

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Discomfort as a Pathway to Well-being

How befriending and mindfulness contrast in coping with discomfort

“People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own Soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

- C. G. Jung

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Abstract

This study examined the distinctive elements of befriending discomfort. Befriending aimed to come to terms with distressing emotions that an individual previously rejected. Different conceptualizations divided the research base of the befriending approach. Some studies asserted that befriending would be similar to the mindfulness approach, for instance, by becoming accepting. Other studies referred to befriending and mindfulness separately. Such distinctions indicated that befriending entailed attaching to and learning about one's discomfort, while mindfulness taught an individual to experience the present moment without reacting to it. Conceptualizations of befriending were thus ambiguous. In a qualitative study, befriending was compared to mindfulness to understand what unique elements pertained to befriending and what did not. Participants (N=5) applied befriending and mindfulness techniques to cope with a self-chosen feeling of discomfort. Narrative journal entries and structured follow-up interviews assembled subsequent data. Inductive intra- and inter-thematic analyses were used. Results indicated that integrating discomfort as part of the self, inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort, and actively trying to improve the discomforting situation were distinctive elements of befriending. These elements were unique to befriending, as becoming mindful entailed detaching oneself from discomfort, putting discomfort into perspective, and creating awareness. Similarities between befriending and mindfulness pertained to becoming accepting and connecting with bodily symptoms of discomfort instead of unrelated negative cognitions. Results also pointed to the possibility of alternating befriending and mindfulness approaches. Finally, befriending led to feeling complete, while being mindful led to feeling free from discomfort. While the unique elements of befriending and commonalities to mindfulness were mostly contemplated, identified differences between befriending and mindfulness contradicted previous research. Although overall results pointed to befriending being distinctive to mindfulness, further research should still examine the unique elements of befriending to arrive at a unanimous conceptualization of the approach.

Introduction

One-fifth of the world experiences mental health problems according to data from the World Health Organization (2020). The psychological discomfort associated with such problems increased around 13% compared to 2017 (World Health Organization, 2020). The majority of people are neither mentally ill nor mentally healthy (Keyes, 2002). Most people are moderately happy, while the prevalence of stress, depression, and anxiety hit record numbers (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Indicated decreases in peoples' psychological health stand in contrast to advances in the mental health field (Wood & Tarrier, 2010). That is possibly due to the divided focus on either curing negative emotions (Bannink, 2012) or promoting well-being (Bohlmeijer & Hulsbergen, 2018). Psychological studies have only recently paid attention to integrating both the experience of striving for happiness and the usage of discomfort (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2020).

Awareness has risen that discomfort should not be discarded as a purely negative experience (Caruso Brown, 2019) but as an opportunity to increase well-being (Bolduc, 2001). Diverse studies have yielded evidence that discomfort can be adaptive and enhance the quality of life (Broeckerhoff & Magalhães Lopes, 2020; Bolduc, 2001). Discomfort can guide behaviour if an individual re-evaluates the cultivated beliefs of unpleasant emotions (Wilson, 2020), as well as removes superimposed self-definitions on how they should feel (Hammer, 2018). That is to say, the experience of discomfort exposes where change is required (Wilson, 2020).

The befriending approach understands the role of discomfort as being a means to increase well-being (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014). A core assumption is that discomfort should be integrated into the conception of the self (Hammer, Hammer & Butler, 2013). Since befriending allows an individual to come to terms with discomfort, it is probable that positive emotions result. As a result of positive emotions, someone's awareness will broaden, which will build long-lasting psychological resources that are beneficial in coping with (future) apprehensiveness (Fredrickson, 2004).

Although befriending is understood as a promising approach to increase well-being, it is not differentiated from mindfulness in scientific research (Khong, 2010; Meyerson, Zazula, Berlin, Mehta & Wang, 2020; Welwood, 1979). The present study thus aims to examine what is unique about the befriending approach and how befriending exploits discomfort to increase well-being compared to mindfulness.

Difficulties in Coping with Discomfort

Researchers have provided evidence that the experience of discomfort can harm people's psychological health (Cassell, 2004). When not effectively coped with, discomfort can take various forms of symptoms, depending on the characteristics of the affected person. Simply because one person suffers does not imply that another would suffer for the same reasons (Cassell, 2004). Therefore, it can only generally be spoken that discomfort appears as instability, urgency, addiction, or anxiety (Licata & Starr, 2020). But the appearance of symptoms can also be more specifically tailored to sadness, anger, shame, or loneliness (Cassell, 2004).

A few studies have further examined the difficulties people experience in coping with discomfort (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson & Savino, 2011). Difficulties are experienced when someone presumes that being mentally well would preclude pain (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011). That is to say, people neglect their discomfort and focus on enhancing their comfort (Scollon & King, 2004). This form of coping can be seen as self-rejection because the individual dismisses pain from the self. In essence, all forms of self-rejection cause difficulties in coping, as negative feelings strive to surface and to reintegrate (Hammer, Hammer & Butler, 2013).

