Combining Mindfulness and Art Therapy: A Holistic Perspective for Psychological Wellness

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Abstract

Mindfulness and art therapy both have psychological and wellness benefits when practiced individually, and remain predominantly separate in existing psychological literature. Research and theory on these areas indicate that a combination of mindfulness and art therapy techniques may be more effective than just art therapy or mindfulness alone. Drawing from current literature and empirical research, this project defines wellness, mindfulness, and art therapy, and explains the relationship between the areas from a holistic, integrative perspective. Overlapping concepts from art therapy and mindfulness with Adler’s Individual Psychology are discussed. Recommendations for complementary techniques from mindfulness and art therapy that can be used daily to improve wellness are provided, and the experiential portion of this project is discussed. The paper ends with concluding thoughts and directions for future work.

Keywords: Adlerian, art therapy, holistic, integrative, mental health, mindfulness, psychology, psychotherapy, therapy, wellness
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Combining Mindfulness and Art Therapy: A Holistic Perspective for Psychological Wellness

At present, the psychological vantage points of art therapy and mindfulness remain predominantly separate in existing literature and practice. Each has value for emotional and mental wellness and is beneficial when practiced individually. There are areas of overlap and complementarity in the concepts and techniques of mindfulness and art therapy. Combining the two has the potential to expand on each of their benefits and help individuals work towards psychological wellness from a holistic perspective. This literature review defined wellness, mindfulness, and art therapy, explained the relationship between these areas, and provided empirical support for using mindfulness and art therapy both individually and combined. Key elements of mindfulness and art therapy that are similar to tenets of Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology were discussed. Ultimately, this project recommended complementary techniques and implementations from art therapy and mindfulness as they can be used in daily life to attain wellness. Final thoughts and considerations for future work conclude the project.

The Meaning of Wellness

Early definitions of wellness identified it as the opposite of an illness or disease model due to its focus on strengths and well-being (Lenz & Smith, 2010). Myers defined wellness as:

A way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being, in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully… Ideally, it is the optimum state of health and well-being that each individual is capable of achieving. (Myers, 2000, p. 252, as cited in Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 483)

Mind-body elements have been a more clearly understood concept in wellness, however the spirituality element is more open to interpretation by the individual. The term spirit was derived from several ancient words meaning wind or breath, has traditionally religious, or spiritual, ties, and is related to the concept of the individuality of one’s soul (Reed, 1997). Within the context of this paper, the spiritual aspect of “mind-body-spirit” is to be understood as
a fluid term that captures the intangible elements of the self that are not purely physical or specifically cognitive; elements that may include personality, values, religious or spiritual beliefs, and the way one relates to and defines their own soul or authentic inner self.

Mindfulness and Art Therapy Defined in Literature

Definitions for Mindfulness

Mindfulness has its origins in religions which predominantly existed in Asia thousands of years ago. It should be noted; however, that the type of mindfulness utilized in therapeutic contexts and which will be referred to in this paper draws techniques from these traditions, but is secular (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007b; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Mindfulness is considered to be an inherent capacity of the human mind, readily available to all humans with average cognitive abilities (Brown et al., 2007b).

There were many different definitions of mindfulness in existing literature from this health-focused secular standpoint. Kasser and Sheldon defined mindfulness simply as the ability to stay “in the present” (2008, p. 252). Perhaps the most well-known and frequently used definition, however, is that of Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). He defined mindfulness as, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (as cited in Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010, p. 413), and explained that “knowing what you are doing while you are doing it is the essence of mindfulness practice” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, location 1119). The University of Massachusetts Medical School, where Kabat-Zinn is a professor, simplified this definition to just “moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness” (2005, para. 1). The two general components of mindfulness, then, are the deliberate regulation of one’s own awareness, and nonjudgment of the events and experiences one then becomes aware of, which manifests as a state of openness,
acceptance, and curiosity (Brown et al., 2007b; Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). Kozlowski agrees, explaining that “the focus is on observing the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli non-judgmentally as it arises without attempting to change, escape or avoid it” (2013, p. 93). Mindful awareness exists without bias, without attachment to the ego, and disengaged from desires or goals, providing the opportunity for individuals to respond to stimuli purposefully and in congruence with their personal values (Brown et al., 2007a). Ruedy and Schweitzer also viewed mindfulness as present-centered awareness of what is taking place, which allows individuals the opportunity to distance themselves from their automatic thoughts and reactions and observe the present moment impartially, leading individuals to experience the present moment more fully and richly (2010).

Leary and Tate, viewing mindfulness as multi-faceted, felt it beneficial to break mindfulness down into five major components, including mindful attention, diminished self-talk, nonjudgment, nondoing [sic], and a specific philosophy or set of beliefs (2007). These definitions agree with those presented in Hayes and Plumb, who explain that mindfulness practices foster an objective “transcendent sense of self” or “Observer Self” and decrease human pain caused by a habitual pattern of living “in our heads” in a problem-focused state (2007, p. 245-255). Additional important elements of mindfulness include compassion and empathy for the self and others (Brown et al., 2007b; Murphy, 2011). Mindfulness employs a mind-body-spirit perspective and views individuals holistically (London, 2006).

