAT significant improvements over control:

- Work-related stress
- Job satisfaction
- Psychological distress
- Job performance

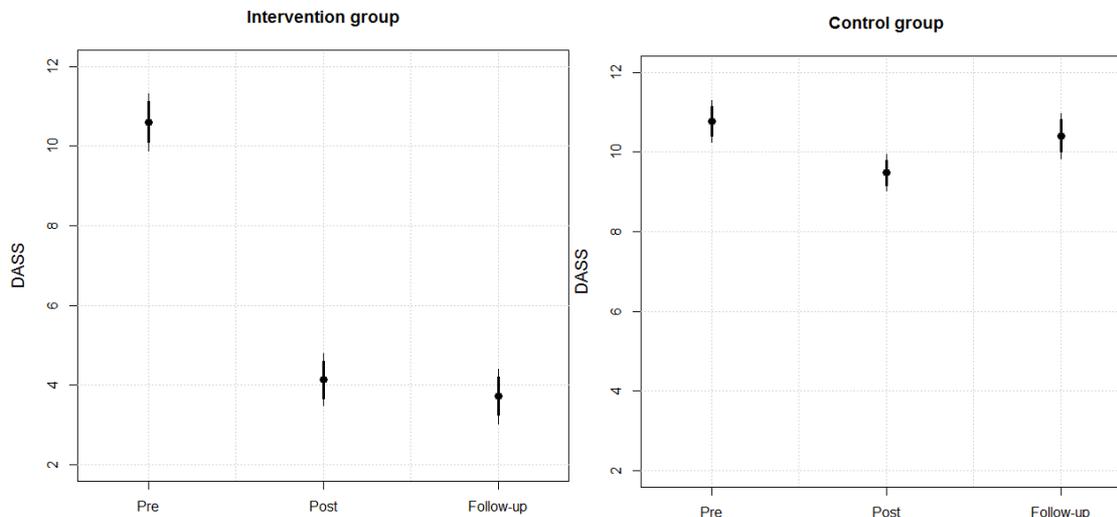


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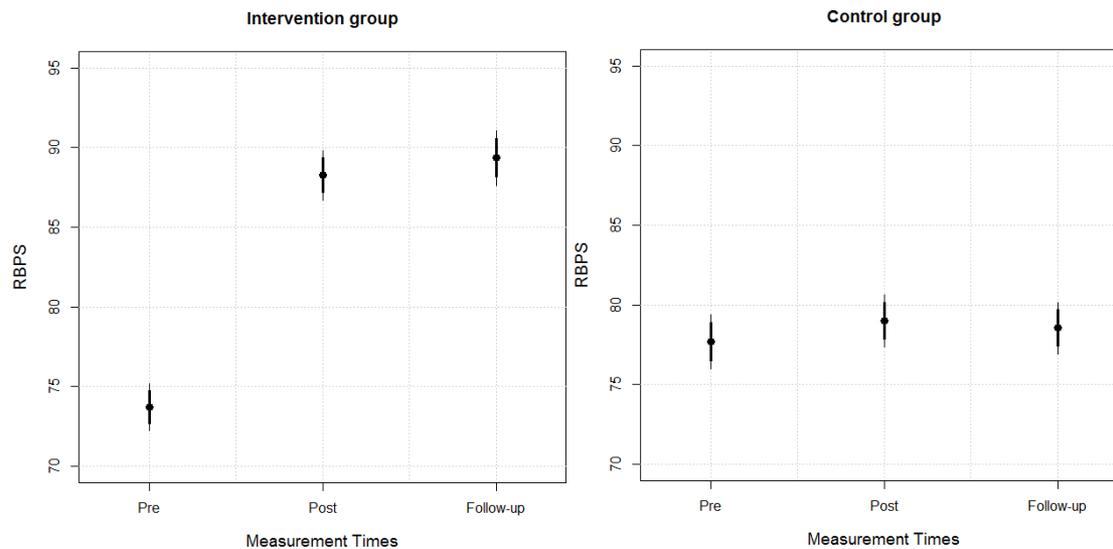
(Shonin & Van Gordon, et al., 2015)