Overall, if one engages with a distressing experience, difficulties in coping are prevented. For example, clients who finished therapy are not free of discomfort (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014). Instead, they learned to be steady in the face of adversity (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011).

The Role of Mindfulness in Overcoming Difficulties to Cope with Discomfort

Mindfulness can help individuals overcome difficulties in coping with discomfort. Studies convincingly demonstrate that mindfulness breaks someone's habit of rejecting discomforting feelings (Gehart & McCollum, 2007; Welwood, 1979). Mindfulness enables individuals to become aware of and recognize all their emotions (Welwood, 1979).

Taking a mindfulness approach to discomfort is based on classic meditation (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody, Segal, Abbey, Speca Velting & Devins, 2006). As a first step, an individual grounds themselves (Zizzi, 2017). Breathing activities, for instance, are used to slow down and intentionally experience the present moment.

Then, an individual pays attention to what happens in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2006). An individual observes the thoughts that come to their mind and feels bodily sensations.

Each thought and feeling is noticed, recognized, and accepted (Bishop et al., 2006). If attention digresses, an individual uses breathing to return attention to the present (Zizzi, 2017).

Finally, an individual cultivates a non-reactive attitude, which entails one not immediately elaborating or reacting to whatever transpires in their mind and body (Bishop et al., 2006). That applies to positive as well as negative emotions and thoughts. A person is fully engaged in the present but does neither respond emotionally nor cognitively to their perceived experiences (Gehart & McCollum, 2007).

Limitations of Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness has become a growing trend within mental health settings due to its benefits for well-being (Baer, 2011). Yet, the confidence in this approach led many researchers to overlook evidence about shortcomings (Farias & Wikholm, 2016).

Mindfulness has a long Buddhist tradition (Baer, 2011). Because many original instructions are in foreign languages relevant mindfulness techniques may be overlooked or misinterpreted. Hence, researchers raise the concern whether Western practitioners teach mindfulness to the Buddhists' intentions (Baer, 2011).

Several studies have found that participants experienced heightened depression, anxiety, and stress after engaging in a mindfulness course (Creswell, Pacilio, Lindsay & Brown, 2014; Dobkin, Irving & Amar, 2012). Mindfulness might increase psychological discomfort by creating awareness of unpleasant emotions (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Paying full attention to long-held negative emotions is difficult to endure (Dobkin, Irving & Amar, 2012). To experience discomfort, the context of mindfulness might thus not be suitable (Farias & Wikholm, 2016).

Researchers falsely assume that becoming mindful is a natural ability inherent in all people (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Mindfulness might amplify symptoms of psychological disorders (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Being in a group setting or solitude when meditating might also adversely affect the individual (Dobkin, Irving & Amar, 2012). Such conditions limit the usefulness of mindfulness to specific people and environments. That is to say, becoming mindful might only foster effective coping in a therapeutic setting (Dobkin, Irving & Amar, 2012).

Finally, mindfulness can transform an individual's views of the self - how they perceive themselves and the world around them (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Becoming mindful may require disidentification with thoughts or feelings rooted in people's core assumptions about the

self (Dobkin, Irving & Amar, 2012). Such a transformation can result in emotional difficulties. For instance, one might feel distinctly unsettled about their identity (Farias & Wikholm, 2016).

Befriending

Befriending may balance the mentioned shortcomings of mindfulness, as researchers are yet to shape this approach. During this approach, one makes sense of a quality that they previously judged as flawed (Ray & Sutton, 2007). Befriending is thus not about overcoming discomfort but being in harmony with formerly rejected emotions (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011).

The first step of befriending is allowing discomfort to arise and to expand by staying in the middle of emotional agitation (Welwood, 1979). Because people tend to protect themselves, trying to gain control over situations, thoughts, or feelings (Robbins & Hong, 2013), one must re-own arising pain (Licata & Foster, 2017) to experience discomfort for what it is (Welwood, 1979). Re-owning discomfort means truly allowing oneself to express the anguish that arises and accepting it as part of the self (Robbins & Hong, 2013).

In the second step, one must become receptive to the troubling emotion and turn into it (Licata & Foster, 2017). Doing so implies that one is willing to be vulnerable and honest about every emotion or thought surfacing. One must connect with inner experiences (Robbins & Hong, 2013) by taking a curious stance for discovery (Licata & Foster, 2017) and a compassionate to respect every unfolding experience (Khong, 2010; Feldman & Kuyken, 2011).

The final step of befriending entails inquiring the self about the experienced feeling of discomfort (Robbins & Hong, 2013). At this, an individual tries to resolve the relationship with unwanted parts of the self (Licata & Foster, 2017). One is open to looking beyond fixed beliefs, which can be dogmatic and structurally restrictive. Individuals need to listen to themselves, pay attention to their hurt, and ask what aptitude they could gain from expressing their discomfort (Robbins & Hong, 2013).