**Definitions for Art Therapy**

Like mindfulness, art therapy is a holistic process. Generally understood as having begun around 1940 (Borowsky Junge, 2010), the profession of art therapy combines the artist with the mental health professional (Lachman-Chapin, 2002). Experiential in nature, art therapy is the
combination of the disciplines of artmaking and psychology. It seeks to enhance life through self-expression (Malchiodi, 2007) without the barriers present in traditional psychotherapy, such as the inability to process trauma or discuss mental health concerns verbally, age and language barriers, and the lack of opportunity to deal with information the body has stored kinesthetically (Kapitan, 2013). The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) defined art therapy as a mental health profession in which clients use the art process, media, and their resulting artwork to understand their emotions, increase self-awareness, and manage thoughts and behaviors, with the ultimate goal of restoring that client’s functioning and overall well-being (2013). One of the benefits of art therapy is the wide range of activities it encompasses (Curl, 2008). It is intrinsically introspective, yet draws from external experiences as well, and is readily accessible to people of nearly all ages, groups and ability levels. Art therapy and mindfulness share this inherent accessibility and juxtaposition between internal and external stimuli.

The Relationship Between Mindfulness and Art Therapy

The experiential, kinesthetic, and non-verbal aspects are shared by mindfulness and art therapy. Both theoretical orientations operate from an integrative, holistic, mind-body-spirit perspective (London, 2006). Several articles in existing literature have related the two concepts and demonstrated the areas in which complementarity and overlap between art therapy and mindfulness are especially strong. For instance, both art therapy and mindfulness fall into a range of healthcare techniques known as mind-body therapies or complementary and alternative medicine (CAM; Fernros, Furhoff & Wändell, 2008). They are linked in their abilities to enhance overall wellness and expand upon traditional psychology, and are related because the arts, like mindfulness, require individuals to become aware observers of their environments, utilizing the senses to grasp the full experience of the present moment and so that it might be
communicated through artistic creation (London, 2006; Rosch, 2001). Both elements increase wisdom and can function as a “way of knowing” in the world (Rosch, 2001, p. 247). In fact, Franklin et al. and Monti et al. have explained in separate documents that mindfulness may actually be increased by other experiential techniques, including art therapy and somatic therapies, due to their ability to help individuals create a “mind-body connection” (as cited in Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). McGhee explains that in order for mindfulness to occur, normal mental activity has to be interrupted or suspended, which can be done by taking in the arts. A blockage of one’s usual internal dialogue, he explains, allows for increased receptivity to one’s environment, including aesthetic perception, which provides the opportunity for individuals to create and respond to indirect, artistic communication (1988). As such, it appears that the relationship between art therapy and mindfulness is bilateral, integrating the whole brain. Research also supports that practicing mindfulness is associated with increased creativity and psychological well-being (Brown et al., 2007b). It is possible that this mutual beneficence exists because both mindfulness and art creation require complete attention, in the moment, to the task at hand, sometimes referred to by artists and athletes as “flow” (Kapitan, 2013; Kasser & Sheldon, 2008; London, 2006; Willis, 1979). Some mindfulness techniques capitalize on the process-oriented nature of art creation, as demonstrated by the symbolic creation of mandala images as part of some ancient meditation rituals (Winters, 1987). Others in the field consider the process of creating art itself to be a form of meditation (Kapitan, 2013), or combine the creation of art with mindfulness techniques like mental imagery and guided imagery or meditation (Curl, 2008).
Empirical Benefits of Mindfulness and Art Therapy Individually and Combined

Benefits of Mindfulness

According to Ruedy and Schweitzer, “Empirical studies link mindfulness with well-being” (2010, p. 75). Evidence from research on the benefits of mindfulness point to positive outcomes across multiple important areas of life, including both physical and mental health, as well as improvements in behavioral regulation, insight about the self and others, and interpersonal relationships (Brown et al., 2007b; Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007). Major components in the practicing of mindfulness are intended to help individuals “live each moment of their lives as fully as possible” (Lewis, n.d.).

