

# Mindfulness, Trauma and the Sense of Self

Strategies for using mindful awareness to improve self clarity, stability and flexibility

May 14, 2016

Janet M. Sims, PhD

[janet.sims@gmail.com](mailto:janet.sims@gmail.com)  
bmindfulpdx.org  
503-719-5499

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Goals for today

Explore the self as a construct made up of dynamic sensory events which are in constant flux

Look at current understandings of the self in relation to emotion regulation, attachment, trauma neurobiology and mindfulness

Practice tracking the sense of self as it arises moment to moment using techniques from the Basic Mindfulness Toolkit

Practice using exercises designed to make the sense of self more clear or more flexible or more stable.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Mindfulness

Sense of self

Trauma

Attachment

Neurobiology

©2014 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Mindfulness and the sense of self

---

---

---

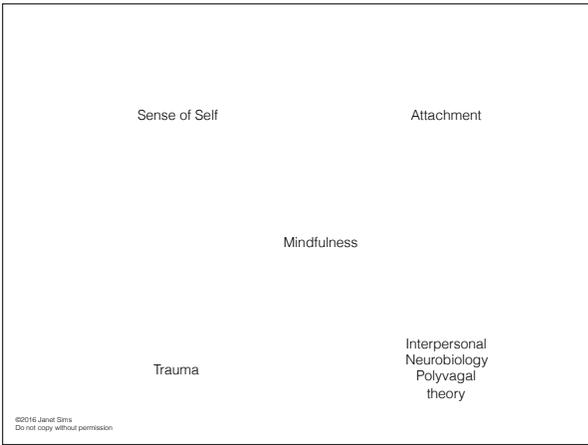
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Basic Mindfulness:**

- A science of sensory experience
- See, Hear, Feel-coming/going, flowing
- Mindful awareness is a way of *paying attention to all sensations (intention to pay attention)*

**“Three attentional skills working together...”**

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Concentration** - staying with what is relevant.

**Sensory Clarity** - brightness, high resolution, untangling

**Equanimity** - a kind of inner balance; a third possibility between pushing the senses down (suppress, avoid) and being pulled away by the senses (fixation, grasping, ID)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Basic Mindfulness Toolkit**

**BODY** - Feel physical and emotional sensations

**MIND** - See, Hear (inwardly visual/auditory but has its own 'Feel')

**WORLD** - See, Hear, Feel (In and outwardly- e.g. heart vs. foot)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Basic Mindfulness Toolkit

Body | Mind | World

Modality, Definition, In/Out, Label

Sensory Modality	Inwardly Arising	Outwardly Arising
See	<b>See In</b> Explore internal sight	<b>See Out</b> Explore external sight
Hear	<b>Hear In</b> Explore internal sound	<b>Hear Out</b> Explore external sound
	<b>Mind</b>	<b>World</b>
Feel	<b>Feel In</b> Explore emotional body sensations	<b>Feel Out</b> Explore physical body sensations
	<b>Body</b>	

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Exercise: Focus on Body, Mind World (See, Hear, Feel)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## A BMT definition of sense of self:

Mind + Body sensory process  
interacting with itself and  
interacting with  
the World\*

\*includes a narrative story of my role in the world

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## A mindfulness view of the sense of self

- Made of sensory events (mental representations; physical and emotional body sensations)
- Changes and renews itself constantly (flow)
- Different 'selves' serve different functions(needs/ desires): procreation, survival, safety, etc. and arise within a narrative (story)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## A mindfulness view of the sense of self, cont'd

- Self system requires differentiation and integration (flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, stable-Siegel)
- When there is flexibility, adaptability the selves arise and pass naturally, e.g. parent self, work self, partner self, protector self..., do function then dissolve
- Problems happen when functional self doesn't arise, isn't flexible, isn't coherent (logically connected); isn't stable (duration) enough to serve function

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

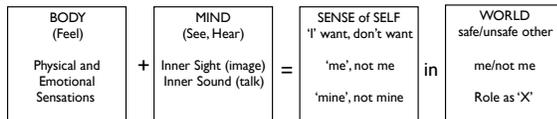
---

### Infant self

"The baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion..." (mostly)

*Principles of Psychology, Wm James (1890)*

### 18 mos-adult: self-differentiation



©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

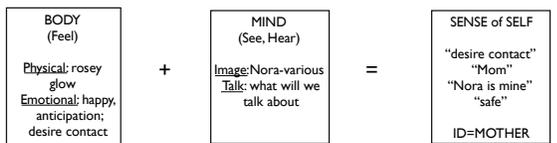
---

---

---

---

---



©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Mindful awareness strengthens/clarifies access to the sensations that make up the sense of self and also to the status of various functions self influences (safety, survival, procreation, homeostasis, narrative roles)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Exercise #2: Focus on sense of self (self-attunement)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Mindfulness and Attachment

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Attachment and the sense of self

Attachment is the interpersonal bond that develops originally between and infant and caregiver

Attachment behaviours are designed to maintain proximity to caregiver and insure safety/survival.

Early patterns of attachment shape an individual's expectations in later relationships.

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

-Wallin, David J.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Attachment and the sense of self

- regulation of emotions is fundamental to the development of the self and that attachment relationships are the primary context within which we learn to regulate our affect...access, modulate and use emotions –Wallin (2006)
- Attunement is 'the interpersonal energy flow that regulates infant and caregiver'- Siegel (IPNB)
- Interpersonal attunement is at the heart of secure attachment
- Interpersonal attunement in here-and-now develops brain regulatory circuits→ *resilience* → the ability to attune internally (internalized secure base) and have empathic relationships.

