



MINDFULNESS AND GESTALT-THERAPY MEDITATION: A POSSIBLE ENCOUNTER FOR HUMAN HEALTH

Meditação Mindfulness e Gestalt-terapia: Um Encontro Possível para a Saúde Humana

Meditación Mindfulness y Gestalt-terapia: un encuentro posible para la salud humana

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Abstract: Mindfulness Meditation has been associated with increased subjective well-being, reduced emotional reactivity, and behavioral regulation. In turn, Gestalt therapy traditionally has the self-awareness and present experience here and now composing its theoretical and practical proposal. Thus, the objective of this study was to identify the possibilities of theoretical and practical exchange between the Mindfulness Meditation technique and the Gestalt therapy psychological approach. We sought to identify, compare and contrast the common terms and concepts found in their respective theoretical and practical frameworks. Although these concepts have their meanings constituted in their different theories, it was possible to identify points of dialogue between the theoretical and practical proposals. The integration self-awareness, functional self-awareness and spontaneous self-regulation are the three axes that demonstrate dialogue and indicate an encounter between Mindfulness Meditation and Gestalt therapy.

Keywords: Mindfulness Meditation; Gestalt therapy; Clinical practice.

Resumo: A Meditação Mindfulness vem sendo associada ao aumento do bem-estar subjetivo, à redução da reatividade emocional e à regulação do comportamento. Por sua vez, a Gestalt-terapia, tradicionalmente, tem a autoconsciência e a experiência presente no aqui e agora compondo sua proposta teórico-prática. Nesse sentido, o objetivo deste estudo foi identificar possibilidades de interlocução teórico-práticas entre a técnica Meditação Mindfulness e a abordagem psicológica Gestalt-terapia. Buscou-se identificar, comparar e contrastar os termos comuns e conceitos encontrados em seus respectivos arcabouços teórico-práticos. Apesar desses conceitos terem seus significados constituídos em suas diferentes teorias, foi possível identificar pontos de interlocução entre as propostas teórico-práticas. A autoconsciência integradora, a autoconsciência funcional e a autorregulação espontânea são os três eixos que demonstram a interlocução e que indicam um encontro entre a Meditação Mindfulness e a Gestalt-terapia.

Palavras-chave: Meditação Mindfulness; Gestalt-terapia; Prática clínica.

Resumen: La meditación de atención plena se ha asociado con un mayor bienestar subjetivo, una menor reactividad emocional y una regulación conductual. A su vez, la terapia Gestalt tradicionalmente tiene la autoconciencia y la experiencia presente aquí y ahora componiendo su propuesta teórica y práctica. En este sentido, el objetivo de este estudio fue identificar posibilidades de diálogo teórico y práctico entre la técnica de Meditación Mindfulness y el enfoque psicológico de la terapia Gestalt. Intentamos identificar, comparar y contrastar los términos y conceptos comunes que se encuentran en sus respectivos marcos teóricos y prácticos. Aunque estos conceptos tienen sus significados constituidos en sus diferentes teorías, fue posible identificar puntos de diálogo entre las propuestas teóricas y prácticas. Integrar la autoconciencia, la autoconciencia funcional y la autorregulación espontánea son los tres ejes que demuestran el diálogo e indican una reunión entre la Meditación Mindfulness y la terapia Gestalt.

Palabras clave: Meditación Mindfulness; terapia Gestalt; Práctica clínica.

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Introduction

The popularity of Psychology studies on mindfulness for various applications (subjective well-being, pain, anxiety, depression) can be measured by the growing number of publications investigating the phenomenon and its possibilities for intervention in clinical practice (Coimbra & Vasco, 2017; Miró et al., 2011). In Brazil, the term mindfulness is replaced with full awareness and full attention (Demarzo, 2015). But, to avoid misinterpretation, the original word in English, mindfulness, will be used in this article. Currently, mindfulness has been identified as an important component in psychological processes, such as working memory, regulation of emotions and pain management. However, the effectiveness of interventions for all types of patients and demands cannot be generalized (Williams, 2010). Still, mindfulness is considered a facilitating component for the psychological adaptation process, as it is positively associated with the promotion of psychological health (Keng, Smoski & Robins, 2011).

