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Quality World Mindfulness: A Counseling Technique Designed for Members of the Community Ex-Offender Population

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Abstract

The author introduces an original technique designed for use within the context of a career development workshop series for community ex-offenders. The technique blends mindfulness practices and William Glasser's *quality world* construct. Through the use of a case example, he illustrates the technique's potential for enhancing a client's sense of safety, comfort with personal self-disclosure, and self-acceptance with regard to details including drug addiction and incarceration. The author presents recommendations, limitations, and directions for future research.

Keywords: career counseling, community ex-offender, mindfulness, choice theory, quality world

Over 30 years of harsh criminal justice policies in the United States have produced a large population of ex-offenders who struggle to find work in spite of the fact that they have paid their debts to society (Barber, 2010). According to one published report (Schmitt & Warner, 2011), in 2008 there were between 12 million and 14 million ex-offenders of federal working age (i.e., at least 16 years old) in the United States. In the same year, about one in 17 men of federal working age was an ex-prisoner (Schmitt, Warner, & Gupta, 2010). Ex-offenders who are unable to secure work find it challenging to desist from repeating prior criminal activities and, as a result, may fail to reintegrate into society. Within five years of release from a state prison, approximately 67% of ex-offenders return to prison (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014). For this reason, the current author designed and implemented a four-workshop career development series to promote the career development of community ex-offenders in Forsyth County, North Carolina.

Developmental Needs of Ex-Offenders

Relative to the general population, ex-offenders as a group tend to be less well-educated and less skilled (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2000). Unlike individuals on the outside who are usually rewarded for demonstrating initiative, incarcerated individuals are rewarded for compliance. Consequently, ex-offenders commonly need assistance from a career development professional in order to become more autonomous and proactive in their efforts to secure gainful employment. Career development is positively associated with *desistance* or a cease in the performance of illegal behaviors (Devers, 2011; Laub & Sampson, 2001). Stable employment is one of the most robust predictors of post-release reintegration into society (Varghese & Cummings, 2012).

Psychological Characteristics of Ex-Offenders

Ex-offender status is significantly associated with forms of mental illness, including substance abuse, depression, and feelings of hopelessness (Varghese, Fitzgerald, Chronister, Cummings, & Forrest, 2013). Ex-offenders commonly have experienced abuse or neglect from primary caregivers (SAMHSA, 2000) and may have been traumatized. The incarceration experience, which frequently includes exposure to violence, can re-traumatize individuals with a history of trauma (DeVeaux, 2013). Symptoms of trauma due to incarceration include emotional numbing, hyperarousal, panic attacks, and inability to trust others (Liem & Kunst, 2013). These symptoms can negatively affect ex-offender career entry skill development and employability.

Promoting the career development of community ex-offenders arguably promotes the overall mental health of workshop series completers. Employment has been reported to be one of the most reliable predictors of several factors, including desistance from criminal behavior (e.g., illegal drug use), development of more positive and supportive relationships, and lower rates of recidivism (Varghese et al., 2013). As a result, provision of a career development intervention can potentially increase participants' resilience, defined by Lewis (2012) as "the human capacity to spring back from risk posed by adversity and the ability to take actions to navigate satisfying life trajectories" (p. 191).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this article is to introduce an original intervention that I have found to be effective in my work with community ex-offenders. First, I will discuss the background literature on mindfulness approaches, including evidence of their effectiveness. Second, I will discuss reality therapy, choice theory, and the "quality world" construct. Third, I will discuss the career development workshop series that is the context for the career intervention. Next, I will describe the Quality World Mindfulness intervention, including its application to a client. Finally, I will discuss my recommendations for using this technique, including limitations and future directions for research.

Mindfulness

Definitions. Basic definitions of mindfulness, as cited by Ie, Ngnoumen, and Langer (2014a), include “moment-by-moment awareness” (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005, p. 6), “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality” (Hanh, 1976, p. 11), “a form of self-regulation of attention” (Hassed, 2013, p. 113), “paying attention with purpose, nonjudgmentally, and while in the present moment” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 230), and “complete attention to one’s experience on a moment-to-moment basis” (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999, p. 68). Murdock (2013) defined mindfulness as “deliberately paying attention to your experience” (p. 526). Curiosity or appreciation of novelty is a quality essential to most conceptions of mindfulness.