The numerous benefits of practicing mindfulness for individuals have been demonstrated in research, including increased satisfaction with life, increased positive affect, improved self-esteem, decreases in chronic pain, and decreases in symptoms of mental illnesses including anxiety, eating disorders, borderline personality disorder, depression, chronic pain and substance abuse (Brown et al., 2007b; Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010; Kasser & Sheldon, 2008; Lewis, n.d.; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). Mindfulness also appears to help people feel more in control of themselves, more motivated to take care of themselves, better able to find meaning in life, and more self-assured, and helps people find clarity about who they are (Lewis, n.d.). The reduction of stress by participating in mindfulness meditation is related to many health benefits (Canter, 2003). Overall, evaluations of medical outcomes have shown a 35% reduction in medical symptoms and a 40% reduction in psychological symptoms resulting from patient participation in mindfulness-based stress reduction programs (University of Massachusetts Medical School, 2005). Additionally, Brown and Ryan published research which has shown that individuals who practice mindfulness are happier than those who do not, and that daily variations in mindful
activity predict daily variations in mood (as cited in Kasser & Sheldon, 2008). Mindfulness also appears in research to facilitate faster emotional recovery following a sad mood (Brown et al., 2007b; Kasser & Sheldon, 2008). Furthermore, Kasser and Sheldon found that mindfulness and the satisfaction of psychological needs through pursuing relevant activities explain associations between an individual’s perception of having enough free time, or time affluence, and subjective well-being (2008). Due to its focus on considering all relevant information in the moment and without immediate judgment, mindfulness has also been linked to increased emotional acceptance, willingness to tolerate uncomfortable emotions and sensations, greater self-control in situations which activate undesired habits, greater attentional control, decreased ethical infractions, and increased principled ethical decision-making (Brown et al., 2007b; Leary & Tate, 2007; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). Research in ethical decision-making indicates that it is imperative for mental health professionals to practice mindfulness; more mindful individuals appear to behave ethically because it is aligned with their internal values and feelings of authenticity, rather than due to social cues or expectations (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). These studies can impact the mental health profession in a positive and healing way.

On a neurobiological level, there also appears to be evidence pointing to positive effects of mindfulness on the brain. Specifically, meditation as a practice of mindfulness has been shown to detectably affect the brain on a structural level through the process of neuroplasticity, in which meditation actually changes the neural pathways of participants’ brains while they create new habits (Costen Kunz, 2009). There is literature that discusses an inverse correlation between the need for stimulants and mindfulness (McGhee, 1988). Not only does the practice of mindfulness change lifestyles and improve overall functioning, but it appears as though it has
measurable biological effects on the brain in addition to helping with mental and physical wellness.

Because one of the primary focus areas in mindfulness is loving-kindness, mindfulness practice also offers numerous benefits in relationships (Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). These benefits include greater relationship satisfaction across research (Kozlowski, 2013), increased sexual satisfaction (Brotto et al. as cited in Kozlowski, 2013), secure attachment, improved communication skills, acceptance of one’s partner, skill development in responding to stress, and increased empathy (Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). In addition to the aforementioned benefits, statistical significance emerging from research suggests that mindfulness is correlated with the ability to identify one’s own emotions and to communicate these to others, increases in compassion for one’s self and for others, decreased psychological distress, increased autonomy, and increases in spirituality and optimism (Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). These benefits indicate that practicing mindfulness can have profoundly positive effects for individuals in their own lives, in their relationships, and in their greater communities.

**Benefits of Art Therapy**

Like mindfulness, the empirical research on the efficacy of art therapy points to multiple wellness benefits. For example, art therapy has been shown to be effective for adults when exploring grief or difficult feelings, addressing frustration tolerance, reducing symptomology of personality disorders, improving behavior and moods, and decreasing anxiety, including statistically significant reductions in stress among participants who completed art therapy activities, regardless of media used (Curl, 2008). Clients participating in art therapy in mental health settings were also more likely to continue treatment over other modalities, and reported enjoying their sessions (Slayton, D’Archer, & Kaplan, 2010). Reviews on art therapy have
demonstrated that it is more effective than control treatments for some non-psychotic mental health concerns. Research has also found improvements in the ability for individuals to develop relationships, practice self-awareness, see things from multiple perspectives, and effectively relax (Uttley et al., 2015). Creating and appreciating art encourages problem solving and identity building, and helps people become healthier from a holistic perspective. Individuals participating in art therapy can develop a stronger sense of identity and connect with their family and community, as well (Congdon, 1990). Art work can be used to communicate ideas and feelings, or calm and comfort (Congdon, 1990). There may be some information that people retain in ways that can only be unearthed through the process of creating art (Kapitan, 2013).

**Benefits of Mindfulness and Art Therapy Combined**

Every day, the average person has approximately 17,000 individual thoughts, and people are prone to doing things on autopilot, daydreaming, and multitasking. This approach to the day can leave us vulnerable to staying in our comfort zones and compromising our values (Murphy, 2011). If we are to approach life from a place of awareness and act in accordance with our values, then, it is likely that we need to step outside of our comfort zones and implement new daily routines and techniques, which can include adopting elements from different wellness perspectives that share a holistic focus. Congdon’s perception of wellness appears to agree, explaining that “mental well being [sic] depends on an appropriate amount of stimulation and curiosity about life” (1990, p. 41). Art therapy and mindfulness techniques both have the potential to provide this novel and holistic approach to creating wellness. According to London, serious creative undertakings, like those found in art therapy, exemplify holistic activity because the artist engages all parts of their being—mind, body and spirit—into the process (2006).