Studies show that mindfulness training based on the program created in the late 1970s by Kabat-Zinn can increase subjective well-being (Menezes, Dell'Aglio & Bizarro, 2012), reduce emotional reactivity and increase self-regulation behavior (Barnhofer et al., 2009). Doctor of molecular biology, Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) based his studies on the ones of medicine, biology and the Buddhist philosophy to organize a meditation protocol grounded on mindfulness, aimed at reducing stress, which he called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction - MBSR. The program's objective was to broaden the participants' perception of their thoughts, negative feelings and body self-awareness, understood only as cognitive productions, and not as real facts or contents and beliefs to be modified. This protocol was originally unrelated to applied psychology.

The association between studies on mindfulness and psychological clinical practices began within the scope of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (MacKenzie & Kocovski, 2016; Barnhofer et al., 2009; Barnes & Lynn, 2010). In order to help depressive patients, Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002) were the first scholars of this approach to develop a mindfulness-based meditation program relying on the pioneering program arranged by Kabat-Zinn, which was called Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy. This program focused on patients who had already presented a picture of major depression, and its objective was to decrease the relapse cycle of these people, which commonly starts from an increase in the frequency of negative thoughts.

The results of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy were positive, as a consequence of its focus on the management of negative thoughts and attitudes and changes in mood, promoting in patients different ways of relating to these behaviors. However, limitations were identified regarding the applicability and effectiveness of the program. Patients who have been diagnosed with a higher level of depression will require two or three participations in the program to achieve favorable results. For patients who have experienced a fairly serious predicament in life, the program has not shown satisfactory results (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002).

The approximation between Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and mindfulness has promoted theoretical discussions about the meaning of the terms "here and now" and "mindfulness", as well as about the use/usage in the practices of such psychological approach (Childs, 2011). The debate also highlights the issue of the psychologists' experience in developing their clinical intervention (Childs, 2011). That is, the psychologist must first develop this practice in order to later work with it (Childs, 2011).

In this sense, Gestalt therapy as a theory and clinical practice that has extensively studied the present experience based on phenomenology as a philosophical basis and scientific method (Ribeiro, 2006, 2007; Boris, Melo & Moreira, 2017; Yontef, 2002; Pinto, 2006) can offer a privileged perspective to the debate. Salomon Perls, also known as Fritz Perls (1893-1972), one of the main authors of this approach, had his assumptions based on the Buddhist philosophy and practice, and also proposed that the attention should be directed to the present experience (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997).

Gestalt therapy has traditionally studied self-awareness, with its focus on the present experience and the awareness that emerges in the here and now. In clinical practice, Gestalt therapy aims at promoting the self-regulation of the organism by focusing on the present experience of the moment. It seeks to favor the awareness process, a term translated into the Portuguese language as total self-awareness (Ribeiro, 2006; 2007).

The purpose of this study was, therefore, to identify the possibilities for a theoretical-practical dialogue between the mindfulness meditation technique and the psychological Gestalt-therapy approach. We sought to identify, compare and contrast common terms and concepts found in their theoretical-practical framework, mainly using the works "Gestalt-therapy", by Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (1951/1997), and "Full Catastrophe Living", by Jon Kabat-Zinn, both the original published in English (1990) and the translation into Portuguese (2017). Although each of these proposals has its own scientific basis, it is understood that their encounter can contribute to caring for the human health. The organization of the article is then



established as follows: in the first and second parts, awareness is presented as the central axis, respectively, from the perspective of Gestalt-therapy and Mindfulness Meditation. The following three parts present the thematic axes that emerged from the interlocution of Gestalt-therapy and Mindfulness Meditation: (1) integrating self-awareness, (2) functional self-awareness and (3) spontaneous self-regulation.

Gestalt therapy

Fritz Perls was a psychiatrist interested in studies of the human psyche with a focus on self-awareness. He coined the theoretical proposal as Gestalt-therapy, that is, a holistic and procedural approach to the awareness system (Yontef & Schulz, 2016; Muller-Granzotto & Muller-Granzotto, 2016; Ribeiro, 2013; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997). His proposal intended on promoting the body's self-regulatory capacity through experiments on consciousness, involving focused attention and concentration (Lima, 2008; Yontef & Schulz, 2016). The human being was considered in their entirety (integration of mind and body), inviting them to get in touch with themselves and experience everything they consciously perceive at that moment, with attention and concentration, because "[...] it is the sensory-motor integration, the acceptance of the impulse and the attentive contact with the new environmental material that results in a work of value" (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997, p. 59).