Mindfulness scholars (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006) have asserted that mindfulness entails five primary elements: (1) *observing* one’s inner emotions, (2) *acting* with here-and-now awareness, (3) *nonjudging* awareness of one’s inner experience, (4) *describing* or putting one’s beliefs, expectations, and opinions into words, and (5) *nonreactivity*, which denotes the ability to maintain here-and-now awareness of one’s inner experience without becoming lost, overwhelmed, or reacting immediately. Nonreactivity denotes the ability to remain calm and aware at the same, even in the face of intense emotional experiences. Baer and Krietemeyer (2006) asserted that all five elements also reflect capacities that can be learned or developed with practice. The Quality World Mindfulness technique promotes these five mindfulness qualities in clients.

History. Mindfulness originated with Buddhism, Hinduism, and other Eastern spiritual traditions (Hick, 2008; Ie et al., 2014a; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The Eastern approaches to mindfulness are meditative and emphasize nonjudgmental here-and-now awareness of one’s self and experience. (Bhikkhu, 2007). These approaches to mindfulness have undergone numerous transformations following their introduction into Western culture. Western conceptions of mindfulness emerged around the 1970s. The Western conception was significantly influenced by Ellen Langer’s seminal body of work, which includes numerous publications on mindfulness and choice (i.e., Alexander, Langer, Newman, Chandler, & Davies, 1989; Langer, 1992; Langer, Beck, Janoff-Bulman, & Timko, 1984; Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Whereas Eastern mindfulness practices are rooted in meditation, Western mindfulness practices foster a heightened sense of awareness through remaining open to novel information and forming new categories out of one’s experience (Ie et al., 2014a).

Applications. Langer studied the potential benefits of mindfulness in a broad range of areas, including mental and physical health, quality of interpersonal relationships, and creativity (Ie, Ngoumen, & Langer, 2014b). Langer’s groundbreaking experiments (Langer, Heffernan, & Kiester, 1988; Langer, Janis, & Wolfer, 1975; Langer & Rodin, 1976) demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness for reducing stress and improving sense of well-being. Incorporation of mindfulness into broader systems of treatment suggest that it improves conditions, including trauma (Folette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006), depression (Hoffman, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), anxiety (Hoffman et al., 2010), and addiction relapse (Vallejo & Amaro, 2009). These conditions are all commonly experienced by members of the ex-offender population, including a majority of the clients who participate in our career development workshops.

An individual can be fully present with her or himself or can be fully present with others. Mindfulness enables us to have self-empathy and self-compassion, and, when used in the context of a relationship, mindfulness enables us to have empathy and compassion for others (Germer et al., 2005; Siegel, 2010). Research indicates that mindfulness meditation can be used to teach or train individuals to have a more mindful outlook, contributing to other positive qualities such as optimism, happiness, or hopefulness (Davidson & Scherer, 2001).

The Quality World Construct

Reality therapy and choice theory. The *quality world* construct is an integral part of William Glasser's reality therapy (Glasser, 1965). Each individual creates and re-creates their quality world beginning shortly after birth (Glasser, 1998). The individual's quality world contains a set of specific mental images representing ways they can meet their basic needs. Reality therapy resulted from Glasser's experiences during his psychiatric residency in which he served as a consultant to the Ventura School, a state institution for girls with emotional and behavioral problems (Murdock, 2013). As described by Glasser, reality therapy principles (e.g., do not use punishment, nurture relationships) were the basis for the principles guiding the practices of the Ventura School.

Constructivist elements. Reality therapy contains distinct constructivist elements. For example, it emphasizes the role of the individual in constructing their quality world (Murdock, 2013). Glasser believed that individuals always control what is included in their quality worlds, and they are clearly in control of their behaviors. The conceptual foundation of reality therapy is choice theory (Glasser, 1998, 2000). Glasser (1998) asserted that "we choose everything we do, including the misery we feel" (p. 3). According to choice theory (1998; pp. 332–335) we cannot control other people, and no one can control us. We are driven by five genetic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. We can satisfy those needs only by satisfying the pictures in our quality worlds. Glasser (2000) asserted, "Our quality world is the core of our lives because it is our direct motivation—where we always look when we are frustrated. If there is no picture to satisfy a need, we must try to create one" (p. 79).

