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In the context of a counsellor in training, the cultivation of an individual’s internal resources (e.g., positive emotions, happiness, strengths, love, hope, spirituality, purpose, self-esteem and coping skills) using positive psychology interventions together with other strategies (e.g., mindfulness, meditation, professional development, supervision, peer support groups, journaling, exercise and nutrition), provides a foundation upon which students can competently monitor and manage their self-care as they prepare to enter the workforce. However, as asserted by Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan and Schure (2006):

Faculty in counseling training programs, often give voice to the importance of self-care for students during the training period, and into practice after training is completed. However, few programs address this in their curricula. (Christopher et al., 2006, p. 494)

In many cases, students are expected to develop and achieve the practice of self-care themselves. In addition, university counselling centres often have long waiting lists which results in students not being able to access help when it is most needed. In a study exploring the use of self-care strategies including ‘meditation-yoga-relaxation techniques, spirituality-religion-self-awareness, career guidance and networking’ by students undertaking a doctorate in psychology, researchers recommended the inclusion of education and training on self-care strategies in university curriculum for graduate psychology students (Goncher, Sherman, Barnett, & Haskins, 2013, p. 58).

In this article, we explore how education and training in mindfulness practices and positive psychology interventions cultivate not only self-care strategies for counselling students, but also assist them in dealing with the challenges of the therapist-client relationship. Firstly, we will provide a brief overview of mindfulness and positive psychology and how they are being utilised in the helping professions, particularly in the context of self-care and the subsequent benefits for the therapist-client relationship. Next we will provide reflections from Australian university students who participated in mindfulness activities, followed by narrative excerpts from Hong Kong counselling students who initiated a positive psychology intervention in their own lives. All excerpts were given to the author by the students after they had completed the course.

Mindfulness
The concept of mindfulness is rooted in Buddhist psychology but at the same time it is imbued with ideas from other philosophical traditions including Greek philosophy, existentialism and phenomenology from the Western tradition and transcendentalism and humanism in America (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). The application of mindfulness in a variety of settings is both well-researched and well-documented (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009; Brown et al., 2007; Snyder & Lopez, 2005; Shapiro, 2009). Brown et al. (2007) assert that mindfulness is part of a long-standing tradition ‘that recognizes the adaptive
This paper is a reflection on two studies which explored how counselling students from Hong Kong and Australia developed self-compassion, self-care and positive coping strategies, reduced their stress levels and engaged in flourishing relationships after adopting a regular practice of mindfulness through meditation, qigong, yoga or positive psychology interventions. The Hong Kong students provided written reports after implementing a positive change in their lives, while the Australian students provided reflective responses following their participation in a mindfulness practice over one semester. The reflections support the benefits of mindfulness practices and positive psychology for counsellors in training and their clients. The implications for future counselling education and training curricula are discussed.

value in bringing consciousness to bear on subjective experience, behaviour and the immediate environment’ (p. 215). Similarly, Brown and Ryan (2003) defined mindfulness as a ‘receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience’ (p. 822). Shapiro and Carlson (2009) speak of it as fundamentally ‘a way of being – a way of inhabiting one’s body, one’s mind, one’s moment-by-moment experience’ (p. 5). However, while it is an innate human capacity, the pressures and stress and stimulus of modern day life often intervene as one attempts to keep one’s head above water. For example, there were situations where Chinese students in Hong Kong in their early 20’s are caring for a parent dying of cancer and looking after smaller brothers and sisters, while other students juggle part-time jobs on top of their heavy study load and then attempt to study in the early hours of the morning. The absence of effective self-care and coping strategies can leave individuals with these life challenges feeling anxious, stressed and depressed (Christopher & Maris, 2010).

Mindfulness practices of meditation, yoga and qigong are commonly used by many people and have been reported to enhance an individual’s emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well-being (Chrisman, Christopher, & Lichtenstein, 2009; Hick, 2008; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008). In a qualitative study conducted by Chrisman et al. (2009), the master’s counselling students reported ‘feelings of relaxation and calmness’ following an in-class qigong exercise (p. 250). In another study exploring mindfulness practices, the graduate counselling students reported enhanced centeredness, energy and a sense of mind-body-emotion connection after practicing qigong (Schure et al., 2008). Similarly, other students found meditation promoted relaxation, mental clarity, ‘awareness and acceptance of emotions and personal issues’. The remaining students found yoga practices enhanced their awareness of their body and energy, ‘mental clarity and concentration’ (Schure et al., 2008, p. 49).