To Perls, through concentration, the continuum of awareness is favored, the self-contact, and it is proposed to the individual to accept their experience in the way that is presented to their conscience. Through focused attention and body concentration, for which Perls instructs throughout his work, it is possible to recover awareness, which promotes a closer contact with the natural functioning of the organism (Ribeiro, 2013; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997). Experiment was the name given to the experiences proposed during the psychotherapeutic process used in Gestalt therapy (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951/1997). Gestalt-therapy's proposals involve the individual's attention and concentration in their current experience, including sensation, motor skills and language, with the purpose of increasing the level of self-awareness of themselves from their experience, and helping the individual to become aware of the inhibition and favor its resolution (Muller-Granzotto & Muller-Granzotto, 2016). Perls, at the time, called this proposal "concentration therapy" (Muller-Granzotto and Muller-Granzotto, 2016, p. 141).

Concentration is the most effective "means by which" neurotic and paranoid disorder can be cured [sic]. The "final gain" is negative: the destruction of disturbance. Concentration is also a "final gain" in itself. It is the only positive attitude that is linked to the feeling of health and well-being. It is the symptom par excellence of healthy holism (Perls, 1947/2002, p. 370, emphasis added).

From 1951, Perls, with the participation of Goodman and Hefferline, reorganized the concept of awareness, describing it as a system composed of contact, feeling, excitement and the formation of gestalten. Hence, awareness is the integration or unification of the individual (Ribeiro, 2006; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997; Muller-Granzotto & Muller-Granzotto, 2016). For Gestalt-therapy, awareness happens as the contact unfolds, which is not only related to the physical aspect, that is, to the organism-environment interaction, but is also an abstract concept (Ribeiro, 2006).

In this theoretical proposal, contact is what provides growth and development to the individual (Ribeiro, 2006, 2007), it is creation and it is the "becoming" that emanates in a dynamic process of assimilation of what is different and new. What is familiar or what does not matter to the organism, is not necessary at that moment, consequently, it is neither contact nor assimilable. Contact is entrepreneurial, because it will always be proactive to the new, since only in this way it becomes subsistence (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997; Ribeiro, 2006, 2007; Silva, Baptista & Alvim, 2015; Yontef & Schulz, 2016). The interruption of the fluid process of contact prevents the fluid process of excitement of the organism. That is, the opening to the new, which is fundamental for awareness, that can lead to psychopathologies (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997; Ribeiro, 2007; Silva, Baptista & Alvim, 2015).

In the psychotherapeutic process of Gestalt-therapy, the individual is invited to experience their censorship, their resistance, focusing on their pain, suffering or whatever arises at the moment, increasing awareness (Ribeiro, 2013). The awareness process is spontaneity, "[...] but it is a process of discovering-and-inventing as we go, engaged and accepting what comes along" (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997, p. 182). Accordingly, it is understood that the individual can achieve insights and find ways to solve problems. The insight involves a new cognitive structure that is organized based on the perceptual process, as new information is assimilated during the contact established between the organism-environment (Farfán & Moguejo, 2015).

Gestalt-therapy's proposal is focused on the current experience (here and now), because awareness is not thinking about the problem or the content, but the experience of integration, opening/closing the contact cycle or solving an unfinished gestalt, that constitutes a failure to close the contact process (Ribeiro, 1994, 2006). When this happens, it is a sign that a critical need of the organism has not been solved, which will



promote an instability in their homeostatic process, and, through dysfunctional adjustments, may cause the development of psychopathologies (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997).

Perls understood psychopathology as an interrupted awareness, because the organism cannot identify their critical need in their present context. Psychopathology is understood as a whole, needing to take into account all the experienced and dynamic interaction established by the human being. Thus, for Gestalt therapy, a disease is considered a form of adaptation of the organism, that the individual found to stay alive, and as a consequence, it is understood as a healthy representation of the human being (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997; Perls, 1947/2002).

Thus, Gestalt-therapy includes the environment for generating unfinished gestalten change and resolution, through closer contact with the self (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997). In this process, it is emphasized that no change in the individual can be understood or promoted if their social, cultural, biophysical and historical aspects are not observed in a unitary way. This is because the human being is intelligible in their contact border, which here does not mean a physical space, but rather a permeable dimension that unites organism and environment in their current context. This strategy was called “contextual method”, at the time when Perls, Hefferline and Goodman collaborated for the organization of Gestalt therapy (Parlett, 1991; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997).