Applications. A number of diverse individuals (cultural minorities, women, LGBTQIA individuals, and other groups) may perceive "the environment" (meaning the external world as they have perceived it across their entire lives) as oppressive and operating according to what William Glasser termed "external control psychology." Exploring a client's quality world—relationships, things, and beliefs or belief systems that meet their needs (i.e., survival, love and belonging, fun, power, and freedom)—can show respect and support for a client's "internal control." Clients really appreciate the concept of quality world as it communicates that they have control, including the ability to add new possibilities to their quality world (e.g., to open up foreclosed decisions) and to remove items (e.g., alcohol) that are not serving their needs. This constructivist, strength-based approach potentially contributes to a client's sense of empowerment.

In the author's experience, the use of the quality world concept with ex-offenders, including those who are addicted to alcohol and drugs, is an apt match. Glasser (2000) observed that the people, things, and ideas people put into their quality worlds are not selected because they are good or moral. Individuals put criminal behavior and substance

abuse into their quality worlds because they represent an attempt to meet their basic needs (e.g., fun, power, love and belonging) in absence of healthier options (e.g., relationships). Sometimes items selected to meet one basic need (e.g., fun) pose a threat to another basic need (e.g., freedom), as occurs when an individual becomes incarcerated for illegal drug use.

Individuals, over the course of their lives, are continually revising their quality worlds in an effort to feel better. According to Glasser (2000), it is more difficult to remove something from one's quality world than it is to add something. He added that it is easier to remove an image when it is simultaneously replaced with an alternative image. The Quality World Mindfulness intervention facilitates the community ex-offender's awareness of items that are currently in their quality world. Further, during the activity and subsequent discussion, clients consider the relative value of the things, people, and beliefs in their quality worlds. Which ones are meeting their basic needs? Which ones are limiting or pose barriers? Which things, people, activities, or beliefs might be removed, and what alternative images might replace them?

Rationale for Integrating Mindfulness and Quality World

Choice theory and mindfulness practice are highly compatible as both emphasize the personal agency of the individual. Choice theory and the quality world construct entail the notion that individuals are the architects of a personal world and only they can choose what images are included in that world. However, from the perspective of mindfulness practice, ex-offenders are frequently less aware of their personal agency. Images they have selected for their quality world may have outlived their usefulness, and they may be operating as if on automatic pilot. Mindfulness is the antithesis of operating on automatic pilot, facilitating here-and-now awareness of one's quality world, including feelings and opinions regarding the images included in that world. Mindfulness has been proven effective for relapse prevention (Vallejo & Amaro, 2009). It promotes intentionality and empowers clients to critically examine the images that are in their quality world. These are the images that motivate behavior. Finally, the discussion of their quality world with a counselor and a group of supportive peers empowers clients to decide to make changes that will motivate them to lead more satisfying and rewarding lives.

New Leaf Career Development

Need and Rationale

A criminal record can pose a serious obstacle for a member of the ex-offender population who is seeking employment. Prison records and felony convictions greatly reduce an individual's chances of finding employment (Barber, 2010). A number of authors have affirmed the need and benefits of applying career counseling principles to promote development among members of the ex-offender population (Brown, Lent, & Knoll, 2013; McWhirter, 2013; Morgan, 2000). A key argument for the provision of career support services is the finding that career development and having stable employment are both, as previously mentioned, positive predictors of desistance from criminal behavior (Devers, 2011; Varghese & Cummings, 2012).

Background

The workshop series evolved from an earlier career support group, originally offered in the fall of 2012 at the Department of Public Safety in Washington, North Carolina. The career support group included the same session topics and consisted of approximately six 90-minute sessions. The workshop series presented here was first offered in November of 2014 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, through a partnership with the Forsyth County Public Library. The series and other related services (e.g., community advocacy) are collectively referred to as New Leaf Career Development for branding purposes. The series began and continues to be offered in a community room located in the public library.