From a self-care perspective, education in mindfulness practices offers counsellors in training strategies they can utilise to proactively manage their health and well-being and consequently reduce the potential of stress, professional burnout (Hick, 2008; Schure et al., 2008), ‘compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatisation’ (Christopher & Maris, 2010, p. 114).

For students of counselling and psychotherapy, mindfulness and mindfulness practice are not only an important dimension but a necessity if they are to be able to form empathic relationships with clients and sit with them and consciously attend to them in a caring manner (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Hick, 2008; Shapiro & Izett, 2008). Fundamental for a therapist is the capacity to be present, to intentionally listen in a way that is non-judgmental, be accepting and receptive, in other words, be empathic (Corey, 2013; Hick, 2008). Research shows that empathy is a strong predictor of positive therapeutic outcomes (Bohart, Elliott, Greenberg, & Watson, 2002; Miller, Taylor, & West, 1980, as cited in Bien, 2008; Watson, 2002, as cited in Corey, 2013). Additionally, Carl Rogers emphasised congruence, which means the therapist needs to be aware of what he or she is feeling in order to feel with the client and consequently offer unconditional positive regard (Corey, 2013). Moreover, researchers have found that the attributes of the therapist are more highly related to the therapeutic outcome than the treatment
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model or type (Lambert & Simon, 2008). Therapist attributes including acceptance, understanding, warmth, empathy and being supportive of the client (Lambert & Simon, 2008), are attributes which can be effectively cultivated and enhanced through education, training and effective use of self-care strategies by the therapist (Bien, 2008; Lambert & Simon, 2008).

Positive psychology
The term ‘positive psychology’ was coined by Abraham Maslow in 1954 and he asserted:

‘The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side. It has revealed to us much about man’s shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height.’ (Maslow, 1954, p. 354).

In other words, positive psychology focuses on the strengths and potential of a person, the positive attributes and what is going right for a person rather than on what is wrong, with the aim of improving quality of life and well-being. Building on the ideas of Maslow and pioneers like Donald Clifton who studied human strengths and George Vaillant who studied effective coping (Diener, 2009), Martin Seligman brought positive psychology to the forefront of psychology in 1999. Positive psychology is based on four key areas which relate to ‘well-being, happiness, positive emotions and character strengths’ (Donaldson 2011, p. 5-6). More specifically, Fredrickson and Kurtz (2011) assert that positive emotions contribute to the broadening and building of a person’s attention and thinking resulting in improved individual growth and awareness, mindfulness of the present moment, ability to deal with challenges, ability to adapt and be flexible in social relationships and situations, and generally maintain a healthier state of well-being (p. 35-36).

While there have been some studies which have found mixed results for the use of positive interventions, in a meta-analysis reviewing research conducted on 51 different positive psychology interventions, Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) found evidence which supports the efficacy of these types of interventions in enhancing well-being and reducing negative emotions, thoughts and feelings.

Positive Psychology interventions offer counselling students a range of self-care strategies from which they can draw on for both themselves and their clients. Some of the positive psychology interventions reported in research to date include positive psychology based individual therapy, positive writing exercises, gratitude and personal strength activities, Fordyce’s happiness program, meditation, mindfulness, forgiveness, hope therapy, counting kindnesses and goal training (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

In addition, researchers have found that participant well-being was further improved when the positive intervention duration increased (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Similarly, Seear and Vella-Brodrick (2013) conducted a study assessing two positive psychology interventions and concluded that interventions with shorter durations did not result in significant benefits for participants in comparison to those who continued the intervention over a longer period. Moreover, Seear and Vella-Brodrick (2013) found that practice, frequency and motivation were key contributing factors for achieving enhanced participant well-being.

Mindfulness class reflections
The participants for this reflection were Master of Counselling students from an Australian University who participated in a course which included teachings on mindfulness practices. These students were in their final year of study and were also completing an Internship. A total of seven students participated in the mindfulness classes over one semester of study.