The process of getting in touch with yourself and concentrating on the experience is what makes the body's self-regulation process feasible, a natural functioning that enables the human being to find balance in the face of stressful situations. The problem is that, during human development, one goes through experiences in which critical needs chosen by the organism are prevented from being fulfilled. This fact influences the vital energy of the organism containing it. In this state, neurosis sets in (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997; Figueiredo & Castro, 2015; Silva, Batista & Alvin, 2015; Fogarty, Bhar, Theiler & O'She, 2016). Stress factors can trigger disruptions in the contact cycle and promote the need for adjustment of the organism, who naturally constituted by the homeostatic system, will adjust to the environment in order to adapt to the new context. However, at the same time that stressors can function as promoters of healthy development of the being, they can also interfere in the awareness system. However, self-actualization of the organism is preserved even in a diminished way (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997).

The increase in the level of self-awareness, as considered by Gestalt-therapy, will favor the individual to deal proactively with stressful situations, as they will be able to perceive action strategies and problem solving (Kolmannskog, 2017; Figueiredo & Castro, 2015). This approach also understands that the historical and social human being must not be interpreted based on previously structured and fixed knowledge. Based on that, it proposes to have a fluid view of the individual, and not that they are imprisoned in structured and pre-conceived nomenclatures. Understanding the individual as a being who, in their life flow, interacts and changes continuously, if they are in a context in which it is favored, psychopathology is defined as a form of expression arising from an attempt at creative adjustment in a search for self-regulation (Karwowski, 2015).

Like Gestalt therapy, integrative medicine accepts the unified view of the human being and understands that, in order to think and promote health, as well as to cure diseases, it is necessary to understand the functioning of the mind and body as a single and integrated process (Telesi Júnior, 2016). Intervention strategies have been developed based on this new paradigm for treating psychological and physiological problems in humans. Mindfulness Meditation is part of this vast field of research, which suggests it as an effective auxiliary technique for dealing with various psychosomatic disorders. This technique is found among phenomena that are currently the target of research, constituting one of the proposed paths that encompass the view supported by integrative medicine, in which the human being is indivisible and can only be fully understood (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

Mindfulness Meditation

Despite the existence of several techniques, the components “focused attention”, “non-judgment” in the face of the experience of the present moment, and “acceptance” are frequent in definitions for mindfulness meditation (Gregório & Gouveia, 2011). All these components have also been designated as a metacognitive practice. Currently research provides evidence that they regulate attention and other cognitive processes that involve information processing, intelligence, expansion of self-awareness, decreased rumination, and they function as a coping strategy for dealing with negative affects, regulating emotional state and improving interpersonal relationships (Bishop et al., 2004; Menezes, Dell'Aglio & Bizarro, 2012; Menezes & Bizarro, 2015).

Meditating is being mindful in the present moment, being aware of it (Menezes & Dell'Aglio, 2009a, 2009b). The practice of mindfulness meditation is the awareness of the present experience of the moment and acceptance of that experience without any judgment or type of elaboration in relation to it. Any type of internal or external stimulus that comes to consciousness should be left to be observed and simply accepted, without any reasoning, self-reflection or rumination (Bishop, et al., 2004; Menezes & Dell'Aglio, 2009a).

The Mindfulness Meditation practice developed in the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)



consists of eight weeks, being held in groups, once a week, for two hours per session. It addresses information on the causes of stress and the consequences for the individual's health, as well as on the anatomy of stress; it teaches attention exercises (sitting and moving meditation and body scan) developed during the sessions and also as an activity to be performed at home; it proposes discussions on the participants' feelings during the meditation process, as well as about the importance of meditation and practice in daily life and for the rest of their lives, with the purpose of promoting physical and mental health to the population in general, reducing their stress level (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; 1990/2017; Viana & Souza, 2011).

In summary, the program's activities are characterized by attention, acceptance, non-judgment and openness to the experience at the present time, making it possible to increase the level of mindfulness and self-knowledge, and thus promote physical and psychological health. In this process, individuals learn to "detach themselves from the autopilot", perceiving thoughts, emotions, feelings and actions that were previously unconscious and, therefore, repeated. Consequently, they learn to make conscious contact with their human uniqueness in order to manage their life more consciously (Kabat-Zinn, 2017).

With the process of increasing the level of mindfulness, one starts to perceive one's own intentions and act according to them, and no longer react automatically to circumstances. The program favors people's contact with themselves, helping them to understand the functioning of their body and mind. Thus, they learn to trust themselves more, being guided by their experiences. Reports by Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) show that, when using MBSR, people started to identify their real needs and meet them. They managed to decrease mental ramblings, increase the perception of sensations and emotions and learn to perceive thoughts only as mental productions, and not as facts.