Theoretical Foundations

The workshop series is based on an *assimilative* integrative model. This integrative model is primarily grounded in solution-focused therapy's (de Shazer, 1994) belief in the power of language to create reality. With regard to the actual practice of therapy, we have adopted some of the important assumptions of solution-focused therapy (O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 2003), including the assumption that there are a variety of different views of a situation that are valid, and it is important to adopt a view (i.e., a solution-oriented view) that is more helpful or more likely to contribute to positive change. Views that are problem-oriented are less helpful as they are less likely to bring about positive change. Thus, solution-focused therapy serves as the primary theoretical orientation in our model, and additional theoretical orientations are integrated with this primary theoretical perspective.

One of these theoretical perspectives is narrative therapy. This perspective is highly compatible with solution-focused therapy as it is also based on a postmodern perspective. Practitioners of narrative therapy encourage individuals to question and challenge dominant narratives that are stigmatizing or pathologizing. In the words of Doan (1998): "Narrative therapy concerns itself with the deliverance of clients from the weights of oppressive and totalizing stories via liberating the client's voice and preferences" (p. 219). For this reason, the techniques and practices in our workshop series emphasize the development of positive, strength-based *alternative* narratives (e.g., the individual learned from his or her mistakes), which run counter to the *dominant* narratives (e.g., the ex-offender is a "bad apple"), emphasizing the past and limitations of ex-offenders.

In addition, the integrative model incorporates social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Our workshops necessarily include modernist elements emphasizing social conventions associated with appropriate behaviors and practices more likely to lead to gainful employment. For example, there are social norms for specific behaviors, such as characteristics of a good handshake, appropriate attire, and information that is appropriate and inappropriate to disclose when answering the question "Tell me about yourself" in an employment interview. Reflective of this theoretical perspective, our intervention includes exercises in which facilitators model appropriate interview behaviors as well as provide constructive feedback pertaining to mock interview performance and how to write a good resume. This approach, like narrative therapy, stresses the importance of emphasizing one's strengths throughout the job search

process and, as a result, complements narrative therapy's emphasis on constructing useful alternative narratives.

Description of the Program and Topics

The New Leaf program primarily consists of a four workshop career support series designed to address the career development needs of community ex-offenders (Scholl, 2015; Scholl, Perry, Calhoun, & Robinson, 2016). General topics covered by the four workshops include: assessment, resume writing, interviewing skills, and job search strategies. Each workshop is two hours long, and all four are offered over a six-week time period. The participants in the workshops are all ex-offenders. Workshops range from three to seven participants in size. Participation in the workshop series, or the earlier career support group, is and has always been entirely voluntary. Ex-offenders who qualify for participation are required to be clean and sober, take prescribed psychotropic medications, speak and write fluent English, and be either unemployed or underemployed. Some methods of instruction, compatible with a social cognitive and strengths-based approach, include role modeling, role play, written exercises, transferable skills assessment, peer feedback, and goal identification and planning.

Workshop 1—Assessment. The assessment workshop begins with a guided discussion of participants' metaphors representing how they relate to the future (Gelatt, 1991; Kaufman, 1976). Second, participants identify and discuss their potential future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This activity requires participants to name and rank order three preferred future selves. Third, reflecting the strength-based philosophy of our program, participants complete a transferable skills inventory. The facilitators emphasize that motivating transferable skills are those they are both good at and enjoy using. They deconstruct their preferred future selves and compare them to the motivating transferable skills they selected. Last, the facilitator introduces the Quality World Mindfulness technique, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

Workshop 2—Resume Writing. In the second workshop, we offer a postmodern approach to resume writing. The workshop participants once again describe their "preferred future self," followed by the identification of characteristics (e.g., transferable skills) that are consistent with the future self. Participants then review past and present work-related activities including volunteer and community work they have performed. They are provided with model resumes and a resume worksheet which they use as a guide in composing their resumes.

Workshop 3—Interviewing Skills. Employers are impressed by strengths that are supported by compelling narratives. In this workshop, the facilitators employ the acronym STAR (Situation/Task/Action/Result) as a form of scaffolding to assist clients in crafting compelling narratives to effectively communicate their strengths to employers. Workshop attendees prepare and share narratives illustrating at least three of their strengths.

Workshop 4—Job Search Strategies. This workshop includes a list of 22 principles for job search success as well as a list of tips for completing application forms (Krannich & Krannich, 2005). Consistent with a strengths-based perspective, the facilitators are careful to present the principles and tips in a manner that is positively worded, emphasizing prosocial, competent, and appropriate behaviors and strategies. In

addition to conventional strategies, the workshop includes several strategies that represent thinking outside of the box.

