Mindfulness Matters: The Universal Need for a Healthy Mind

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Abstract
Mental illness is prevalent in American society, affecting about 1 in 5 individuals (“Learn About Mental Health”). Addressing trauma is one way of preventing mental illness. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study by Dr. Vincent Felitti of the Kaiser Permanente Foundation and Dr. Robert Anda of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, looked at the connection between negative childhood experiences, such as substance abuse in the home, to the most common causes of death manifested in adulthood. Mental health affects physical health, and one of the ways to address the effect of lifetime traumas is to develop coping skills such as mindfulness and engaging with nature. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, stress, chronic pain, and blood pressure (Brown, et al 211-237). Engaging with nature has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, stress, and blood pressure as well (Tyrväinen et al. 1).

My exhibition will consist of an installation that acts as a practice in mindfulness meditation for myself and as an introduction to the basic tenets of mindfulness for the viewer. Interconnectivity, being in the moment, and accepting circumstances without judgment are all concepts that are introduced to the viewer through paintings, drawings, screen prints, and zines (self-published magazines).

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Obviously, mindfulness meditation looks very different outside of the clinical world, and practices can vary from person to person—from the kind of meditation they practice, to how often they do it, and for how long. The majority of people who meditate aren’t following a formal program with an hour of practice every day plus weekly group classes with specially trained teachers personally coaching them and researchers keeping tabs. There is an intriguing cluster of studies forming around the potential benefits of mindfulness meditation for a couple of other stress-related health issues that are just as universal as depression, anxiety, and pain: inflammation and aging.