As an activity within a counselling unit of study, students were asked to choose and engage in one mindfulness practice during the semester and keep a journal to monitor the effects on their own life, their study and their work with clients. At the end of the semester, students submitted a short report summarising their experiences. The practices chosen by students included qigong, yoga and meditation. At the completion of the course the author asked the students if it would be useful to write up reflections on their use of mindfulness and five students wrote a de-identified summary and gave it to the author. Two chose not to complete a summary.

The students’ reflections were quite insightful and they showed that a range of physical, psychological, mental, emotional and relationship benefits were achieved through their chosen mindfulness practice.

Yoga
Some students reported not only physical benefits from yoga but also improvement in their concentration and ability to be more present with their clients. This was particularly true for those who maintained a regular practice. For those who practiced intermittently, the benefits were still noticeable but not as long-lasting.

Meditation
A student in her fifties found that meditation in the form of mindfulness helped her the most. She had explored qigong and spent many of her early years practicing yoga and applying Eastern philosophy to her daily mindful practice. She said,

I had a little book called Metaphysical Meditations. I would sit in a peaceful garden, cross legged in a yoga pose with my eyes closed and say over and over again, “God show me the way, show me the light”, which was one of the prayers from the book. I would try to clear my head of all random thoughts and simply focus and meditate on a steady stream of light in my mind’s eye. This certainly produced a measure of temporary peace which enhanced my sense of well-being tremendously. However, when the hustle and bustle of life crowded in on me that temporary peace would seem to vanish and stressful feelings were left in place.

Her searching led her and her husband to seek for truth and peace along many different paths to fulfill the deep longing in their hearts. Eventually they embraced Christianity and her meditation became grounded in a Christian philosophy and lifestyle.

Qigong
One of the students found that her ability to be present in relationships including her therapeutic relationships with clients had been enhanced through practicing mindfulness and qigong:

Another significant improvement I’ve noticed is in my emotions and relationship with others. When I have been absorbed in regular mindful practice I became aware that I was seeing others in a different, more positive light. That is, others’ positive qualities became more evident as I was feeling better in myself. I believe this was perhaps a result of not projecting my issues or tension onto others, which has had far reaching
A deeper relationship to oneself and more awareness of one's own feelings leads to an embodied awareness and presence with the client.

A female student in her forties reported:

I have been involved in yoga practice for four years and have found numerous benefits, emotionally, physically and psychologically. Recently, whilst I have been studying, it has been essential to descale anxiety levels, so that I am able to focus on key assignments in the Masters' Program. Qi Qong has been a new practice for me to adopt and I have found it beneficial in our lectures to help me ground and focus... I had a recent experience when I could not relax or wind down, whilst walking along the beach. I decided to sit quietly with my eyes closed and remembered some of the exercises we had learnt in class. I walked to the deck and stood there and closed my eyes again. I commenced doing one of the Qi Qong exercises for ten minutes. I found it became completely immersed in the practice and was not aware of any peripheral distractions or issues. When I opened my eyes, I felt a sense of inner calm, my breathing was slower and much more relaxed. As I walked back to the car I realised how wonderful I felt, with not a care in the world.

She also reported that the practice of qigong had strengthened her ability to listen more attentively to her clients. Similarly, another student in her thirties found that qigong gave her physical, psychological and relationship benefits. She commented:

As a student studying my Master of Counselling I have been engaging in a variety of mindfulness based activities such as Qi Qong, meditation and yoga. Throughout the semester, I have become aware of a multitude of holistic benefits from practicing regular mindfulness techniques. Physically, I noticed the most significant 'shift' or energy balancing with the Qi Qiong exercises we engaged in during the workshops. On several occasions I could literally feel the energy between my hands, and then shifting and clearing my energetic field. I also felt significantly more relaxed and focused after completing the Qi Qong.