Comparison of Befriending and Mindfulness

Some researchers assert that befriending is part of mindfulness (Gehard & McCollum, 2007; Khong, 2010, Welwood, 1979), while others claim that befriending is an independent approach (Ray & Sutton, 2007; Robbins & Hong, 2013). However, many of these researchers overlook

whether commonalities and differences between both exist (Bishop et al., 2006; Feldman & Kuyken, 2011; Zizzi, 2017).

How Befriending Relates to Mindfulness

Diverse studies suggest that befriending is similar to mindfulness (Gehard & McCollum, 2007; Khong, 2010). First, scientific literature argues that befriending and mindfulness are rooted in Buddhist traditions. Indigenous healers traditionally teach both approaches (Baer, 2011; Robbins & Hong, 2013). That entails not changing a problem but rather the attitude of someone to the discomfort experienced (Gehart & McCollum, 2007).

Second, separate studies suggest that acceptance plays a role in both approaches (Zizzi, 2017; Feldman & Kuyken, 2001). Befriending and mindfulness require an accepting stance of mind to be receptive to any discomforting experience in the first place (Gehard & McCollum, 2007).

Finally, researchers claim that becoming mindful of and befriending bodily symptoms of discomfort is common to both approaches (Khong, 2010). If an individual appraises emotions cognitively, unrelated thoughts might arise. If one is sad, an unrelated cognitive response could be to feel like ‘no one understands me’. Both approaches recognize that such cognitions can sustain or worsen discomfort (Khong, 2010). Hence, both approaches require an individual to note the bodily feeling of discomfort without triggering unrelated thoughts (Khong, 2010).

How Befriending Differs from Mindfulness and May Balance its Limitations

Diversely, several studies suggest that befriending can be differentiated from mindfulness (Robbins & Hong, 2013; Bishop et al., 2006; Ray & Sutton, 2007). Differences between both approaches become relevant because befriending may balance the mentioned shortcomings of mindfulness (cf. p. 5-6 ‘Limitations Mindfulness’).

The main difference between a mindful and a befriending approach lies in creating awareness. In mindfulness, awareness is the goal (Bishop et al., 2006), while in befriending awareness is the foundation (Welwood, 1979). Since befriending builds upon awareness, individuals can cope with the discomfort they just became conscious of (Robbins & Hong, 2013). The context of mindfulness may not be suitable to experience discomfort because becoming mindful ends with increased awareness of potentially unpleasant emotions (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Field studies, therefore, suggest that befriending, in contrast to mindfulness, provides individuals the opportunity to work through their discomfort (Ray & Sutton, 2007).

Researchers further contrast mindfulness from befriending by asserting that being mindful aims at experiencing the present moment without reacting to it (Bishop et al., 2006). By befriending discomfort, an individual shows a reaction; an individual inquires about the meaning of discomfort (Robbins & Hong, 2013). Not reacting to a dominating feeling might be an element of mindfulness that does not come naturally to everyone (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Inquiring the self about discomfort, in turn, does not require specific skills, as it is a personal process (Robbins & Hong, 2013). Hence, it may be conceivable to develop a practice of befriending rather than mindfulness that is suitable to most - if not all (Robbins & Hong, 2013).

Lastly, befriending is distinct from mindfulness, as an individual builds an attachment to discomforting feelings (Ray & Sutton, 2007). Mindfulness, in contrast, requires non-attachment (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). In this context, a case study (Ray & Sutton, 2007) illustrates how befriending and thus attaching to discomfort may benefit an individual more than mindfulness. By befriending a problem, a client regarded the problem as being their psychological ally. The client entered, discussed, and lived with discomfort without altering their sense of self (Ray & Sutton, 2007). They could preserve their identity while reclaiming core parts of themselves (Ray & Sutton, 2007). Because researchers suggested that mindfulness might alter the sense of the self (Farias & Wikholm, 2016), befriending may be more fitted to cope than mindfulness.

Alternating Befriending and Mindfulness

Contemporary conceptualizations increasingly combine mindfulness and befriending. According to Gehart and McCollum (2007), befriending follows from mindfulness. Because mindfulness lowers emotional reactivity to unpleasant experiences, individuals can alter the way they relate to their discomfort. An individual will no longer resist encountering discomforting experiences but is willing to engage with - to befriend - associated negative emotions (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). Mindfulness-based hypnotherapy provides further evidence on alternating both techniques (Ajinkya, Jadhav & Ajinkya, 2015). This form of therapy starts with becoming aware of both the body and mind, continues with befriending unpleasant experiences, and concludes with teaching a client further mindfulness skills (Ajinkya, Jadhav & Ajinkya, 2015).