Quality World Mindfulness Technique

In my work with a recent group of three participants completing the workshop series together, I introduced the Quality World Mindfulness technique as the final component of the first workshop on assessment. I introduced the technique at this time for several reasons. First, I wanted to promote the clients' awareness of the people, things, and beliefs in their quality worlds. Second, I wanted to promote their awareness of the fact that these images are powerful motivators. Third, I wanted to emphasize early on that the participants have complete control over the images they decide to include in their quality worlds. Last, I encouraged them to critically evaluate and continually revise their quality world in an attempt to construct a personal quality world representing the ideal ways in which they preferred to meet their needs.

I then reintroduced the Quality World Mindfulness technique at the end of the final Job Search Strategies workshop. A primary reason for this timing was because the technique is a useful and meaningful way of exploring significant changes participants have made with regard to the images they find meaningful and motivating. In addition, this timing is excellent for inviting participants to articulate their goals (e.g., substituting an image such as drug use for a new satisfying image such as a good relationship). Last, the technique stimulates a deepening of the discussion regarding how participants have grown over the course of the workshop series, and their long-term goals and plans.

Procedure and Script

The technique begins with a mindfulness exercise emphasizing here-and-now body awareness and muscle relaxation. After progressively directing each participant to focus on various part of the body (legs, back, shoulders), the script then directs participants to pay attention to their senses (touch, hearing, taste) and simply notice corresponding sensations for a moment. Next, the script instructs participants to pay attention to their breathing in order to promote mindfulness in the present. Participants are told that thoughts will inevitably arise, to notice them, set them aside, and return to focusing on their breathing. Then they are instructed to focus on their breath (e.g., entering and leaving their nostrils or mouth) for about one minute. Scripts facilitating mindfulness based on breath awareness can be obtained from a variety of sources (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2009). This phase, based on mindfulness centered on breath awareness, requires about three or four minutes to complete.

Typically, a facilitator then instructs the participants to shift their attention to their surrounding environment and open their eyes. However, for this intervention, rather than doing this, the facilitator next introduces the concept of the quality world using the following script developed by the author and based on Glasser's (1998) concept.

Your quality world is a set of mental images of people, things, activities and beliefs that fulfill your needs. Because they satisfy your needs, these images and the real life objects they represent, make you feel good. Images in your quality world are people you want to be with and things, beliefs, and experiences that make you feel good.

1. Take a minute and visualize your quality world. The mental images you select are the people, things, beliefs, and activities that help you fulfill your needs for love and belonging, power, fun, freedom, and survival. Include existing people, things, beliefs, and activities as well as desired people, things, beliefs, and activities. Include work-related images if you like.
2. Be sure and include an image corresponding to all objects in your life that are required to meet your wants and needs.
3. You have the freedom to choose the images of things, people, beliefs, and activities that fulfill your needs and belong in your quality world. Have there been any recent changes in images in your quality world? That is, have any things, people, activities, or beliefs been recently added or removed? Take a moment now and mentally take inventory of the images in your quality world.

Take just a while longer and visualize your quality world for maybe half a minute, and note any significant changes you've made, any surprises, or new realizations. Now, expand your awareness outside of your body, to the sensations coming from sounds and lights in the room. Sense the world around you as you feel your body again in your chair, and open your eyes when you are ready to return to the room.

Process Questions

Sometimes during mindfulness activities individuals use the activity to dissociate from their real lives. Processing the activity increases the likelihood that participants will use mindfulness in a manner that is related to their real lives and allows them to incorporate the experience.

1. What were your general impressions of this activity?
2. What images in your quality world are currently meeting your needs for survival, love and belonging, freedom, power, or fun?
3. Which images/objects are limiting or pose barriers to meeting your needs?
4. Which things, people, activities or beliefs have you removed or might you consider removing from your quality world?
5. What new objects have you recently added to your quality world or might you consider substituting for a no longer useful object in your quality world?

As an alternative to questions 2 through 5, a facilitator may opt to use the following question instead.

2. I invite you to share something significant that happened for you during this activity. In other words, share something that you would like to take away with you and possibly incorporate into your life.