Research in mind-body therapies—which include mindfulness meditations, guided imagery, and
art therapy—has shown clinically significant improvements in general health perceptions, emotional wellness, cognitive functioning, sleep, pain, role limitations due to emotional concerns, and family functioning. (Fernros, Furhoff & Wändell, 2008). In research conducted by Kim, Kim and Ki, the most effective results on improving overall subjective well-being were attained by a group that participated not in mindfulness or art therapy alone, but in art therapy combined with a mindful breath meditation (2014).

An area of overlap between mindfulness and art therapy was the concept of flow, or losing oneself in the process of something. Flow can be defined as a state of absorption in a single activity during which people may use a great deal of energy and experience time as altered (Kapitan, 2013). Congdon argued that this can be accomplished with the artistic process (1990). This may be because creating art fully engages the body and the mind, and leaves no mental space for thoughts or emotions to conflict (Kapitan, 2013). Based on this analysis, it could be argued that participating in art therapy alone may produce some of the same results as art therapy with mindfulness components or mindfulness alone, because the process of art making seems to inherently incorporate mindfulness strategies. This is not to say that art therapy is more effective than mindfulness; however, as they are likely still most beneficial when combined (Kim et al., 2014), but that if the choice to utilize art therapy over mindfulness is made, the art therapy may carry with it some of the benefits of mindfulness due to the artistic process.

Overlapping Concepts from Mindfulness, Art Therapy, and Individual Psychology

The major theme shared by mindfulness, art therapy, and Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology is that of holism. The theoretical foundation of a holistic model was the belief that at any time, each of us is the sum total of all parts of their being, including the mind, body, and spirit (London, 2006). This idea of holism was found in the basic tenets of mindfulness, which
view the connection between the mind, body, and spirit as central to well-being, in the main concepts of art therapy, which utilizes kinesthetic processes of art making to explore spiritual and psychological beliefs, and in Individual Psychology, which views treating the individual as a whole being—including their environment—as a requisite for achieving well-being.

Adler theorized that humans need to be understood in their totality, which includes all elements of the person, as well as their environments and social settings (Udchic, 1984). He believed that people were more than the sum total of their parts, and that these parts cannot be divided (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). In fact, holism is the theoretical basis for all of Adler’s work, as evidenced by the name “Individual Psychology,” which, though a poor translation from German into English, was actually meant to speak to the indivisible self. Adlerian therapists incorporate techniques and methods that include meditation, visualization, psychodrama, and art therapy, in addition to traditional psychotherapy techniques (Udchic, 1984). Udchic summarized the benefits of a holistic approach, saying, “When science is combined with holistic thinking, and when the therapist and the patient actively cooperate, the possibilities for gain are greatly enhanced” (1984, p. 370).

An evidence based model of wellness—defined as integrating the mind, body and spirit—structured using Adlerian concepts puts the self at the center of the Wheel of Wellness, and includes second-order factors of the self: creative, coping, social, essential, and physical (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). The model uses the three life tasks common to Adlerian psychology—work, friendship, and love—as well as two additional life tasks, spirituality and self-regulation (Lenz & Smith, 2010). Such a model posits that a positive change in any one factor would constitute a positive change for the whole person. The creative factor could logically be understood as related to creative pursuits in wellness, like art therapy. Coping,
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which includes stress-management, self-worth, and beliefs, has some obvious ties to the elements most affected by practicing mindfulness. The social factor which includes friendship and love can be seen as tied to mindfulness’ focus on love, loving-kindness, and compassion. The essential factor, which deals with self-care, spirituality, and some elements of identity, could include the regular practices of mindfulness, as well as art therapy activities. The physical factor might be tied to both as well, since both mindfulness and art therapy employ kinesthetic elements (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). This multidimensional conceptualization for wellness, which seeks to encourage a holistic approach, but which also points to multiple areas of focus, can also be seen in a personal wellness plan described by Cummins, Massey, and Jones that defined self-care as having physical, spiritual, emotional and social elements (2007).

As mentioned, a key belief of Adler’s was the concept of the creative self. In this understanding, Adler believed that individuals were essentially the creators of their own lives and personalities. As Ansbacher and Ansbacher explained this, “The individual is thus both the picture and the artist. He is the artist of his own personality, but as an artist he is neither an infallible worker nor a person with complete understanding of mind and body” (1956, p. 177). Tying personal creativity to individual psychology and lifestyle development helps explain why art therapy can be such a useful therapeutic tool. This also aligned with what Bakhtin and Keats understood to be “soul-making,” the process which tied aesthetic perception and creation to the making of a human soul. Bakhtin wrote, “In every act of aesthetic perception there slumbers, as it were, a determinate image of a human being, as in a block of marble for the sculptor” (as cited in Reed, 1997, p. 8). In this way, the spiritual component of a mind-body-spirit perspective on wellness may be viewed as an ongoing creative process for the individual, in which the person
seeks to express oneself and simultaneously define for themselves and the world their personality and lifestyle.