# MAT: Some Findings

Psychological  
Distress



Job  
Performance



(Shonin & Van Gordon, et al., 2015)

# MAT: Some Findings

Embedded qualitative study arm:

- **Growth in spiritual awareness**

- Change in life and work perspective
- ‘Phenomena Feedback Effect’

*“When you look at work as a place to grow as a person and spiritually, every work encounter becomes important. You start to take pride in everything you do – even if its how you respond to a rollicking by the boss. You feel in charge of your life and you start to feel alive ... Instead of the employer being in control, you’re in control; but its a win-win situation”. (Participant 4)*

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(Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015)

# Phenomena Feedback Effect

*“It’s as if [meditation] helps you to talk and communicate with situations around you. I don’t mean talking with words, but there starts to be a tacit understanding between you and the situation you’re in ... It’s as though the situation is on your side, even if it’s a tough situation.” (Participant 6)*

*“You begin to sense how things have to unfold. You become aware of the conditions around you ... it’s as though things happen ‘deliberately by accident’. Almost like reality has a sense of humour at the ultimate level. And you can play and dance with it if you’re tuned in enough”. (Participant 7)*

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(Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015b)

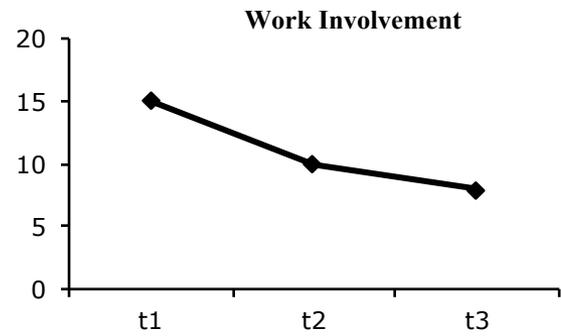
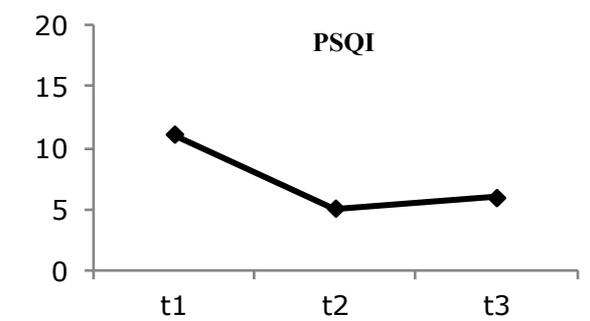
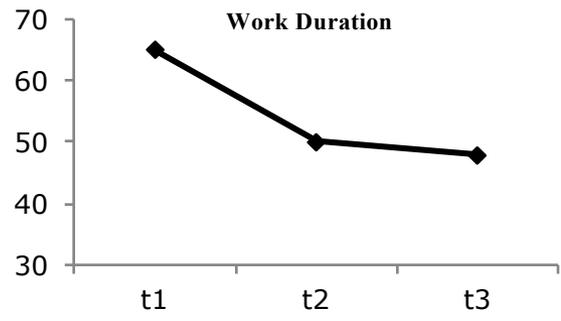
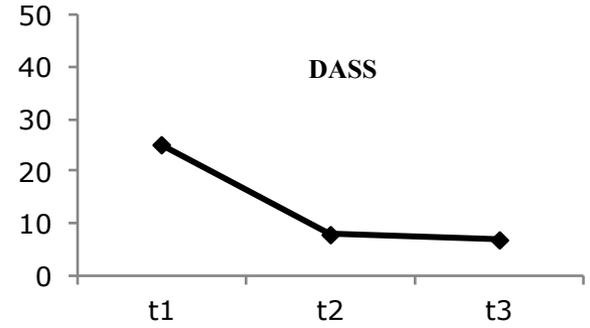
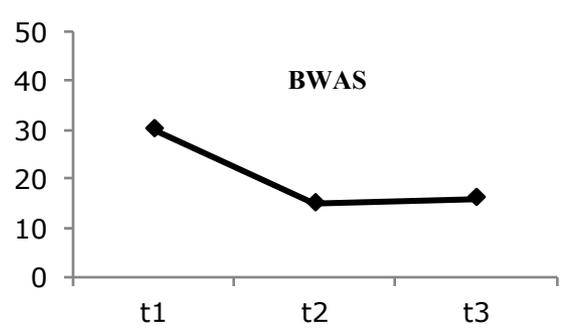
# MAT: Some Findings