The Present Study

The present study examines how people employ a befriending approach to cope with their discomfort. An aim is to discover elements that are distinctive of befriending. The scientific

understanding of befriending is to be broadened further by differentiating befriending from mindfulness. To that end, participants apply the befriending and the mindfulness approach to cope with a distressing feeling. The following research question is formulated: *What are the distinctive elements of befriending discomfort compared to mindfulness?*

Methods

Participants

A heterogeneous sample with maximum variation was chosen purposefully. Participants were approached directly or were referred to the researcher to access populations from different social layers. Participation was voluntary and no incentive was offered to partake in the study. Yet, two inclusion criteria existed: fluency in speaking English or German and solid mental health.

Sampling resulted in five participants who differed concerning their cultural backgrounds, education level, gender, and age. On average, participants were 35,6 years old (SD=17,26). Notably, two participants had previous experiences with at least one of the approaches applied in the current study. A summary of demographics is in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

	Age	Gender	Cultural Background	Educational Background	Previous Experiences with approaches
Participant 1	55	Male	German	Teacher	No explicit experiences with either
Participant 2	23	Female	German	Bachelor student	Experiences with both
Participant 3	23	Female	German	Master student	Experiences with mindfulness
Participant 4	23	Male	Indian	Nurse	No explicit experiences with either
Participant 5	54	Female	American	Freelancing journalist	No explicit experiences with either

A sixth participant dropped out shortly after beginning the study. As a reason, they stated that their subjective experience of discomfort would not be strong enough to be reflected.

Procedure

The BMS Ethical Committee of the University of Twente approved this study (210181). After gaining permission, the researcher recruited participants. Each participant signed an informed consent form (Appendix A) to ensure confidentiality. Participants were informed about the study aims, data anonymization, and their right to withdraw. After these formalities were taken care of, the current study could begin. The duration of gathering data amounted to twelve days, starting on the 13th of March and ending on the 24th of March.

This study took a qualitative, explorative approach by employing a phenomenological study design. First, the researcher sent each participant instruction on how to implement befriending and mindfulness approaches. All participants applied both techniques, however, in a randomly selected order. Three participants started with befriending, while two began with the mindfulness approach. Right after putting both into practice, instructions on how to write the journal entries followed. Participants wrote one journal entry per approach. The researcher set a deadline of five days to finish the narratives and to send them. If questions arose, the researcher provided further information. As soon as the researcher received a finished journal entry, they scheduled an interview. The approximately 30 minutes interviews took place on the 14th, 19th, 20th, 21st and 24th of March. Four interviews were conducted in person, while one interview took place via video chat. In both instances, the researcher kept interruptions to a minimum. An audio recorder taped all interviews. After completion, participants could ask questions. Data collection ended by thanking participants for taking the time to engage.

Materials

This study developed three types of materials, including a demographic questionnaire, narrative journal entries and a structured interview scheme.

Demographic Questionnaire

The researcher provided a short demographic questionnaire. Questions tailored participants' age, gender, culture as well as educational background (Appendix B).

Narrative Journal Entries

In 1986, Sarbin introduced the narrative approach to psychology (Handler, 1987). Since then, researchers have used narratives to explore peoples' experiences and understand emotions

(Kleres, 2010). This study thus chose journal entries to explore peoples' experiences with befriending and mindfulness to cope with discomforting emotions (Alaszewski, 2006).

Materials entailed an opening statement that defined befriending and mindfulness and outlined the (procedural) differences of both (Appendix C). The aim was to equip participants with the same basic knowledge.

At the outset of either approach, materials guided participants to think themselves back into a discomforting situation. Then, instructions illustrated the steps participants needed to take when aiming to befriend discomfort and become mindful. These instructions (Appendix D & E) were equivalent with two exceptions. The befriending instruction required participants to work with their discomforting feeling (*'Once you find yourself in the middle of this discomforting emotion, shift your awareness to inquiry and work with your discomfort'*). Mindfulness entailed engaging in a grounding meditation after re-experiencing discomfort to create awareness. Corresponding instructions were: *'Once you find yourself in the middle of this discomforting emotion, engage in a small meditation that aims to ground you in the present moment'*.

Subsequently, materials encompassed instruction for writing the reflective journal entries. Participants were to write at least one A4 page about their experiences with either approach openly and extensively. They reflectively wrote down their feelings, thoughts, and insights. Guiding questions, such as the following, were posed: *'What are the core features of yourself that determine how you feel about discomfort?'*; *'How will you use this experience to welcome discomfort as a part of yourself?'*; *'What insights did you gain about yourself in the state of mind you just experienced?'*.

Structured Follow-Up Interview

Materials also entailed a structured interview scheme, which the researcher completed with participants verbally. Nine questions, in total, targeted participant's experiences with both the befriending and the mindfulness approach. All questions were open-ended so that participant's interpretation was centered. Most questions were supplemented by sub-questions, in which participants elaborated or illustrated the point they made using an example.