Another element of the “Wheel of Wellness” previously discussed, deals with relationships and compassion (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). Adler’s understanding of mental health held that a mentally well person would demonstrate social interest, expressed through empathy. Empathy in the Adlerian sense has been summed up with the phrase, “To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p.135). Empathy and compassion for the self and others are considered central values in mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007b; Murphy, 2011). Striving in life, or working in service of a goal, is healthy when it is in service not only of the individual, but also of the community in which that human exists. This horizontal striving benefits the whole, and is exemplified by cooperation and contribution (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This aligns with the understanding that mindfulness benefits relationships because of its focus on loving-kindness (Eubanks Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). According to Moon, the practice of creating art helps individuals create a sense of self, which is essential before an individual can be capable of empathy (2002). It is easy to see, based on the previously mentioned areas of overlap, how art therapy, mindfulness and Individual Psychology can be integrated together in a cohesive way to help people create a lifestyle that focuses on wellness.

Recommended Mindfulness and Art Therapy Techniques and Implementations for Daily Life:

**Experiential Component Explained**

Reed wrote that suffering is a human problem relating the soul and creation of identity (1997). Human suffering is universal, and as such, mindfulness needs to be applied to daily life (Hayes & Plumb, 2007). According to Brown et al., the increased consciousness that results
from mindfulness was typically beneficial to the mental activity individuals experience and partake in during everyday life (2007b). Daily life can also be observed, enhanced, and communicated in meaningful ways by the interactive process of creating art (Rosch, 2001). The goal of the experiential component of this project became creating a useful and approachable tool that would allow both wellness professionals and the general population to identify ways to incorporate holistic wellness practices into their daily routines. After an extensive review of literature on mindfulness, art therapy, and holistic or integrative models of wellness that focus on the mind, body, and spirit, it became clear that there were many methods and techniques already being used, and that there were so many options it would become difficult to list them all in a comprehensible way or suggest a select few specific techniques as being the best among the vast array. Patterns of techniques and complementary ideas from art therapy and mindfulness began to emerge, and these led to the development of nine daily tasks that when prioritized in daily life may help individuals create movement towards holistic wellness. These nine tasks include: being deliberate in one’s daily activities; engaging in mind-calming or centering activity with a breathing component; engaging one’s body in rhythmic, deliberate activity; mindfully observing nature; appreciating any form of art, usually created by another person; learning something for personal growth or inspiration; spending time expressing oneself creatively; noticing meaningful moments; and connecting with one’s support system (see the Appendix for The Daily Wellness Planner which is the full experiential component of the paper).

Because the goal was to provide this set of tasks and create a useful tool that made these tasks easier to prioritize and implement, there was a need to find a way to help people track their daily actions and remind them about these important tasks regularly. The simplest way to accomplish this was to create a daily checklist of these items that people could use to help hold
themselves accountable. The idea that a checklist, or to-do list, of items could be effective for helping people focus on their wellness is supported in literature. Hand-written to-do lists and the conscious act of planning activities reduce the burden on the brain to contain and recall tasks among the noise of the other 17,000 thoughts people have each day, a phenomenon known as the Zeigarnik Effect (Becher, 2014; Murphy, 2011). According to Little, humans often pursue over a dozen goals at one time (as cited in Masicampo & Baumeister, 2011), and are frequently overwhelmed with tasks. Empirical evidence shows that creating specific plans for goal attainment increases goal achievement and simultaneously uses fewer cognitive resources, minimizing the effects of distraction (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2011). Essentially, to-do lists work for helping people actually accomplish the things they visually prioritize.

Simply creating a checklist for individuals to use so that they could accomplish these nine daily wellness tasks still might not have been effective, however, because introducing a checklist into one’s daily routine may not be a natural fit. If adding the use of a checklist to a person’s normal daily activities is too far a departure from the way they usually go about their day, they are considerably less likely to adopt and maintain the habit of using it (Duhigg, 2014). If they don’t maintain the habit, and they are not using the checklist regularly, it cannot help them move towards wellness. Ultimately, the checklist needed a vehicle that would be used naturally in people’s lives to carry this new addition over into their daily routine; it needed to be included in something that people were already using every day. Duhigg explained that in order to form new habits, that habit must be prompted by a familiar cue, must replace an existing habit, and must be rewarded afterwards in a familiar way. This is known as the habit loop (Duhigg, 2014). Fitting a checklist into an existing everyday habit is possible only if we can capitalize on what we already know people do. Modern life is busier than it has ever been, and people need to schedule
their time carefully because their lives are full. Yet for people looking to improve their wellness, slowing down one’s day enough to prioritize daily wellness tasks is essential. Combining the daily wellness checklist with a usable scheduling tool seemed a natural fit. The Wellness Planner was created to allow people to write in and see their hour-by-hour schedule every day right next to the daily wellness checklist, so that both things could remain top-of-mind priorities.