Another student who was new to qigong commented:

Over the last semester, I have participated in my university class with all the Qi Qong exercises that we have been taught to do. I found them good. However, at home I prefer to practice my own form of mindfulness techniques which I have been doing for years and with which I feel very comfortable. I still my mind by focusing on Jesus. I say his name over and over and express gratitude for all He has done for me and for all He means to me. If I am troubled with distress I bring these concerns to God. Sometimes I concentrate on my breathing and consciously choose to relax different parts of my body, but always with my focus on Jesus. I feel the compassion and love He has for his people and this constantly influences my love and concern for others.

The above resonates with what qigong Master Chunyi Lin teaches. He says "Through your heart you are connected to what Gandhi called "the most powerful force the world possesses", the power of unconditional love" (Lin, 2011, p. 7). Chunyi Lin (2011) builds his teaching on the Chinese philosophy of universal energy that flows through the cosmos and through our bodies in the form of yin and yang energy. The different forms of qigong which are about cultivating or working with the energy in our body, are not tied to any particular religion and one's practice and meditation may focus on God. Jesus, Allah, Buddha or love, compassion, forgiveness and kindness. Such is the power of mindfulness practices.

General comments about mindfulness practices
One of the students noted personal psychological benefits from practicing mindfulness over a period of time, stating:

I have noticed that I am able to focus more in the present moment and feel more grounded as a result. Although my mind may have been racing and at times worrying about the amount of work I needed to complete, I am able to recover my focus more readily and my concentration has improved as I able to bring my focus back to the present moment. I have particularly noticed that I have not been projecting into future worries, or likewise, dwelling on past issues. I find generally I am struggling less with 'what is' in my life and there is less struggle and stress as a result. Also thinking in the here and now has led to a reduction of feeling overwhelmed by future troubles and study stresses.

Commentary
A deeper relationship to oneself and more awareness of one's own feelings leads to an embodied awareness and presence with the client. In Buddhist practice one is taught to generate kindness to oneself first by acknowledging one's own difficult emotions and thoughts. The next step is to generate this kindness towards others. A simple intension before sitting with clients is to relax, breathe deeply and gently and fill oneself with love and compassion, or to imagine oneself filled with universal energy or filled with the compassion of the Buddha or of Christ. Bien (2008) suggest 'dwelling on kindly intentions', such as:

- May I be happy.
- May I be peaceful.
- May I have abundance.
- May I be safe.
- May I have ease of well-being.
- May I be free of negative emotions.

(Bien, 2008, p. 50)

The therapist then repeats this for the client (Bien, 2008). Chunyi Lin (2011) uses the power of visualisation to assist in bringing about that gentle presence and awareness. Shafir (2008) shares the prayer she uses on the way to meeting her clients:

First, let me consider the mystery of what is about to occur. Let me remember that my patient is a unique being and that my interaction, to the extent that it's genuine, will be unprecedented. Let me remember that each moment is brimming with possibilities, that by listening mindfully,
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I may be able to heal; by foregoing judgment, I may be able to see more deeply, by letting myself be touched by their experience, I will convey to the patient that I care (Shafir, 2008, p. 230).

Thoughts are energy, according to the great qigong Masters and positive thoughts bring better outcomes and more positive results. This was also proved scientifically by Matsuro Emoto, a Japanese scientist who researched and discovered the power of water, which, after being frozen and viewed under a microscope, portrayed beautiful crystals (Emoto, 2003, 2004). He also found that by putting positive thoughts onto water, even dirty water, it was transformed into beautiful crystals, whereas pure water revealed distortion and no crystal when exposed to negative thoughts (Emoto, 2003, 2004). De Quincey & Chang, 2009, p. 1011). The purpose of self-cultivation is to foster more harmonious relationships and a sense of moral duty to family and to the country. A class on positive psychology at a university in Hong Kong was the ideal forum for self-cultivation and it also enabled the lecturer to begin to explore with them, ways and means of initiating positive change in their lives and subsequently reducing the destructive impacts of stress and pressure. Furthermore, for the Chinese student in particular, the self-in-relationship is paramount (Ho, 2001; Sun, 2008), and a high value is placed on relationships and relational harmony, and ‘collectivist beliefs place group interests above self-interests’ (Wong, 2012, p.10). In consideration of this, Moir-Bossy (2006) in her PhD research found that for the Chinese ‘relationship with others implies communication and ways of behaving that are essential to maintain harmony’. Hence the positive psychology course was designed in such a way that students would be able to relate their learning and experiences to the context of their own families and relationships (p. 37). Moreover, it is acknowledged that the influences of modernisation and globalisation have placed stress on families’ relationships, and in many cases, some of the young adult students have identified challenges related to a generation gap between themselves and their parents.

