A Comparison of Centering vs. Opening Meditation Processes in Healthcare

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Background

- Meditation is widely used in healthcare to reduce stress, depression, and pain.
- Yet there remains lack of conceptual clarity regarding different types of meditation that is needed to guide the rapidly growing body of research in this area (Ospina et al., 2007).
Purpose

To clarify the distinction between centering and opening meditation processes to contribute to the development of multidimensional models of meditation in healthcare needed to guide research and evidence-based practice in healthcare settings

Adapted from Birx (in press)
Method

- Rodgers’ (2000) evolutionary method of concept analysis
- Healthcare literature 2006-2011 was searched using Alt HealthWatch, CINAHL, PsychNET, and PubMed databases using keywords “centering” and “opening” alone and in combination with the term “meditation”
- Included nursing, medicine, neuroscience, psychotherapy, and CAM literature
Centering is the gentle focusing of attention inward, calming body, thoughts, and feelings, thus being present in the moment with an integrated, balanced sense of self.
Opening is present moment awareness without focusing on any particular object while maintaining a receptive attitude and letting go of sensations, emotions, and thoughts, thus cultivating an intuitive experience of spacious clarity and non-duality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centering</th>
<th>Opening</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention focused inward</td>
<td>Attention open including both internal and external perceptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness focused on calm place within</td>
<td>Open awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of center</td>
<td>Spaciousness, without boundaries or center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploration of inner self</td>
<td>Dissolving of ego-boundaries and sense of separate self; beyond inner/outer, subject/object, self/other dichotomies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Non-dual or unitary</td>
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Exemplars

- Centering (Watson, 1999, p. 171-172)
- Opening (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 152; Makransky, 2007, p. 82)
Conclusions and Implications

• There are many different types of meditation that may fall along a continuum from focused, to open monitoring, to wide open (Kornfield, 2003)

• Different types of meditation activate different areas of the brain (Austin, 2011)

• Even subtle differences in the instructions can affect the experience and outcomes (Chiesa, Raffaella, & Serretti, 2011)
Conclusions cont.

• One aspect of classifying different types of meditation is whether or not the aim is experiencing non-duality (Josipovic, 2010).

• The distinctions between these two meditation processes are significant in the context of the understanding of self in new models of psychotherapy (ACT, DBT, & MBCT) and the development of unitary-transformative healthcare models.
References