Clinical case study:

- Director of a blue chip technology company (male)
- £80,000/annum
- Symptoms of work addiction

Qualitative outcomes:

*“Meditation centres the mind and helps you see more angles...but it also helps you see the human in people”*



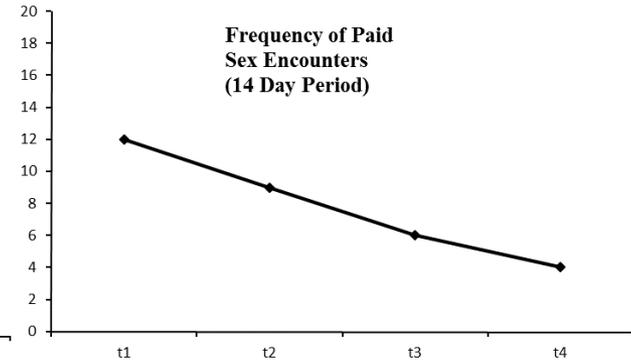
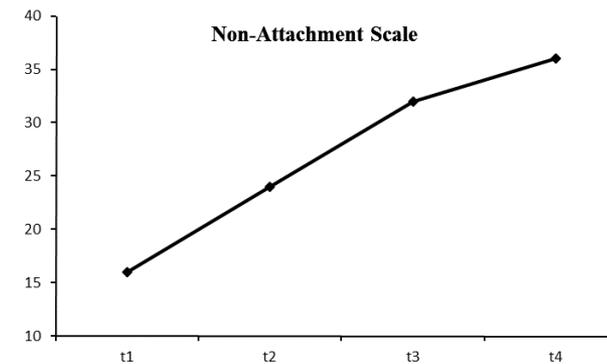
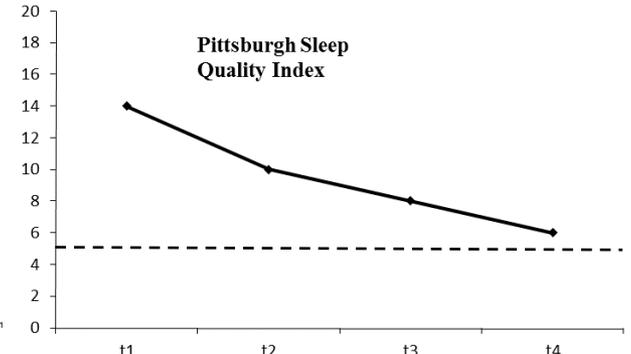
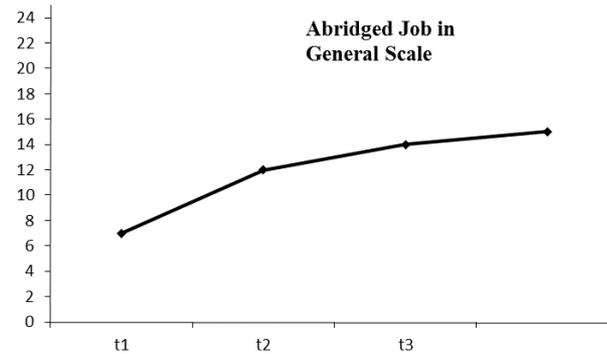
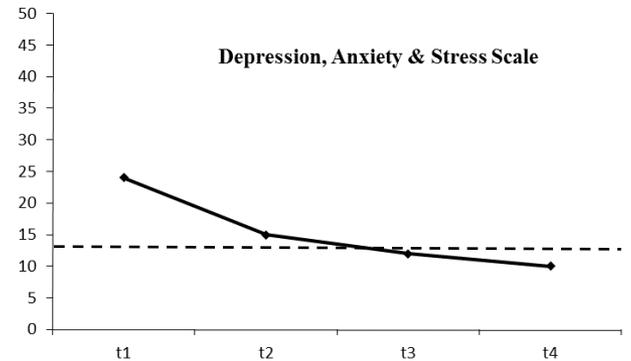
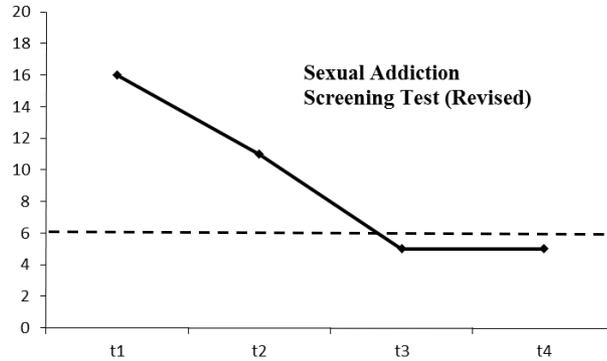
(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014)