Such technique teaches one to accept any life experience, with its pains and sufferings, joys and pleasures, without changing anything, with openness and acceptance, and not with judgment. Only in this way, according to Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017), is it possible to get in touch with the "being" that we are and learn how a new way of relating to what emerges during the present experience is possible. The narrowing of the individual's contact with themselves and with their experiences allows them to perceive possibilities of relating to them in different ways, which can promote healthy human development (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

The concept of mindfulness used by Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017, p. 26) refers to "[...] the awareness that arises when paying attention intentionally in the present moment, without judgment". Such condition allows the discovery of different forms of relationship with stressors that constitute human existence. In this sense, according to him, mindfulness is a style of self-awareness that expands possibilities of perception about whatever comes to the human mind.

The eight-week program is entirely based on this style of self-awareness. The work through meditation techniques teaches the person to get in touch with themselves, with openness and acceptance, so that they can discover learning throughout the process and grow with the current experience. It is through contact with oneself and the investigative openness about what emerges in consciousness in the present moment, during the experience, that all the work continues. MBSR involves making contact, rather than avoidance. Only in this way is it possible to rescue the integrity of the being as an indivisible whole, facilitating the physiological connections indispensable for the organism's self-regulation process (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

The attitudes that make up the practice of mindfulness are "[...] non-judgment, patience, a beginner's mind, confidence, not fighting, accepting and letting go" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017, p. 78). Each of these attitudes influences the scope of the others during practice. In this dynamic, not judging is an attitude that develops as one learns that the mind is judgmental, whether through repressed fears or prejudices developed throughout life. The important thing is to perceive this judgmental functioning and to be open to the experience of perceiving the mind judging, without the need to change it.

Patience, in turn, contributes to the learning that everything has its own pace and to the perception of the differences between what it is like to live mindfulness and to live on "autopilot". Living on the "autopilot", it is not clear what the necessary pace of the organism is so they can balance themselves, but through patience, it is possible to do so. To have patience is to be open to the present experience. The beginner's mind provides contact with the phenomena emerging in the present moment. It is characterized by experiencing the moment as if it were the first time, without prior knowledge, without pre-formed opinions.

Trust, on the other hand, is the attitude of accepting the information that the organisms themselves reveal about themselves, finding self-understanding. Non-action is fundamental for achieving mindfulness, because any attempt of change interferes in the awareness process (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017). Then, it is necessary to strive to accept every experience without changing anything, just living with openness, acceptance and non-judgment. It is by not doing that the organism reaches a state of natural and healthy balance. This is a paradox, because the "not doing" state promotes transformation. This idea is not related to being passive; on the contrary, it means remaining non-reactive, which requires effort and intentionality. Non-action involves the act of observing your thoughts as mental productions, and not as facts, and perceiving your own sensations without changing them. In doing so, one learns to respond appropriately to the needs of the organism, because "[...] knowing what you are doing at the moment you are doing it is the essence of the mindfulness practice" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017, p. 74).

Mindfulness Meditation requires full involvement of the entire "being" and commitment to the in-



attention to be in the here and now throughout the process. The proposal to work with mindfulness involves using focused attention and observing what is revealed to the conscience. Acceptance teaches you to perceive phenomena as they are revealed, with all their originality. Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) describes his concept of healing related to this attitude. According to him, the cure will only happen as soon as the acceptance is present, because it sets one free, opens the way for the fluidity of the contact making and makes room for the process of becoming aware. Detachment is allowing life to flow, to continue. It is accepting that everything is temporary and procedural. The attitude of acceptance favors the development of the human “being” and their way of “being”, since it facilitates their connection and wholeness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

It is through awareness that the transformation process takes place. The entire program consists of techniques that emphasize mindfulness as a mechanism for healing. Breathing is used as an instrument to keep attention focused, as it is considered the embodied anchor, and helps the individual to remain in the here and now. Thus, observing breathing in the abdomen region and keeping your attention focused when breathing is part of the mind's training process to stay in the present.

