

Mindfulness and Mindlessness in Love

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Abstract: The study of love is extensive and affects many areas within relationships between individuals. The following paper examines the concepts of mindfulness and mindlessness, as defined by Langerian mindfulness, within the context of love. The objective of this report is to define the differences and similarities between loving mindfully versus mindlessly and evaluate the impact of both types of love within relationships. The process of engaging in mindful love and enhancing the quality of relationships will be explored, as well as how engaging in mindless love results in emotional disengagement, dissatisfaction, and even conflict. The contrast between the healthy effects of mindful love and the detrimental influences of mindless love is ultimately highlighted. Although being mindlessly in love provides the benefit of “ignorance is bliss”, mindful love engages all parties in the relationship, constantly bettering each other for a greater change. Essentially, this research paper emphasizes the significance of mindfulness and mindlessness and highlights their coexistence- not only in love- but also in the aspects of life.

Keywords: mindfulness, mindlessness, love, engaging, relationships

1. Introduction

Love is a complex emotion with an elusive definition that has been analyzed and explored by psychologists, philosophers, and biologists for centuries [1]. It is often seen as the root of all subjects, ranging from those as significant as war to those as simple as relationships. Summarizing a “possible integrative explanation” concluded from Aron & Aron’s [2] self-expansion model, individuals are primarily motivated by “opportunities for enhancing potential efficacy” [3]. Applying this theory, it can be gathered that falling in love occurs when an individual recognizes another as somebody with qualities worth learning.

Scientifically, research shows that multiple biological reactions occur when a person's eyes make contact with the ones of a potential love interest. When humans experience desire, “adrenaline (also known as epinephrine), which is a neurotransmitter and hormone, is released from the adrenal medulla during the ‘fight or flight response’” [4]. Consequently, the fight or flight response triggers an increased heart rate, sweating, and dilated pupils [1]. Along with adrenaline, the brain also releases a handful of other classified “feel-good” chemicals, which include vasopressin, dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins. An example of such brain chemicals providing a sedative effect on the brain would be endorphins, which according to Selhub [5], create the sensation of “euphoria and relief from pain.” This euphoria is the same feeling detailed by individuals claiming to have “fallen in love.” This essay

analyzes the differences and similarities between falling in love mindfully and falling in love mindlessly.

2. Mindful Love

Mindfulness, as characterized by Langerian mindfulness is “a state of conscious awareness in which the individual is implicitly aware of the context and content of information.” [6]. Given such a definition, mindful love can be interpreted as love that emerges from a place of self-awareness, intentional aims, and conscious commitment. Studies have shown that people who engage in mindful relationships may, unconsciously or consciously, establish more positive changes within their lifestyle [7]. Examples of said positive changes include a finer diet, proper exercise, and decreases in alcohol, nicotine, and other drug use [8].

A handful of extensive investigations were conducted regarding mindful love and its correlation to relationship satisfaction. More than half of those scales included the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (hereinafter DAS) [9], the Couple Satisfaction Index (hereinafter CSI) [10], the Marital Adjustment Test (hereinafter MAT) [11], the Triangular Love Scale (hereinafter TLS) [12], and more. All of these scales measured relationship satisfaction or happiness, as well as intimacy, passion, and commitment. The higher the resulting scores are, the higher the level of the above qualities within the relationship is.

It can be argued, however, that mindfulness is an individual practice [13] and cannot influence the overall state of a relationship. Although this is a valid rebuttal, the state of mindfulness mentioned above mainly concentrates on meditation, whereas Langerian mindfulness not only focuses on the inner being but the external as well. There are many aspects of mindfulness that impact relationships, primarily since most of the “empirical work focused on the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction uses the principles of mindfulness and some relationship dynamic theory to serve as a reason to study the association” [14]. Further discoveries were published in the Journal of Human Science and Extension, stating that “the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction is statistically significant, indicating when an individual is more mindful they are more satisfied in their romantic relationship.” Such correlation signifies positive relations between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction, which can lead to overall higher mindful engagement in everyday activities and increased health benefits.

To understand the process of loving mindfully, it must also be acknowledged that mindlessness will always be clouded in various aspects of life. This is because as an individual mindfully opens a new category for information, that very category also “becomes available for mindless use” [15]. In restating the Langerian definition of mindfulness, “the active process of noticing new things about the current context, other people, and the self” [16], a conclusion can be drawn. Intending to love mindfully pertaining to the above qualities, “listening, finding areas to agree, working together for a solution, and mutually agreeing on a compromise” are vital aspects of a healthy mindful relationship [14].