# MAT: Some Findings

Clinical case study:

- Male
- Sex addiction

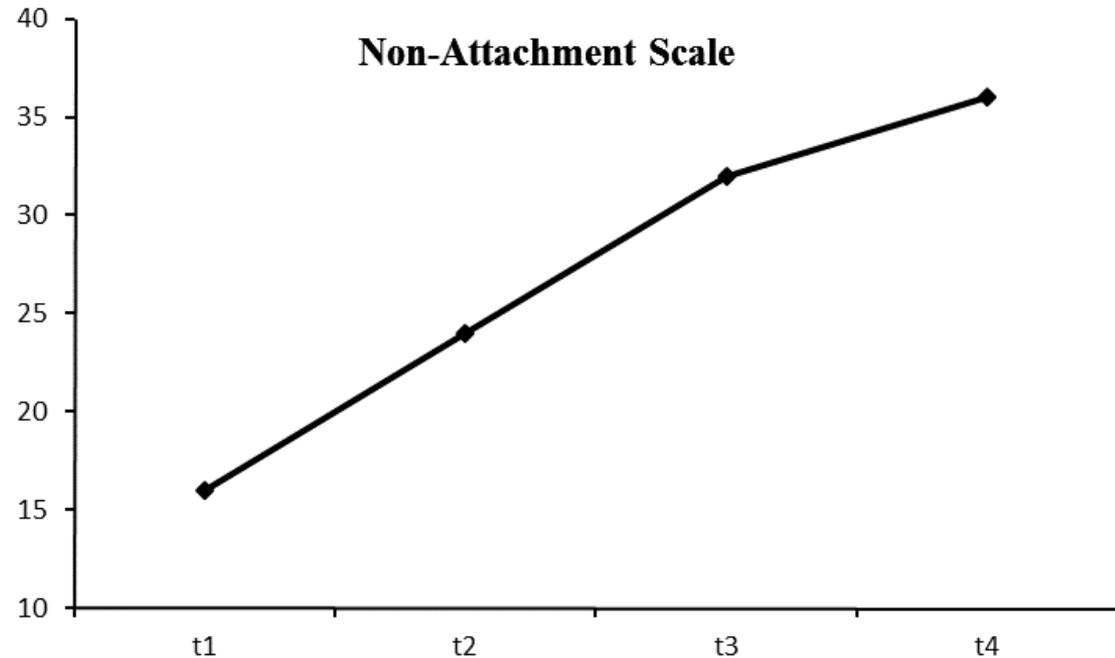


(Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016)

# MAT: Some Findings

Clinical case study:

- Male
- Sex addiction



*Non-Attachment Scale* (Sahdra et al., 2010, 2015) is based on a Buddhist model of mental illness and assesses attachment to psychological, social, and material phenomena (as well as attachment to ‘self’).