The interview scheme entailed two categories of questions. The first category comprised six items providing deepened insights into participants' experiences and their associated added value. Participants were to clarify how they had or had not successfully put both approaches into effect. Participants also needed to elaborate on the perceived differences,

disadvantages, benefits, and preferences of each approach. The second set of questions consisted of three items, examining the connection between the befriending and mindfulness approaches and well-being. Participants were to compare their well-being before and after engaging in mindfulness and befriending. Additionally, they elaborated on the perceived helpfulness of both and how these helped them to feel genuine. The whole interview scheme is in Appendix F.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was suitable, as it was a foundational method for analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher justified an inductive approach because the basics of befriending and mindfulness needed to be clarified (Murray & Sools, 2015). The researcher also used a deductive approach as a loose framework. The reason was that all ethnographic research would be affected by preconceived theoretical ideas (O'Reilly, 2009).

The researcher transcribed all interviews manually and verbatim. Transcripts and narrative journal entries were then uploaded into the coding program *Atlas.ti*. The researcher made no distinction between data of narratives and interviews but treated both as one compiled unit of analysis. To familiarize with the data, the researcher read interview transcripts and narratives multiple times while making notes. A top-down approach structured all themes into three overall categories: befriending, mindfulness, and well-being. A bottom-up technique created initial codes based on salient features of the data. The researcher adhered to three coding criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Overcash, 2003). That is to say, the researcher coded similar, repeatedly occurring, and accentuated ideas. The researcher sorted relevant parts of the data to sustain each code. Next, the researcher organized codes into potential themes. Identification of themes was intra- and inter-thematic; themes were found and compared for one participant and between participants (Overcash, 2003). The researcher used expressions of participants to name, define and illustrate themes. Coding ended when developed themes covered all relevant statements of participants. Finally, themes were reviewed and arranged into a visual map. The resulting coding scheme is in Appendix G.

Results

In total, 540 fragments were analysed to discover patterns in the data. 9 themes, 17 codes and 15 sub codes have been developed. Of these, three themes distinguished the befriending approach;

three distinguished the mindfulness approach; three encompassed commonalities between both (Table 2). Codes depicted specific steps needed to put both approaches into action. Sub codes summarized aspects that either increased or impeded well-being. All themes, codes and sub codes were displayed in three different figures. In the text, these will be elaborated. Percentages have been calculated separately per approach, theme, code and sub code.