The use of focused attention extends to all other techniques, such as body scanning, mindfulness walking or mindfulness movement. For example, during body scanning, you are invited to focus your attention to each region of the body and keep in touch with it during the experience. The previously mentioned Mindfulness Meditation techniques are also guided by the same principles (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

Attention plays a crucial role in the organism's self-regulation process; being an indispensable component for the knowledge of the body state through information present in it and that can be accessed at all times by the attentional focus (Hölzel et al., 2011). With attention, it is possible to internally create a favorable relationship to the situation experienced, facilitating the presentation of new responses in relation to it - for example, positive effects on blood pressure and cardiovascular functioning are observed in a training with attention (Gotink et al., 2015). Conversely, inattention promotes a lack of connection that deregulates the organism. Attention, therefore, is an indispensable component for health promotion, since it has the function of maintaining the conscious connection of the feedbacks informed by the organism, which serve as an alert for adjustment and adaptation to the environment, promoting the self-regulatory process (Richards, Campenni & Muse-Burke, 2010).

The perception of the lived experience can positively alter the organism's relationship with the stressor, leading to adaptation and self-regulation. The latter, in turn, can be defined as “[...] a process through which a system remains stable and functioning, preserving its adaptability to new circumstances” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017, p. 337). This process involves a flow of energy that participates in the dynamics and constant transformation of the organism (allostasis) when interacting with the environment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

Mindfulness Meditation is seen as a technique that favors balance, well-being and self-regulation of the body as a whole in the face of stressors that cause its imbalance. With mental training, the reduction of information processing is promoted, favoring perceptual reorganization and, consequently, physical and psychological well-being, since self-regulation involves cognitive and emotional processes. Such benefits are achieved with the help of relaxation, another mechanism that makes up meditation and decreases peripheral and central activations (autonomous activation), related to physical and psychological well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017). Mindfulness refers to the development of a less conditioned mind, of not engaging in elaboration processes or automatic reactions to stimuli (Menezes, Dell’Aglío & Bizarro, 2012). It has been understood as a phenomenon that encompasses two main components: the self-regulation of attention and the openness to accept the experience of the present moment. However, scholars have not yet reached a consensus regarding its operational and conceptual definition, which does not prevent its application in promoting human health (Bishop et al., 2004; Gregório & Gouveia, 2011; Menezes, Fioretin & Bizarro, 2012; Hirayama et al., 2014).

The metacognitive process may not work to promote well-being in situations involving more serious pathologies, which suggests the need for implicit learning, going beyond knowledge. The individual needs to feel and experience thoughts without any judgment or engagement in a process named as metacognitive insight (Teasdale, 1999). Studies that investigate the results obtained with mindfulness and the self-regulation of emotions in long-term meditators point to their interference in negative affects, causing their decrease. Such effect was also detected in meditators with little experience: the technique can reduce the positive affect in this group, due to the fact that individuals come into contact with suffering (Lalot, Delplanque & Sander, 2014).

Demarzo et al. (2015) also points out benefits of this technique on improving health in primary care patients with a higher level of self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, decreased concern and rumination. The study by Hölzel et al. (2011), in turn, analyzed people who underwent stress reduction training based on mindfulness and identified a greater amount of gray matter in the regions of the left hippocampus and posterior cingulate cortex. The research suggests that the intervention is associated with learning and memory processes, as well as emotion regulation.

Self-regulation is defined by Doron and Parot (2001) as a state reached by the organism without external interference. It does not happen automatically and is due to the functioning of an integrated organic system or a cognitive system that promotes an integrated organization. Derybery and Rothbart, cited by



Castro (2004, p. 51), define self-regulation as the “[...] processing at the highest operational level of modulation and control of the reactive states of the somatic, endocrine, autonomic and central nervous systems”. In humans, self-regulation is maintained by the autonomic nervous system, which controls the glands, the smooth muscles of the viscera and blood vessels, breathing, heart function, digestion, temperature, the hypothalamus (which controls sexual and food behavior) and organs that work without a conscious monitoring (Torrado & Ouakinin, 2015).

In fact, a study by Atanes et al. (2015) found a positive correlation between self-reported mindfulness, perceived stress and subjective well-being in primary care health professionals with complaints of stress and symptoms of burnout, taking into account their long working hours. This result suggested the use of the mindfulness technique to increase the level of awareness of these professionals, as a way of preventing illnesses. A systematic review by Gotink et al. (2015) to assess the effects of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy on heterogeneous groups reported that the benefits generated for the mental health of patients with depression, anxiety and stress, are associated with an increase in people's quality of life. Given that, the authors concluded that the results of using these programs as a supporting technique in the treatment of cancer, depression and disease prevention in healthy adults are favorable. It was also observed that the motivation and confidence of the participants in the intervention program in relation to the technique used is fundamental for their benefits to be achieved. Relevant evidence can be found in the research on the health of the North American population (based on a monitoring procedure conducted in 2012), which found meditation to be the most used practice among complementary medicine practices. The practitioners were female, middle aged, holding a university level degree and with symptoms of chronic diseases (Cramer et al., 2016).