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Attachment possibilities



### SECURE

- comfortable flow between needing and self-reliance
- free flow of energy and information
- flexible self-narrative; arises and passes as needed
- ease of relationship repairs, apology, non-defensive
- ease in relational field

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Attachment possibilities



### AVOIDANT

- attachment system 'off'; over focus on self; compulsive self-reliance; (oblivious to other)
- In protective mode; attachment urges deflected
- sense of self rigid; controlling to get needs met
- inability to respond to or initiate relshp repair(wants to mainly positive only focus); few words
- stuck in future

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Attachment possibilities



### AMBIVALENT

- external regulation; over focus on other for self-regulation
- attachment system 'ON' too much
- sense of self too porous, includes too much 'other'; confuse own needs with other; please/resentment cycles
- Stuck in past; fixation on abandonments; inconsistency

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Attachment possibilities



### DISORGANIZED

- sense of self is chaotic; confused
- dissociative, scared, frozen
- loss of voice, poor word recall, hard to follow
- amygdala stuck in trauma

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Exercise: Co-mindfulness (attune to self and other)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Purpose of attachment system is to encourage organism to seek safety and increase chances of survival

How is safety, danger and life-threat determined by animals?

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Mindfulness and Neurobiology/IPNB

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### NEUROCEPTION–Detection of Safety

- Assesses risk outside of awareness
- Don't always know trigger of safety or danger
- Always know body's response
- **\*\*Not just fight, flight, freeze\*\***  
(sympathetic, parasympathetic)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

–Stephen W. Porges

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Phylogenetic Stages of Neural Development of ANS

**Stage 1:** Primitive, unmyelinated vagus  
Immobilization behaviors (fainting, shutdown  
dissociation (viscera)

**Stage 2:** Sympathetic nervous system  
Flight/fight behaviors (limbs)

**Stage 3:** Myelinated mammalian vagus  
Social communication                      homeostasis  
Enables social interactions to regulate physiology and promote  
health, growth and restoration (balance between  
unmyelinated and SNS) (head)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

–Stephen W. Porges

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Hallmark of trauma is nervous system  
shutdown: immobilization, dissociation,  
pass out, poor social engagement

Primitive nervous system being  
recruited for defense rather than  
homeostasis

Use social engagement—prosodic voice,  
welcoming eye contact—to move out of  
protection w/primitive vagus

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

–Stephen W. Porges

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## IPNB definition of Mind

“An emergent self-organizing and embodied  
and relational process—that arises from and  
regulates energy and information within the  
body you live, and yourself and other people”

–Daniel Siegel

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Healthy sense of self is an integrated self.

Integration involves information flowing.

With flow there is differentiation and linkage  
within all parts of the system—e.g. thought/  
feeling; body/logic left/right; self/other

–Daniel Siegel

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**'TRAUMA IS AN ASSAULT ON INTEGRATION'**

**'Integration promotes harmony and brings the individual chaos and rigidity of PTSD states into resolution, growth and healing'**

**-Daniel Siegel**

(integration of what?)

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Path of trauma development**



Every form of self-regulation depends on integrative regions of the brain-'resonancy' circuitry  
Hippocampus, Corpus Collosum, Pre-Frontal cortex

**-Daniel Siegel**

Attachment pattern and sense of self

**Avoidance**  
att. 'off'  
too much 'self'  
rigid auto-soothe  
focus in future

**Ambivalent**  
att. 'on'  
not enough 'self'  
focus on other  
stuck in past

**Disorganized**  
att. chaotic  
frozen self  
dissociative  
high arousal  
mix past/present

Corrective for sense of self

flexible 'self'  
more 'other'  
welcome to world of humans  
NOW

Self clarity  
Self-regulation  
welcome love  
NOW

Self-clarity  
Self-safety  
Self-stability  
Self-protection  
NOW

All three need to integrate what has been compartmentalized (fragmented), and orient to the present time.

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

To what extent can patients experience their bodily sensations, feel their emotions, think their own thoughts? And how effectively can they integrate these domains—for example, by bringing their thoughts to bear on their feelings?

Wallin, David J. (2007-03-06). Attachment in Psychotherapy (p. 62). Guilford Publications. Kindle Edition.

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## MINDFULNESS IS A FORM OF INTEGRATION

- self-initiated attention
- first practiced as a state, gradually becomes a trait
- becomes a form of *self-attunement*
- *allows linkages of parts of brain, mind and body, body and family, family and society,*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Exercise: self-attunement differentiation, integration, flexibility

- Parts vs whole
- Left vs Right integration
- Specificity vs ambiguity
- Flexibility of roles and self parts

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

“Mindfulness involves attuning attention to our own  
intention—intention to attend to attention  
(intrapersonal-attunement via interoception)”

“...*the human brain creates representations of others minds...*  
the mental intention we imagine is going on in someone  
else’s mind” (interpersonal attunement)

“...emotional resonance.. the outcome of attunement  
of minds”

“...resonance is the underlying mechanism beneath the  
attuned communication between parent and child in  
secure attachment”

—Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*

©2016 Janet Sims  
Do not copy without permission

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

“...resonance is the underlying mechanism  
beneath the attuned communication between  
parent and child in secure attachment”

Resonance is the underlying mechanism  
beneath the attuned communication between  
therapist and client in a safe relationship

Mindfully attuning (resonating) with clients is the  
process that helps to reintegrate parts of the self  
fragmented by trauma

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Case examples  
Kris #1-4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Thank You!

[bmindfulpdx.org](http://bmindfulpdx.org)  
[janet.sims@gmail.com](mailto:janet.sims@gmail.com)

Now at Amazon!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---