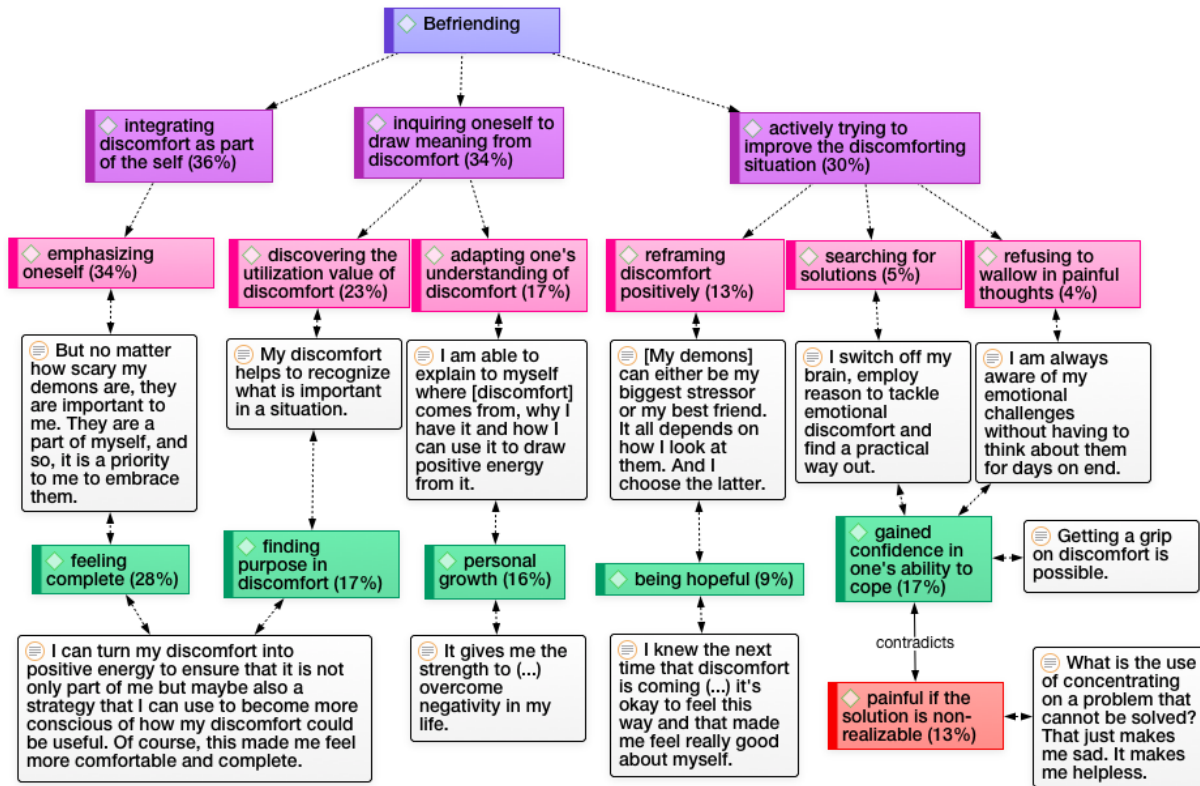
Table 2
Overview of Themes

Approach	Themes
1. Befriending	1. 1. Integrating discomfort as part of the self 1. 2. Inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort 1. 3. Actively trying to improve the discomforting situation
2. Mindfulness	2. 1. Putting discomfort into perspective 2. 2. Externalizing discomfort from the self 2. 3. Creating an awareness of discomfort
3. Befriending and Mindfulness	3. 1. Becoming accepting 3. 2. Connecting with felt senses instead of intrusive thoughts 3. 3. Combining both approaches to cope with discomfort

The Distinctive Elements of Befriending Discomfort and their Impact on Well-Being

Based on participants' input, befriending was defined as a tender way of coping that was distinguished by understanding discomfort as a purposeful quality of the self to actively improve suffering. Corresponding data have been summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The distinctive elements of befriending, their relations and their impact.



Note: Purple boxes identify themes of befriending. Pink boxes summarize codes. Green and red boxes entail sub codes. White boxes entail quotations illustrating codes and sub codes.

Befriending Increases Well-Being

‘Integrating discomfort as part of the self’. When integrating discomfort as part of the self, the individual recognized that discomfort was a natural and valid feeling. Doing so, the individual showed efforts to welcome discomfort into their perception of the self. The theme ‘integrating discomfort as part of the self’ (36%) was most important in increasing participants’ well-being. At this, the code ‘emphasizing oneself’ (34%) had a determining effect: “*Discomfort is part of life and accepting it as such allows me to feel okay*” (Participant 1). Acknowledging discomfort thus helped participants to normalize and welcome its occurrence. The reason for this was the ability to confide in oneself: “*In some moments, I don’t feel heard (...). Telling myself that negative emotions are a part of me helps me cope (...). I feel heard by myself*” (Participant 2). Seemingly, emphasizing oneself was a tender coping strategy intended to understand and integrate the discomforting part of the self.

After emphasizing themselves, participants mentioned the sub code ‘feeling complete’ (28%) to illustrate increases in their well-being. They genuinely felt like themselves despite experiencing discomforting feelings: *“Translating my negative feelings into positive ones happened because I was finally able to experience all my feelings holistically”* (Participant 1). Another participant added that feeling complete would shift their focus away from fixating on comfort: *“I didn’t expect myself to simply feel good. (...) And somehow I felt more like myself because feeling discomfort in certain situations is just how I am”* (Participant 3). To that end, feeling complete with unwanted emotions seemed to be more desirable than simply feeling good.

‘Inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort’. When inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort, the individual entered in dialogue with the self. This dialogue was directed to asking what purpose the experience of discomfort yielded and what reasons may underlie suffering. Explanations for the righteousness of discomfort were found. The theme ‘inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort’ (34%) encompassed two codes, of which ‘discovering the utilization value of discomfort’ (23%) was the more frequently mentioned pattern. Self-insights, gained through inquiry, were used to act purposefully and specifically in future discomforting situations. *“If I should ever be in the same discomforting situation, (...) I can just think about how I dealt with it and how I have reflected on that and use these insights”* (Participant 3). Participants thus gained an understanding of the utilization of discomfort by considering prior experiences of coping. This has been enforced by the sub code ‘finding purpose in discomfort’ (17%). Purposefulness described any benefit individuals recognized from experiencing discomfort. This involved personal transformation, insights into the self or academic achievements; e.g. *“My nervousness before presentations helps me to concentrate on the essentials”* (Participant 1).

‘Adapting one’s understanding of discomfort’ (17%) was an additional pattern employed to derive meaning from negative emotions. Participant 3 will be used to illustrate this. One learned about and reflected upon the causes of discomfort. This led to a change in perspective, *“I differentiate strongly between insecurity and self-confidence, which does not necessarily have to be the case”* (Participant 3). Because adaptive insights to cope more sympathetic with negativity were gained, participants’ refined understanding of discomfort showed evidence of ‘personal growth’ (16%). This was amplified by considering the advantages of discomfort *“A sense of self-*

assurance can also be gained from insecurity” (Participant 3). The sub code ‘personal growth’ thus increased well-being, as harsh judgment toward feelings of discomfort abated.