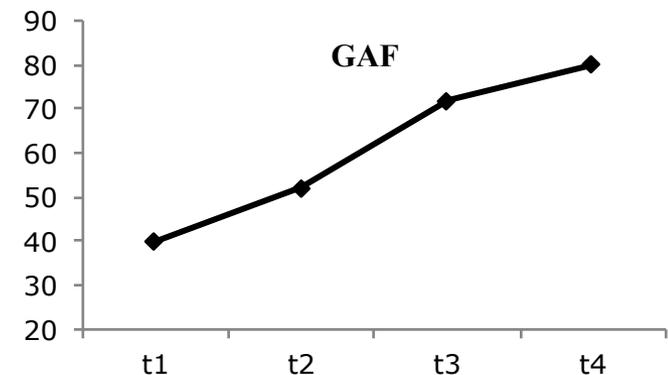
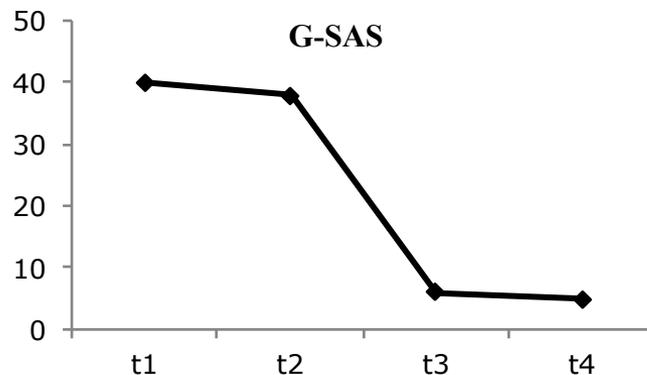
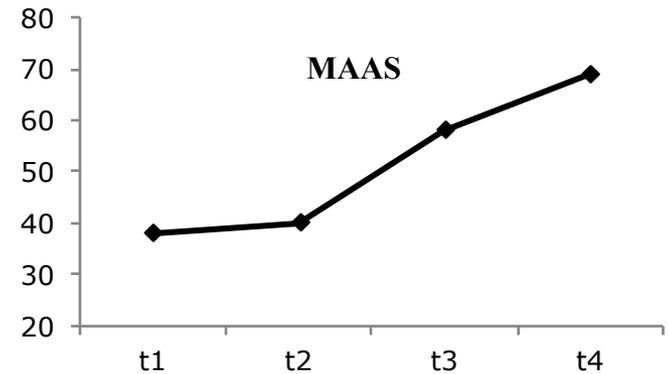
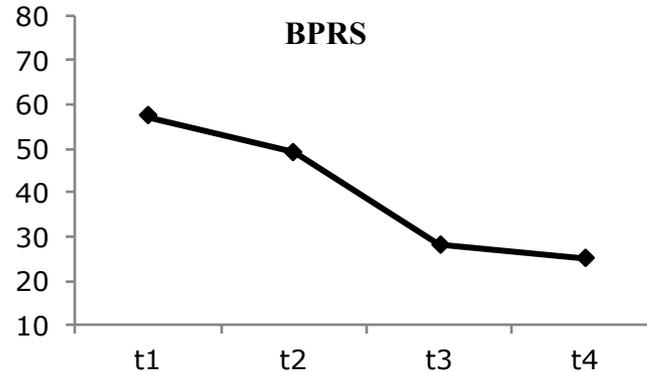
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(Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016)

# MAT: Some Findings

Clinical case study:

- Female
- Co-occurring pathological gambling with schizophrenia



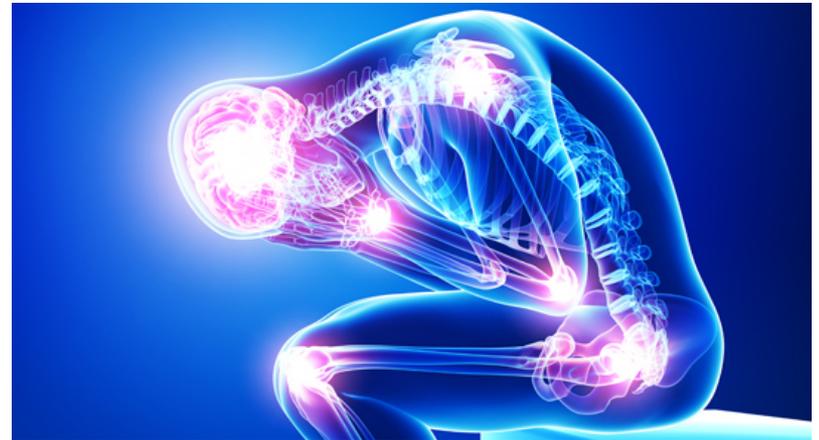
Qualitative outcomes: *‘Meditation makes me understand that thoughts and feelings have to dissolve. So I just relax the mind and don’t hold on; then they start to go away on their own’.*

(Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014)

# MAT: Some Findings

Randomised controlled trial:

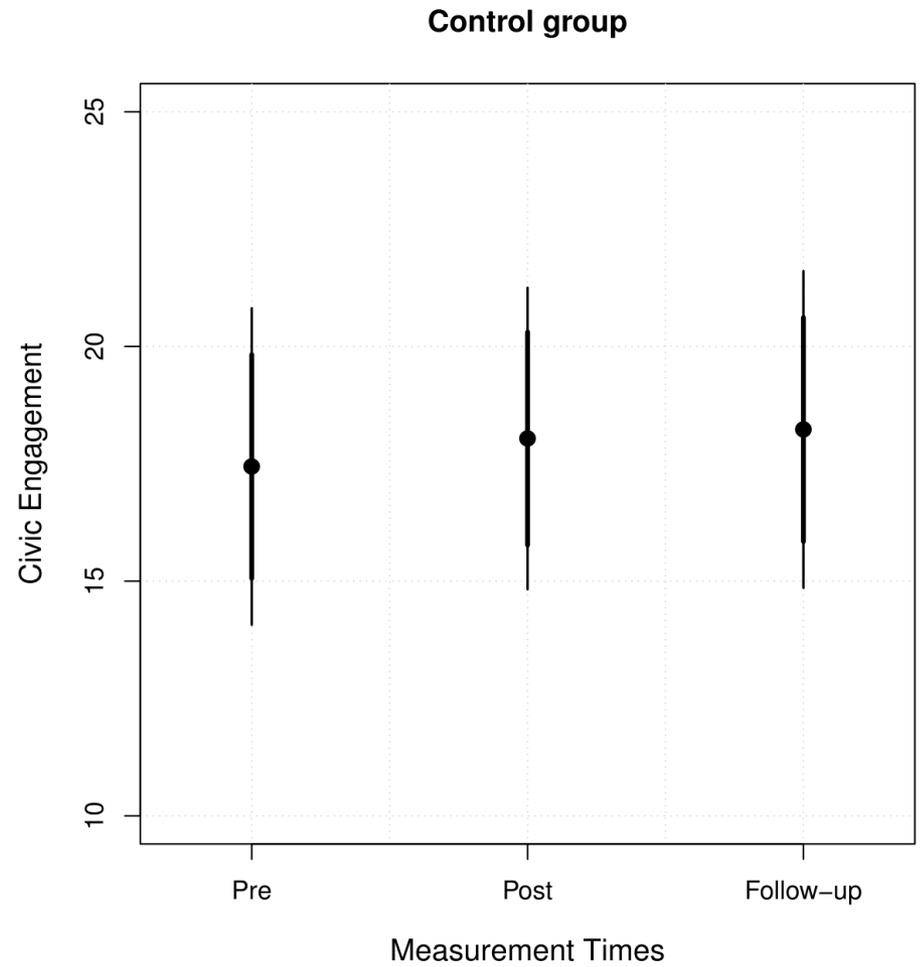
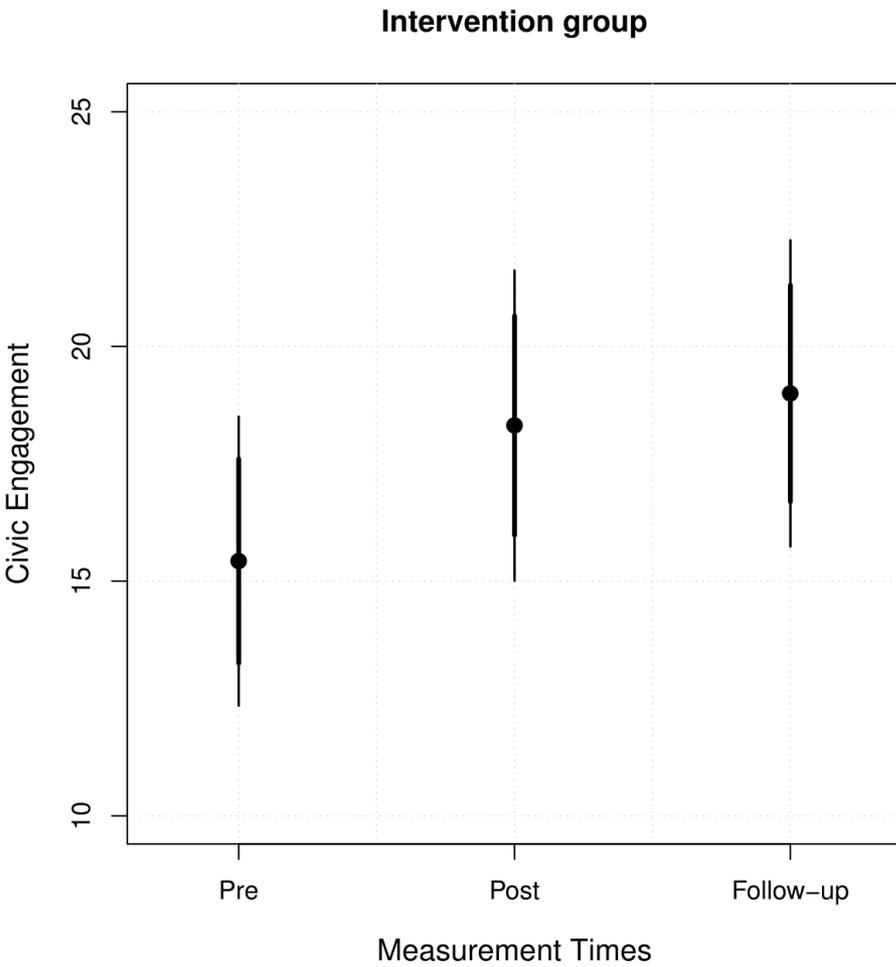
- Fibromyalgia patients ( $n=148$ )
- Active control condition
- Consort guided
- Significant improvements with moderate-large effect sizes ( $d > 0.6$ ):
  - Fibromyalgia symptoms
  - Pain
  - Sleep quality
  - Depression, anxiety, & Stress
  - **Civic engagement**
  - **Non-attachment**