The students for this reflection came from three classes with approximately 30 students in each studying for their Bachelor of Social Science (Honors) in Counselling and Psychology. Course details

The positive psychology course which was held over one semester had three main purposes of a) the student actually experiencing the power of discovering their own strengths and abilities; b) how they could use these strengths and abilities in difficult times or in dealing with the stresses and pressures of their daily lives; and c) how they could improve their quality of life including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. Students also learnt about positive emotions, motivation, strengths, leisure, flow and mindfulness, relationships and love, creativity, wisdom, and religion and spirituality and their effects in their lives. In addition to this content the course also incorporated mindfulness and qigong practices as a support for their learning.

Each class began with a mindfulness practice — either qigong or a mindfulness meditation — which assisted the students to become more aware of what was happening for them physically and emotionally.

Procedure

As a major assessment task, students were asked to engage in a project of change with the aim of bringing about a change in their own life. When the students were considering possible change projects, some students chose to work on relationships within the family; whereas, other students felt there was a strong imbalance in their life due to the predominance of work and study and subsequent lack of sufficient sleep they needed to feel refreshed. Moreover, many students reported that they did not go to bed until 2 or 3am each day and that they constantly felt tired. Others found they ate more junk food each day, did not know how to cook and rarely had a balanced diet, felt lethargic, stressed, overweight and generally lacking in exercise.

The students were asked to decide on a project of change in their life and identify a theory of change that would help them to accomplish the change, such as the Transtheoretical Model of Change encompassing stages of pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (Prochaska & Di Clemente, 1984). As part of the task, they were asked to: a) keep a journal and log for the whole semester documenting what they achieved each day; b) gather evidence from those who knew them well, such as friends and family to support their efforts; and c) write an academic essay at the end of the semester about their journey, experiences and process.

In a discussion at the end of semester the author asked a few of the students if they would be willing to share their experiences for the benefit of future counselling students. A summary describing the outcomes students experienced are provided below categorised by the type of change.

Qigong. Two students took up the practice of qigong, learning from their mother and gaining her support and evidence that they practiced every day. They noted that it helped them in their
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relationships through forgiveness were reported between a student and her father. Her parents had divorced when she was 12 years old. Her mother had suffered a lot financially after this and the daughter developed anger towards her father because of this, as both mother and daughter felt unsupported. At 22 years of age, the daughter realised for herself that her anger towards her father was not helping any of them and she wanted to find a way to change this and at least form a relationship with her father. She began by reading about forgiveness and discovered a book by Marc Shimoff – ‘Happy for no reason’ (2008) that demonstrated steps towards forgiveness. Her first approach to her father was through email and she was surprised at his warm response. Over the coming weeks she emailed and then phoned but still did not feel forgiveness towards him. She continued with her project and finally found by Week 11 that she could let go and invited him to dinner at what had been one of his favourite restaurants. Her final academic paper on the project demonstrated her journey towards positive self-development and the renewal of positive relationships, all of which had a strong influence on her attitude and approach to her studies.

The above are just a few examples of how positive psychology, mindfulness and qigong influenced changes in the students, their families and their environment, and showed them that they had the ability to initiate and facilitate change both for themselves and others.

Conclusion

This brief review of what students from two different cultures were able to achieve through positive psychology, and mindfulness practices, illustrates and builds on a growing body of research that points to the benefits of cultivating such practices, particularly for students training to be counsellors. Mindfulness supports positive well-being, physical and psychological health and decreases pathology. As Shapiro and Carlson (2009) note, ‘The aim of cultivating positive qualities, including wisdom, compassion and virtue, is at the heart of the original intentions of mindfulness’ (p. 129). While only very small studies, further exploration on a larger scale will be undertaken with a wider body of students in the future as, ‘A mindful psychology offers an opportunity to approach psychological health and well-being from a new paradigm, a new way of seeing’ (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009, p. 129).

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