‘Actively trying to improve the discomforting situation’. When actively trying to improve a discomforting situation, the individual tried to transform their suffering into something positive. The individual tried to fix discomfort by either changing their perspective, feelings or the discomforting situation itself. This final theme of befriending, ‘actively trying to improve the discomforting situation’ (30%), was supplemented by three codes. To begin with ‘reframing discomfort positively’ (13%), participants tried to assign a new meaning to their discomforting feelings: *“I believe that my demons can help me transform my life to the better”* (Participant 2). This quote illustrated how participants could reassure themselves by changing the negative thoughts associated with discomfort into more affirmative ones. Accordingly, the impact on well-being became visible using the sub code ‘being hopeful’ (9%): *“I generally try to see something positive in my experience of negative emotions”* (Participant 3). Repelling of negative emotions has thus been reframed into compatibility with the self to increase well-being.

‘Searching for solutions’ (5%) was the second mentioned code in this thematic context: *“I switch off my brain, employ reason to tackle emotional discomfort and find a practical way out”* (Participant 5). The practicability of solutions was thus important. Likewise, ‘refusing to wallow in painful thoughts’ (4%) was identified. Refusal occurred naturally: *“It almost feels like there is a physical barrier inside of me that prevents dwelling on negative emotions”* (Participant 5). If discomfort became too agitating, participants’ tendency to self-preserve activated. The sub code ‘gained confidence in one’s ability to cope’ (17%) resulted from both: *“I am able to deal with my discomfort (...) Of course, this made me feel more comfortable”* (Participant 1).

Befriending Impedes Well-Being

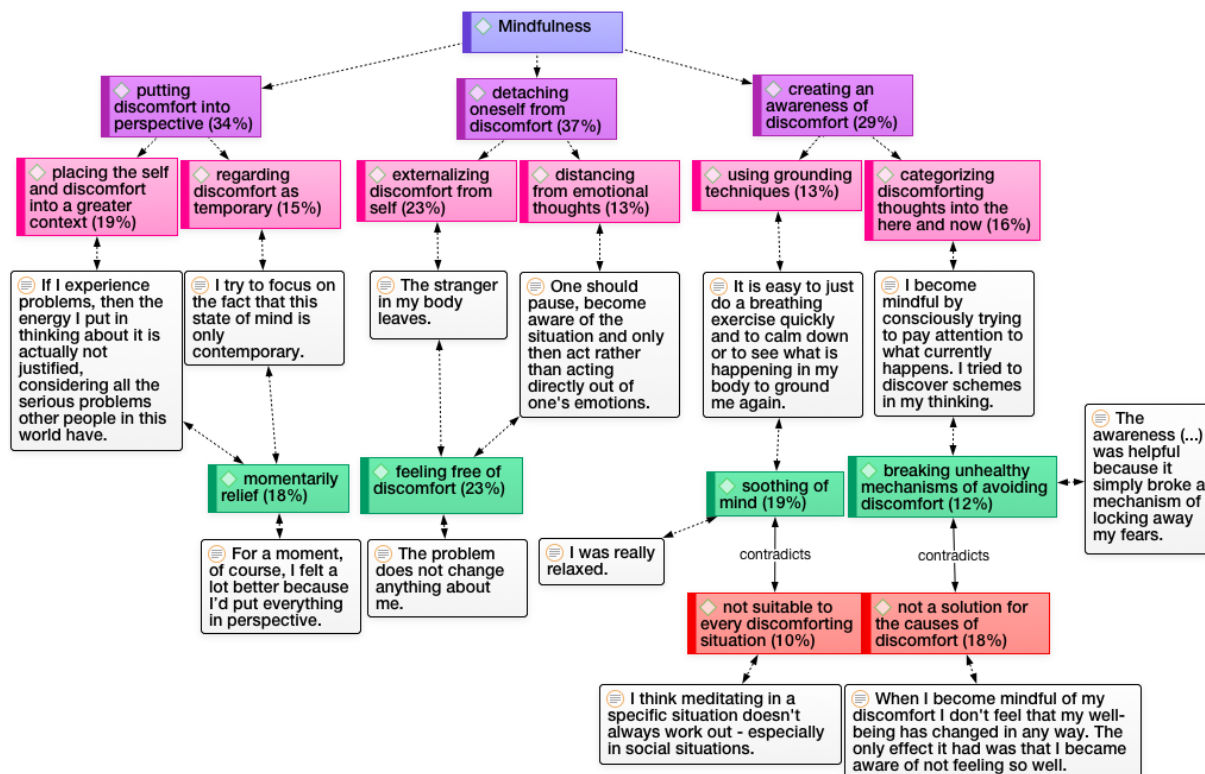
When participants were unable to actively improve the discomforting situation and their attempts to cope were thus unsuccessful, well-being was impeded. After all, it was ‘hurtful if the solution is non-realizable’ (13%): *“Simply befriending my discomfort does not contribute to my well-being. Thinking about what I can do to solve my problem would help me. Provided that I find solutions, so that my discomfort disappears”* (Participant 5). This, however, was only the case for participants who were unable to accept that discomfort would not vanish directly and completely: *“It is just not possible for me to genuinely befriend things if they keep reappearing and still make me feel uncomfortable”* (Participant 4). Concluding, no particular theme of

befriending impeded well-being. Since participants naturally desired to relieve anguish, well-being suffered only if the attempt to improve discomfort failed.

