Mindfulness, compassion, and the Pain Paradox

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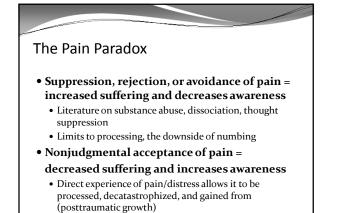
Pain and suffering

- Classic Western approaches to pain
 - Labeling and badness
 - Bad feelings, psychopathology
 - Support for
 - avoidance/fixing/suppressing/numbing
 - Just get over it
 - Take a pill
 - Buy this car

Pain and suffering

• Confusing pain and suffering

- "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional" (except when you don't have the option)
- Pain is the direct effects of adverse things, traumas, losses, and unprocessed memories of those things
- Suffering is when pain is psychologically misinterpreted and is avoided, rejected, suppressed, numbed, or denied
 - Only optional to those who are able to tolerate pain



Implications for intervention

- Mindfulness as the antithesis of avoidance
 Intentional, ongoing awareness of the present moment, with acceptance and without judgment
- "Inviting your pain to tea" (exposure interventions)
 - Avoiding avoidance, to the extent possible
 - "Leaning into pain" (Brach)
 - "Invite your pain to tea"

Implications for intervention

- Allowing "naked," non-overwhelming distress in the context of compassionate caretaking
 - Clinician compassion
 - Nonegocentric appreciation of the suffering of others with a desire to relieve that suffering
 - Biological role of compassion in attachment circuitry

Suggested readings

- Briere, J., & Scott, C. (2012). Principles of trauma therapy: A guide to symptoms, evaluation, and treatment, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Briere, J. (2012). Compassion and mindfulness in psychotherapy for trauma survivors. In C.K. Germer and R.D. Siegel (Eds.), Compassion and wisdom in psychotherapy. New York: Guilford.
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- Kornfield, J. (2008). The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology. NY: Bantam.