Approachability to implementing holistic wellness techniques into daily life was also of great importance. Some people may want to focus on their wellness, but not know how or understand terms and techniques. A brief book explaining each of the nine checklist items is provided in the front of the Wellness Planner to help people understand which types of activities fit into these categories. Additionally, a 74-item list of activities taken directly from existing literature on mindfulness and art therapy techniques is provided as an appendix, with an attached chart that indicates which checklist items may be met with each activity. This list is not intended to be finite, but rather to help people who are beginners in practicing mindfulness or artistic expression understand what some of their daily options are.

Concluding Thoughts and Considerations for Future Work

A comprehensive review of existing empirical literature reveals a single key takeaway: A holistic, integrative approach to wellness which combines art therapy and mindfulness techniques has the potential to be significantly more helpful to individuals than utilizing just art therapy or mindfulness practices alone (Kim et al., 2014). There is not a shortage of available techniques and activities from which one may draw, and the possibilities for daily implementations are multitudinous. The development of a daily wellness planner which includes a checklist to encourage individuals to prioritize their wellness is one practical solution which can guide users toward wellness of mind, body, and spirit, while allowing for human variation
and needed flexibility. Nine tasks—being deliberate in one’s daily activities; engaging in mind-calming or centering activity with a breathing component; engaging one’s body in rhythmic, deliberate activity; mindfully observing nature; appreciating any form of art; learning something for personal growth or inspiration; spending time expressing oneself creatively; noticing meaningful moments; and connecting with one’s support system—point people in this direction. A plethora of other combinations and techniques are possible, and need only to be discovered and attempted to further capitalize on the power of integrating art therapy and mindfulness practices.

Furthermore, a movement in the mental health field toward integrative practices beyond the scope of art therapy and mindfulness is needed. This is different from simply adopting an eclectic approach to mental health that draws upon many different psychological theories. Rather, a holistic and integrative approach should seek to merge wellness methods and models—psychological, spiritual and kinesthetic—that have clear complementarity and overlap, in ways that are deliberate and purposeful for expediting or amplifying the positive results for individuals’ wellness. In addition to the possibility for greater efficacy, holistic and integrative approaches to wellness have added applicability to more diverse populations on an individual level, being that they draw from many different perspectives and can therefore be scaled or adapted easily to suit a person’s unique needs. The collaboration between mental health professions and other mind, body and spirit-based wellness professions may also be of benefit in destigmatizing mental health concerns, such as by creating institutions that provide an array of services, utilizing a non-medical approach, and focusing on wellness rather than illness. Future work in researching how mind, body, and spirit wellness professions can be combined with mental health practices is important work that could profoundly impact the lives of people
struggling with wellness concerns who have not found a solution in singular treatment modalities.
References


APPENDIX
Appendix

The Daily Wellness Planner
Appendix

The Daily Wellness Planner

Why a Daily Wellness Planner?

This planner is designed to make focusing on your wellness an easy part of your daily routine. Because many people at least occasionally use calendars and to-do lists in their daily life, creating a space to combine these with a checklist of simple wellness actions is an intuitive way to help you focus on prioritizing your self-care each day. The human brain loves lists (Becher, 2014; Masicampo & Baumeister, 2011), and having a daily wellness checklist on each planner page provides a visual reminder of your goals. The more you use your wellness planner, the more you will notice its positive effects on your lifestyle.

The Ideal Conditions for Creating Wellness

There are innumerable resources available that attempt to prescribe a universal wellness regimen in the form of a specific activity, diet, or thought process. What is more difficult to find, however, is a resource that combines and categorizes such activities in an approachable and customizable way. This daily wellness planner seeks to do just that, as well as to provide a simple way to track your wellness progress that fits into your daily life. Having read through dozens of empirical studies and books written by experts in their wellness niches, common themes began to appear. These wellness activities recommended in literature each fit into one or more of the Remix Wellness categories: relationships, mindfulness, and expression. In drawing out the [of-yet-uncharted] patterns in current literature, it is my belief that the ideal conditions for creating wellness include:

- Achieving a calm, focused state
- Rhythmic, deliberate activity
- Allowing for expression of personal meaning

AND

- Maintaining a support system

If we focus on cultivating these areas in our lives, we will create a lifestyle of wellness for ourselves. Being fully aware that these conditions are somewhat abstract and that not all people are abstract thinkers, a nine-item checklist provides more specific guidance for maintaining your wellness every day.