Case Illustration

The author was the facilitator for all four of the workshops in which the client participated. The author is an experienced career and personal counseling professional who has approximately five years of experience working as a career counselor in college

settings, including two years of experience working with students with disabilities. In addition, he has approximately three years of experience providing career development services to ex-offenders in the community. The counselor's work with this client illustrates recommendations for using the Quality World Mindfulness technique with clients who are ex-offenders. The client in this case illustration will be referred to by a pseudonym.

Description of the Client

Johnny is a 34-year-old African American. Approximately one month prior to beginning the workshop series, Johnny had been homeless for a period of approximately five years. During this period, he had a serious drinking problem that he supported by panhandling. One month prior, he was deemed eligible for a government subsidized apartment, and he began attending a substance abuse treatment program. Johnny had a good sense of humor, which he enjoyed sharing with others in the workshop meetings. Although there was some variability in workshop membership, Johnny, two other clients, and the author were present in all four of the workshops.

Earlier in his life, Johnny was involved in his community church and still considers himself to be a religious person. As the workshop series progressed, he shared his struggle with giving up alcohol. For years he has used alcohol to help him cope with feelings of emptiness. The New Leaf Career Development program, and the Quality World Mindfulness activity, are not designed to treat substance abuse. However, a significant number of the ex-offenders participating in the program also have substance-related issues. The process description below primarily focuses on Johnny's responses during the fourth workshop of the series.

Process

Johnny shared that when he had participated in the Quality World Mindfulness activity in the first workshop, due to his struggles with alcohol, he found it difficult to concentrate. After six weeks, he had significantly reduced his daily alcohol consumption, and this time the activity was a much more meaningful experience. With regard to images in his quality world that are currently meeting his needs, he noted small conveniences (e.g., a hot shower, a bed to sleep in) were a source of great satisfaction because very recently he was homeless. He also shared that his relationship with his girlfriend represented how he currently met his need for love and belonging. He spoke of images from his past related to his career development, such as teaching bible school and coaching youth sports teams, that he would like to make a part of his life again. Teaching, coaching, and motivating skills were an important part of his quality world.

With regard to images that pose barriers to meeting his needs, he shared that at one time he had been drinking eight 40-ounce bottles of beer per day and that his doctor had told him that if he continued this pattern he would die within a few months. Although he had reduced his drinking considerably, he needed to abstain entirely, as his drinking was an imminent threat to his survival.

Johnny confided that prior to the workshop series, alcohol was the only thing in his life that had broken pervasive feelings of emptiness and monotony. Alcohol had been the one image representing an object that fulfilled his need for fun. However, that changed when a gentleman who worked for the city had told him he could have his own

apartment if he was only willing to give up alcohol. The gentleman had in effect saved his life and was now an indelible fixture in his quality world. He also shared how the career development workshops represented rare times during the week that he did not feel empty and as such were objects that met his needs for belonging and fun. The fact that he had shared many details of his struggles with homelessness, alcoholism, and serious health problems was evidence that he felt safe and accepted by the members of the group.

Outcome and Discussion

Earlier in the workshop series, Johnny had felt a sense of shame regarding his alcoholism and the period of time he was homeless. During the Quality World Mindfulness process, he appeared to have experienced all five of the capacities (i.e., observing, acting, nonjudging, describing, nonreactivity) identified by Baer and Krietemeyer (2006) as essential for mindfulness. The Quality World Mindfulness technique facilitated Johnny's openness and his *observing* and *describing* personal details that he had not shared in the workshop setting previously. Perhaps, as a result of the mindfulness activity, and consistent with accounts by Baer and Krietemeyer, he appeared to adopt a *nonjudging* attitude toward himself that led to his self-disclosure.

He was clearly able to relate to the concept of the quality world and able to identify more recent additions (e.g., his girlfriend, his own apartment, the city worker), reflecting that his quality of life had recently improved. His ability to focus on these details indicates that he was capable of *observing* and *acting* (i.e., focusing his attention on the present). In this respect, the activity promoted a here-and-now recognition of a more positive outlook on life.

In addition, Johnny was able to identify alcohol as a both a barrier to his needs and a substitute for healthier ways to meet his needs for belonging and fulfillment. He was able to identify abstinence and some career-related activities as images to add to his quality world. His ability to relate these details in a calm and composed manner resembled Baer and Krietemeyer's (2006) description of *nonreactivity* as entailing the ability to experience intense feelings without becoming lost or overwhelmed by them. Further, the activity appeared to stimulate a more forward looking, intentional, and proactive stance toward life. The use of the process questions also appeared to promote incorporation of Johnny's insights into a plan for his life.