Although stemmed from and developed from different theoretical frameworks, it is understood that the main concepts and phenomena of interest in the theoretical proposals of the Gestalt-therapy clinical approach and the Mindfulness Meditation technique allow a dialogue between these concepts. Three main axes emerge in this dialogue: integrating self-awareness, functional self-awareness and spontaneous self-regulation. Each axis is a component of a whole that is the result of the synergic relationship between the three. That is, each axis contains the other two, as constituent parts, in a continuous game of figure-ground. Each axis is described below, separately.

Integrating self-awareness

In Gestalt-therapy, the “[...] self is the system of contacts in the organism / environment field; and these contacts are the structured experience of the real present situation” (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997, p. 173). The view of Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) regarding a system that changes according to the needs identified by the organism which is in contact with the environment, working in order to internally self adjust (homeostasis) and externally (adaptation to the environment), is expressed in the following argument: “When we are more in contact with the body, by paying attention to it in a systematic way, we are much more in tune with its messages and we are more able to give appropriate responses” (p. 71). The continuous process of establishing contacts requires facing catastrophic obstacles in life to achieve the integration of the present being, as described by Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017, p. 52):

we need to be willing to face the total catastrophe of life itself, in pleasant and unpleasant circumstances, when things happened in the desired or undesired way, when they felt that things were under control and when they were not [sic] - using their own experiences, thoughts and feelings as raw material to rescue one's wholeness.

For Gestalt-therapy, it is said that such confrontation is related to an acceptance of the experience as it appears in the present moment, without intervening in an attempt to change it, as expressed in this excerpt: “this is the experience of concentrated observation of something, in which we adopt an attitude of confronting and examining the thing, but we refrain from intervening in it or adjusting it in any way (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997, p. 181). In accordance with this premise, Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017, p. 414) thus clarifies:

in the occasions when we turn our attention to symptoms of any kind, instead of discussing the symptoms as a problem and focusing on how to eliminate them, we do so in order to get in touch with the actual experience of the symptoms themselves, in those moments when they dominate the mind and body.

The experience ‘to get in touch with the symptoms’ dialogue with the holistic view of the human psyche that Perls added to the Gestalt-therapy approach when describing the concept of self as an integrating system of contacts that favors the adjustment of the organism to the environment in a continuous process. Through



this system, it is possible to face life's obstacles in the way that it presents itself to the conscience (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997). In the proposal made by Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) on Mindfulness Meditation, contact is the indispensable element for the conscious encounter with human singularity. It will enable the individual to manage their existence, as it makes it possible to increase the level of mental and body self-awareness, realizing its functioning and learning to trust themselves and their own experiences.

Bearing this objective in mind, the MBSR program proposes that the participant, through establishing contact with themselves, can grow and develop with the experience of the present moment. Both proposals work by establishing contact with the self, focused attention and present experience, according to their own theoretical-practical framework, proposing the individual to get in touch with what emerges in their conscience in the here and now, without judgment, with openness to experience, increasing, with that attitude, the level of self-awareness. Although these concepts have their descriptions specifically elaborated by the theoretical composition in which they are inserted, the viability of the interlocution is noted. As in Gestalt therapy, Mindfulness Meditation understands that the rescue of being as an indivisible whole involves the total awareness, made possible by contact, an indispensable process for achieving self-regulation of the organism (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997; Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

Functional self-awareness

Self-awareness is understood as being what you are in the present moment. This meaning, as seen in the analysis of the excerpts highlighted below, is shared by Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017, p. 41): "[...] mindfulness is awareness from moment to moment without judgment [...]"; "The present moment is the perfect moment to open up to that dimension of your being, to incorporate the total dimension of what is already in consciousness" (p. 95). For Gestalt-therapy (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997), self-awareness means unraveling yourself from bodily and mental manifestations. With this understanding, Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951/1997, p. 44) put forth: "[...] awareness seems to be a special type of awareness, a contact function in which there are difficulties and delays in adjustment". The same authors still argue that

[...] we can immediately see that consciousness is functional. Because, if the interaction at the contact border is relatively simple, there is little awareness, reflection, motor adjustment or deliberation, but where the interaction is difficult and complicated, there is an intensified awareness (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997, p. 69).