**The Elements of the Daily Wellness Checklist**

On each day of the planner, there is a daily checklist of items to help you keep yourself focused on your overall wellbeing. In this section, I will provide clarification about the intended meaning of each checklist item. However, please note that these intentions and examples are not rules, but rather guidelines to help you on your way. Additionally, some of the daily activities you choose may apply to more than one checklist item. For specific examples of activities that may fit each category, see the book appendix.

**Be Deliberate in Your Daily Activities**

Living mindfully includes having an element of awareness in the present moment. Many of us have gotten accustomed to multitasking and living on autopilot. Being deliberate in your daily activities simply means taking the time, when you remember to, to notice what you are doing with your time and ask yourself whether this action is deliberate or automatic. You may plan your day out in a deliberate fashion, or simply pause in a moment of your life, depending on what suits you. You might even choose to follow the advice of Jon Kabat-Zinn and intentionally
slow down your normal daily activities (2013). There is no expectation of perfection. There is only the goal of being aware—living your life on purpose and with purpose.

**Engage in Mind-Calming Activity with a Breathing Component**

Studies seem to agree that our wellness improves when we take time to calm our minds and breathe. Some people may refer to calming the mind as “centering.” Many activities fall into this category, with the obvious being a sitting and breathing (Zazen) meditation. This might also include yoga, non-doing, a slow walk in nature, or any other relaxing activity that quiets the mind and allows you to focus on your breath.

**Engage Your Body in Rhythmic, Deliberate Activity**

A wellness lifestyle includes a kinesthetic component. We must use our bodies if we want to achieve wellness. It turns out that our holistic selves actually enjoy kinesthetic activity most when it is rhythmic and purposeful, because it allows us to achieve a state of “flow.” Your normal daily workout routine, dancing, art making, and yoga are all examples of using your body in rhythmic and deliberate ways.

**Mindfully Observe Nature**

Nature is something we can all connect with on a very primal level. Chances are you have a favorite place in nature that you travel to or remember when you want to feel at peace. Perhaps it’s a place of nostalgia, a favorite local park, or a vacation destination you’ve always loved. We can even connect with nature simply by walking down the street or sitting in our yards, feeling the sun, watching the foliage rustle, hearing the birds celebrating another beautiful day. If you’re like me and you live in a climate that doesn’t allow for outdoor activities for some portion of the year, you can find a way to bring nature indoors by keeping plants or buying fresh flowers. You can also do any number of the actions on this list outdoors and complete both!
Appreciate Any Form of Art

When I refer to appreciating art, I am referring primarily to art made by other individuals. It might include a visit to a museum, or just listening to music. There are many kinds of art we can explore and enjoy. While I intended for this to mean art made by artists other than yourself, if you have a favorite piece of art that you made that speaks to you, you could also use this. Spend some time taking in the details of the art, and the effort that went into creating it. Art is a gift for our senses.

Learn Something for Personal Growth or Inspiration

Each of us has goals and curiosities. Take time each day to indulge the part of you that wonders. We are lifelong learners and achievers. Your wellness will benefit from your pursuit of insight and knowledge in areas that align with your personal values. This type of education need not be studious, although it may be if that’s your preference, but there are ways to learn that are playful and lighthearted, as well. Both count.

Spend Time Expressing Yourself Creatively

People have a need to feel understood and to connect with others, as well as to tell their stories. We communicate constantly, yet so many of us have never given ourselves the opportunity to cultivate our communication skills. Expressing yourself creatively is like allowing your true self to be visible, even if you never share your creation with other people. Write, dance, paint, decorate… Whatever you choose to do, just make sure you’re making something authentic to you.

Notice Meaningful Moments

This item is rather self-explanatory. In your day-to-day life, try your best to notice the moments that feel meaningful to you. These moments might be big, but they might also be small.
Perhaps you received a text message from a friend you haven’t seen in a while, and it made you feel loved. Perhaps you noticed a moment when a task that was once difficult suddenly felt easier, and it made you feel accomplished. Tiny moments of gratitude, of abundance, of freedom and ability, are all worthy of your attention in present. You needn’t crack the code to “the meaning of life” or anything existential like that. All you have to do is use your awareness and enjoy the snippets of time when you experience something that has meaning for you.

**Connect with Your Support System**

Each of us needs to belong in at least one group of other humans. We are a social species. Belonging helps us feel happy. Additionally, at times we all need support. Our support systems—our families, our friends, our communities, our cohorts of likeminded individuals—are there to encourage us and lend a hand when we need it. They might also help us stay accountable with our goals. They are there to share our journey with us. While you focus on your wellness, make sure a part of that effort includes keeping in touch with the important relationships in your life.