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(Van Gordon et al., 2016)

# MAT: Some Findings



(Van Gordon et al., 2016)

# MAT: Some Findings

Fibromyalgia qualitative arm outcomes (n = 10):

- Civic Engagement

*“I’ve recently taken a job at [employer redacted]. It’s been 3 years since I’ve worked but I’m getting back into it. I’m really enjoying it ... I take lots of breaks. I pace myself ... [but] I hope I haven’t jumped in too soon ... I’m just going with the flow. It’s such a relief”*

(Participant 4)

*“I’ve gone back to my old job. I’m taking it easy, just three afternoons [each week] at the moment ... It feels good to give something. And it’s good to get paid too. I hope I don’t go back to how I was. I can’t go back there. This meditation is keeping me afloat”* (Participant 5)

# Second-Generation MBIs: Mechanisms of Mindfulness

- Same as first-generation MBIs:
  - Greater perceptual distance from maladaptive cognitive processes
  - Observing thoughts and feelings as passing phenomena
  - Reductions in autonomic and psychological arousal
- But also:
  - Increased spirituality
  - Letting go of ‘me, mine, and I’
  - Civic engagement, organisational citizenship, perceptive clarity & decision making aptitude



inner calm  
outer change

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(Shonin et al., 2015; Van Gordon et al., 2015)

# Integrating Mindfulness into the Workplace

## Objection

1. I don't have time to practice

2. I can practise when I sit in meditation but I forget at all other times

3. My mind is too distracted, I can't focus

## Response/Possible Solution

1.

2.

3.