Finally, the mindfulness element combined with the holistic exploration of his quality world facilitated an increase in Johnny's level of self-disclosure. The technique appeared to promote a sense of safety and self-acceptance that led the client to trust everyone in attendance enough to share his personal struggles. Plausibly, this experience, including the affirmations he received for taking this risk, will generalize to his other relationships. This experience may lead him to trust others and risk revealing more of himself, which may in turn enhance the quality of his relationships. Although not specific to the Quality World Mindfulness activity, Johnny stated that completing the workshop series gave him a confidence that in his words, "flowed over to my girlfriend." He added, that the workshops gave him a newfound confidence and that "she sees a more confident man in me."

Recommendations for Counselors

One recommendation that I have is for counselors to utilize the technique at two disparate points across the course of career counseling. Although early in the course of counseling clients may not feel as comfortable sharing during the processing phase, they may still be actively engaged on an intellectual level. Also, clients may need to participate in the activity more than once in order to become accustomed to adopting a mindful outlook (Davidson & Scherer, 2001; Germer et al., 2005; Siegel, 2010) and exploring their quality worlds.

Providing an environment of safety is paramount when working with ex-offenders. Clients who have a history of incarceration have commonly been exposed to harsh conditions that commonly contribute to feelings of vulnerability and mistrust (Liem & Kunst, 2013). As a result, counselors should provide empathy, validation, and encouragement to promote the development of a good therapeutic relationship. In addition, the counselor can also elicit support and encouragement from other participants to promote a greater sense of safety and social support.

The individual in this case illustration, in addition to being an ex-offender, also had a history of substance abuse. As mentioned in the introduction, individuals who are ex-offenders commonly also possess a variety of symptoms associated with mental disorders. The strength-based, solution-focused technique introduced is intended to supplement career development, but is not intended as a treatment for symptoms of mental disorders. I recommend combining it with a larger system of treatment (e.g., solution-focused therapy) that has core components that are solution-focused and strength-based. Solution-focused therapy has demonstrated effectiveness in career counseling (Burwell & Chen, 2006).

Finally, the workshop series described is grounded in an egalitarian conception of the client-counselor relationship. The workshop facilitators consistently communicate that the purpose of the workshops is to empower the participants and that participants should view one another and counselors as allies. I believe that this egalitarian, empowering, and nonjudgmental philosophy is essential to the success of the workshop series and the intervention introduced here.

Advantages, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

Consistent with the assertions of scholars (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006; Davidson & Scherer, 2001; Germer et al., 2005; Siegel, 2010), mindfulness practice appears to have taught and encouraged the featured client to think in new ways. In the case illustration, the client exhibited a forward-looking, intentional, and proactive stance toward the future. He also appeared to adopt a self-accepting view of himself and a trusting view of fellow workshop participants. Yet another advantage of this approach is that it promotes a holistic critical examination of objects that help clients meet their needs as well as objects that pose barriers. One final advantage is that the activity emphasizes the personal agency of the client with regard to selecting objects and images to include in their quality world.

With regard to limitations, the current account of the technique's effectiveness is based upon observations of and statements made by a single client. Based upon this case based examination, the technique's most significant contributions appear to be related to

facilitating attitudes including openness, self-acceptance, and a heightened sense of personal agency with regard to the future. This particular client is unique with respect to the nature of his addiction and his recent acquisition of an apartment following years of homelessness. By contrast, many ex-offenders do not have addictions and do not experience a period of homelessness. Additional research is needed to determine the specific client characteristics that predict if clients will benefit from the implementation of this technique.

Future researchers might more directly assess clients' impressions of the benefits of this technique through the use of one or more survey items or standardized scales. I recommend that researchers employ standardized scales, such as the Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) or the Self-Efficacy Scale (Scherer et al., 1982) to assess ways in which the Quality World Mindfulness technique potentially contributes to changes in clients' self-concept. In these ways, future research will potentially refine our understanding of the advantages and limitations of this career development technique designed for use with the ex-offender population.

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