3. Mindless Love

Mindlessness can be “associated with the past, whereas mindfulness is associated with the present” [15]. Mindless love can typically be associated with detrimental forms of attachment, and such circumstances may arise the emotions of an individual do not align with the object of their love [17]. From the previous statement, mindless love can be interpreted as a love that lacks awareness, intention, and conscious choice. Such irrationality can be shown when lovers are “regressing to the needs, insecurities, and obsessions of [their childhoods]” [18].

Multiple studies have shown that the way individuals behave in relationships is impacted by the bonds they had with their caregivers in their early childhoods, influencing “both the timing of involvement and the quality of romantic relationships” [19]. Brogaard [17] stated that people with a “secure attachment style maintain a healthy proximity to other people,” and that “such people do not shy away from intimacy and closeness, and do not depend on it pathologically.” However, when individuals engage in mindless love, they typically develop the opposite of a secure attachment style (insecure attachment style) and tend to either “avoid closeness with others” or depend their “whole existence” on a relationship [17]. This can be explained by a concept called the “attachment theory,” which states that “caregivers’ sensitivity to infants’ attachment cues and communications is the primary environmental determinant” of the stability of their future relationships [20].

The evolutionary theory of attachment suggests that the crucial period for children to develop affection is from birth to five years old. If an attachment has not been formed in this period, the child will “suffer from irreversible developmental consequences, such as reduced intelligence and increased aggression” [21]. Typically, circumstances in an individual’s childhood determine whether their relationship behavior in their adolescent years can be shaped for better or worse [22]; therefore, when growing up with a lack of affection resulting in increasing aggression within an individual, it is likely for them to project dissatisfaction onto other people they enter relationships with.

While one type of mindless love causes individuals to lash out at their partners, the other type results in quiet suffering. These are the people who, due to forming harmful or even obsessive attachments, are unable to let go of their significant others. Such attachment may be so strong that even when in abusive relationships, they are unable to leave. This is characterized as nonvoluntary independence [23]. Oftentimes, victims of abusive relationships choose to focus on the better aspects of their relationship and are trapped in their mindset of “my partner loves me, and they don’t mean what they do.” This is one of the major signs of mindless love, which typically results in the deterioration of one’s mental health. Another factor that contributes to the inability to walk away from or the constant return to an abusive relationship is a sense of commitment. In a study conducted, it was found that the majority of victims were more likely to return to their partners due to poor alternatives and the fact that they had greater investments in the relationships. It was also shown that individuals were more inclined to rejoin their abusive relationship due to their lack of better choices, rather than feelings of satisfaction [23].

Mindless love, while a seemingly simple concept, is multifaceted, and can be given or received by either person in a relationship. It is crucial to keep in mind that mindlessness works in both directions and although it is often unintentional, it is a harmful aspect of relationships and could potentially become dangerous if escalated to any form of abuse.

4. Conclusions

In comparing mindless and mindful love, it can be found that conscious awareness and intentionality can offer a significant impact on our relationships and overall well-being, whereas unhealthy attachments and unsolved childhood trauma often lead to down-spiraling impulse-driven relationships lacking in depth and stability, as well as persistent patterns of dysfunctional and disregard of set boundaries. Mindful love encourages individuals to live in the present and observe to understand the needs and emotions of their own, as well as others. Such attentivity to living allows easier navigation through conflicts by seeking mutual understanding and resolution. In practicing self-reflection and self-care, people can help bring a sense of security into relationships without sacrificing their well-being for the sake of others.

Choosing to love mindfully would bring individuals much more happiness than choosing to love mindlessly, which would snowball various harmful factors to a person’s well-being. Mindful love requires a confrontation with the ever-shifting reality, a collection of biases and limitations. It also

requires the willingness to be vulnerable. Engaging in such aspects of mindfulness allows not only growth and the release of idealist expectations but also the acknowledgment and embracement of the fact that imperfections are inescapable in the journey of life.

To enjoy said journey of life, people must focus on the present and live in our attempts to grow as individuals, all the while maintaining an open mind. It must be acknowledged that as human beings, people will never truly be omnipotent, nor will the absorption of all information ever be reached. Once people begin to truly live and not just live your every day, you will find that wonders are abundant yet to be discovered and vast seas of information left to be understood. As Ellen J. Langer stated, “Mindfulness can encourage creativity when the focus is on the process and not the product.”

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