These authors assert that "[...] we could still conceive the rule that 'what is most vulnerable and valuable is defended first', as a speck in the sensitive eye is the most intense pain and requires attention; it is the 'wisdom of the body'" (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997, p. 88). For Perls, consciousness developed over the evolution of the human species with the function of helping the organism to adapt to the unfavorable circumstances of the environment at a given moment (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997). Reflecting on the excerpts presented, self-awareness has the function of informing the organism's critical need, in order to solve the problem that causes the imbalance. Aligned with this proposal, it is understood that the mindfulness meditation technique also contributes to this adaptation, as it favors the increase in the level of self-awareness, self-knowledge and human development (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2017).

Hence, it can be understood that the creators of both proposals point out that it is through self-awareness that the healthy development process takes place. In mindfulness meditation, breathing is a technique used to keep your attention focused and help the person to be in the here and now, in contact with you during the present experience. In Gestalt therapy, the individual is invited to experience their suffering without resistance, seeking to increase awareness, favoring the preservation and adjustment of the species through the establishment of contact. The theme of functional self-awareness reflects the encounter between both theories, reflecting an openness to working together, in which the psychological approach Gestalt-therapy and the Mindfulness Meditation technique can strengthen the function of self-awareness as an indispensable component for a healthy development of the human being.

Spontaneous self-regulation

Awareness is understood by Gestalt-therapy as a spontaneous process of self-regulation of the organism, made possible by the establishment of contacts with the environment at the present moment (Ribeiro, 1994, 2006). Excerpts from the work of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951/1997, p. 84) indicate the construction of this thought: "the spontaneous awareness of the dominant need and its organization of contact functions is the psychological form of organismic self-regulation [...]"; "[...] spontaneity is neither directive nor self-directing, nor is it dragging anything, although it is essentially uncompromised, but it is a process of discovering and inventing as we go, engaged and accepting what comes along" (p. 182).



In Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017, p. 337-340) words, “self-regulation is the process by which a system remains stable and in operation [...]. However, when the system loses its balance, restoring health requires more attention in order to reestablish that connection”. Regarding this process of awareness, Kabat-Zinn explains that the acceptance of what comes to consciousness is fundamental for the promotion of the healthy and natural balance of the organism and, as a result, for the achievement of healing. He asserts that “[...] awareness [of the individual] is in a kind of intermediate way, neither active nor passive, but that he accepts the conditions, dedicates himself to work and grows towards the solution (p. 59), emphasizing that, “[...] actually, my operational definition of healing is the following: to accept things as they are” (p. 84).

In Mindfulness Meditation, the acceptance of the present experience is fundamental to a healthy and natural self-regulation process in the body. In Gestalt-therapy, contact is a participant in the awareness process, which is the body's self-regulating system, being composed of the attitude of acceptance and attention.

Focusing on experience is what guarantees the organism's self-regulation process (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1997). That importance of attention that make up the awareness process is also present in the work of Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017, p. 54), suggesting the communication between the ideas of the authors and the two proposals. “Mindfulness essentially consists of a specific way of paying attention, and the awareness that comes from paying attention in that way [...]”. Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) explains that “[...] strange as it may seem, knowing our feelings intentionally during hours of emotional suffering is something that contains the seeds of healing” (p. 470). Bearing that in mind, it is possible to point out that Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951/1997) and Kabat-Zinn (1990/2017) emphasize the importance of awareness, which is a process of spontaneous self-regulation, for the integration experience, of self-regulation and healing the body.

Final considerations

The study sought to present tentative dialogue between the Mindfulness Meditation technique and the Gestalt-therapy psychological approach. The concepts of experience, present, contact, attention, awareness, acceptance and self-regulation are found in the main works of both previously mentioned authors. Although these concepts have their meanings constituted in their different theories, it was possible to reflect on the contribution of theoretical and practical proposals to the human health. Integrating self-awareness, functional self-awareness and spontaneous self-regulation are axes that demonstrate dialogue and that indicate an encounter between Mindfulness Meditation and Gestalt-therapy. It is then suggested that the clinical psychological approach Gestalt-therapy, working together with the Mindfulness Meditation technique, may enhance the positive results of this supporting technique to promote health.

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