# Integrating Mindfulness into the Workplace

## Objection

1. I don't have time to practice
2. I can practise when I sit in meditation but I forget at all other times
3. My mind is too distracted, I can't focus

## Response/Possible Solution

1. Mindfulness is a way of working, not something we have to do
2. Mindfulness reminders: watch chime, simple acronym (e.g., SOS), etc.
3. Take the distracted mind as the object of concentration, or try counting the breath

# Concluding Thoughts

- Allowing employees to make an informed decision as to whether mindfulness is right for them is a good idea
- Authentic mindfulness has a role in the workplace
- However, there is a need for greater awareness amongst employers as to what:
  - Constitutes authentic mindfulness practice
  - Outcomes are realistic (i.e., steady improvements in work-related wellbeing/effectiveness)
  - Methodological factors limit the findings (i.e., to counteract scientific/media hype concerning mindfulness)
  - Health and commercial risks exist

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(Van Gordon, Shonin, Lomas, & Griffiths, 2016)

# Something to Think About

- Mindfulness is about becoming aware of the present moment
- But the present moment is continuously changing
- It never, ever, stands still
- It can be divided into infinitely smaller units of time:
  - Millisecond (one thousandth of a second)
  - Microsecond (one millionth of a second)
  - Attosecond (one quintillionth of a second)
  - Yoctosecond (one septillionth of a second)
  - Planck ( $5.4 \times 10^{-44}$  s: “shortest physically meaningful moment of time”)

# Something to Think About

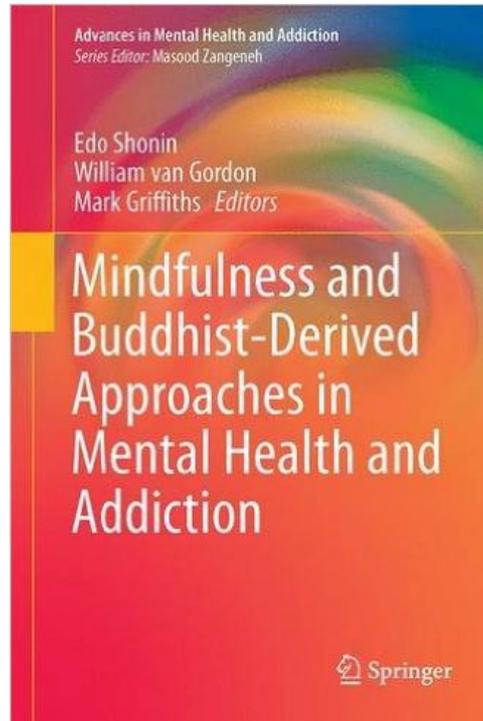
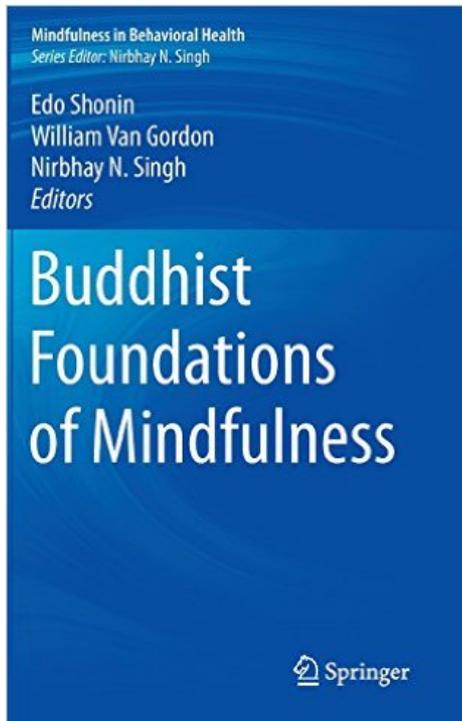
- How can a thing that never becomes static undergo change? (change implies that something changes from one state or position to another)
- Therefore, what present moment exists in order to be mindful of?



(Shonin & Van Gordon, 2013)

# Contact Details & Resources

- [william@awaketowisdom.co.uk](mailto:william@awaketowisdom.co.uk)
- [meditation@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:meditation@ntu.ac.uk)
- Meditation Practice & Research Blog: [www.edoshonin.com](http://www.edoshonin.com)



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Awareness  
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