**How to Use the Daily Wellness Planner**

There are 9 items on the checklist every day. That doesn’t mean, however, that you have to do 9 different activities every day, or that each day must be different from the previous day. Sometimes you might have activities that will apply to more than one checklist item. Additionally, if it works best for you, you can create a schedule for yourself so that you can meet as many of your checklist items as possible with ease and predictability. Or, if you prefer to live your life organically, you can find ways to meet your checklist items as you go. It’s all about what works for you.
At first, using your wellness planner every single day might feel like a chore. You may forget to do it, and decide to go back and retroactively fill things out from days past. You might feel like it isn’t working for you, and want to toss the system aside. I encourage you to stick with it in spite of any difficulties you may initially face. Using your wellness planner and focusing on your wellness as a key component of your life is a new skill and habit that you must build, and building new habits takes time. In order to help yourself build a new habit of using your wellness planner, add using the planner to a part of your day where it fits naturally and you will remember to do it. For example, perhaps you want to put a note next to your bed that reminds you to fill out your planner before you fall asleep each night, and if you use brightly colored paper, you know you will see it and be reminded. For the first few days, or maybe even a week, you might forget all about your planner until you see that brightly colored note next to your bed, where you have conveniently also placed your planner, and you will fill it out then. Soon enough, just having the planner there will be enough of a reminder. It will become a part of your daily routine, and begin to feel easy. Or perhaps you carry a bag with you as you go about your day, and you can keep your planner in your bag. Each time you take it out to look up the time of an appointment or to write something into it, you will see the checklist and be reminded to focus on those things. The key is to add the planner to a part of your day that it fits naturally and where it will feel like time spent congratulating yourself for focusing on your wellness and clearing space in your mind that previously held onto your appointments or to-dos. When we create a routine for ourselves using a cue that already exists during our day, we are capitalizing on what we know about the habit loop (Duhigg, 2014), which is that new habits are formed when they come from existing cues and provide us with familiar rewards. Wellness is a reward, a clear mind from knowing your appointments have been placed somewhere is a reward, and checking things off of a list is also
rewarding. You might even choose to reward yourself if you are able to using your wellness planner for a full week, for example, by having dinner with a friend or doing some other meaningful activity. Whatever gets you excited about committing to your wellness, use it.

Within your planner, you will notice that each day has a layout of the hours of the day, as well as a space for notes and the daily wellness checklist. The hours of the day section is meant to make it easy for you to write in important times, whether these are class times, work hours, appointments, important phone calls, your daily workout routine, or whatever else it helps you to schedule in. The notes section of the planner is meant for you to use however you need to. Mine tends to have daily to-dos and reminders in it, as well as possibly phone numbers or business hours I may need to remember, and maybe even an inspirational quote I found online that speaks to me. Finally, the daily planner pages include your checklist. You can choose to simply check each box off as you accomplish them, but there has also been space left under each item for you to jot down what activity you used if you want to. However you use this space is up to you.

You will also notice that one of the checklist items is “spend time expressing yourself creatively.” While we’ve already discussed that this can mean anything you choose it to mean, the planner also includes blank pages each week for you to use as your creative space, if you so choose. You can write, draw, create a collage, tape a favorite inspirational message… Literally anything you want to create there. The goal is not perfection. The goal is to focus on wellness. Expressing yourself creatively helps you get in touch with your authentic self, even if you don’t believe you are creative. Simply journal on the pages, even if it’s to write about how much you hate being creative. There is no judgment in your planner. The only thing that matters is your wellness.
Finally, you will notice that there is a book appendix in the back of this planner that contains ideas of different activities you may choose to use (or not) to accomplish the items on your wellness checklist. This chart is intended to be used as a guide, but not as a rule book. For example, you can count your daily yoga practice for all the items the book appendix mentions, or use your own judgement to check things off. And of course you may do activities that are not on this list. It is not intended to be exhaustive. It is only intended to help you come up with ideas.

If you are interested in some of the research findings that led me to create the wellness planner, you may look into the literature I have included as at the end of the book for further reading. These books and articles were all used to find and compile the techniques and concepts used in The Daily Wellness Planner. Now you may get started using your planner. Use it, stick to it, and enjoy feeling better and more fulfilled in your life. You deserve it.
### Today’s Wellness Checklist

- Be deliberate in your daily activities
- Engage in mind-calming or centering activity with a breathing component
- Engage your body in rhythmic, deliberate activity
- Mindfully observe nature
- Appreciate any form of art
- Learn something for personal growth or inspiration
- Spend time expressing yourself creatively
- Notice meaningful moments
- Connect with your support system

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### Notes

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[Insert creativity here.]
## Book Appendix

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<th>Art Act</th>
<th>Deliberate action</th>
<th>Mind-calming</th>
<th>Body-activity</th>
<th>Observe nature</th>
<th>Appreciate art</th>
<th>Express yourself</th>
<th>Notice moments</th>
<th>Support system</th>
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<td>Trul khor-energy medicine</td>
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The Daily Wellness Planner’s References for Further Reading