The Distinctive Elements of Becoming Mindful and their Impact on Well-Being

Once more, participants' experiences have been merged to conceptualize mindfulness. Mindfulness was defined as an individual's ability to attentively, objectively and calmly deal with discomfort by relativizing, separating from and becoming aware of dominating negative emotions. A visualisation of the concept and its impact on well-being is in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The distinctive elements of mindfulness, their relations and their impact.



Note: Purple boxes identify themes of mindfulness. Pink boxes summarize codes. Green and red boxes entail sub codes. White boxes entail quotations illustrating codes and sub codes.

Mindfulness Increases Well-being

'Detaching oneself from discomfort'. When detaching oneself from discomfort, the individual disconnected from the problem that caused discomfort. Individuals did not regard discomfort as part of themselves but as an outside influence. 'Detaching oneself from

discomfort' (37%) was the most prevalent theme of mindfulness. In this context, the code 'externalizing discomfort from the self' (23%) has been mentioned most often by those who could not tolerate the experience of negative emotions: "*Emphasizing on painful introspective, dwelling on the worries of life feel counterintuitive to me*" (Participant 5). Respectively, participants separated themselves from their anguish: "*You imagine yourself separated from the circumstance, in which you currently are. You don't see the problem as part of you*" (Participant 4). The problem was regarded as an external influence interfering with the self.

The second code was 'distancing from emotional thoughts' (13%). One adopted an objective view: "*When you are entangled in your thoughts, a mindfulness exercise helps to pull yourself together and to look objectively at the situation*" (Participant 3). Thoughts were reset in a way discomfort would not dominate cognitive processing: "*I reset my thoughts and the advanced feelings of discomfort, so that I may calmly start a new train of thought*" (Participant 4). Subsequently, distancing from emotional thoughts enabled individuals to detach from discomfort because the emotionality behind their apprehensions had been neutralized.

Overall, detaching from discomfort seemed to work as a form of self-protection. By separating from a discomforting situation one externalized the associated psychological anguish. This automatically led to 'feeling free of discomfort' (23%): "*Discomfort is gone (...). The fact that I couldn't cope with the situation is okay because that doesn't change anything about me personally*" (Participant 4). Hence, it was relevant that a problem, as well as intrusive thoughts, did not define one to keep one's self-image intact.

'Putting discomfort into perspective'. When putting discomfort into perspective, the individual made an effort to adapt their ordinary views on discomfort. The individual relativized their suffering by making their discomfort dependent on a time or societal frame. Two codes added to the theme 'putting discomfort into perspective' (34%). Firstly, participants were 'placing the self and discomfort into a greater context' (19%), "*The energy I put into thinking about [my problems] is actually not justified considering all the serious problems other people in this world have*" (Participant 5). Secondly, participants were 'regarding discomfort as temporary' (15%): "*My feelings of discomfort will pass and possibly even create a space for something new*" (Participant 4). It was thus suggested that timely bound discomfort weakened as soon as one gained perspective on their suffering and considered a possible positive aftermath of feeling uncomfortable. The sub code 'momentarily relief' (18%) resulted: "*I felt positive just for*

the moment (...). But that doesn't help in the long run because you can't capture this moment" (Participant 5).

'Creating an awareness of discomfort'. When creating awareness of discomfort, the individual focused on the present moment. Paying attention to bodily sensations and thoughts that were connected to the discomforting situation created a non-reactive state of mind. 'Creating an awareness of discomfort' (29%) was the final theme of becoming mindful. In this context, the code 'categorizing discomforting thoughts into the here and now' (16%) defined an individual's effort to attend and assign thoughts to the present: *"Discomfort is actually a mechanism that only occurs in certain kinds of situations"* (Participant 1). However, *"pushing away bad thoughts is not the solution"* (Participant 2). Well-being was thus increased by the sub code 'breaking unhealthy mechanisms of avoiding discomfort' (12%). After all, becoming conscious of discomfort was imperative to coping: *"Often you are supposedly happier in situations if you ignore uncomfortable feelings. Yet, the mindfulness approach naturally leads to realizing these emotions anyway, which is needed to actually be happy"* (Participant 3).

Slightly being less prominent, the second code 'using grounding techniques' (13%) consisted of relaxing one's body. The reason for relaxation to have a grounding effect was that *"a main characteristic that determines my subjective experience of discomfort is restlessness. As this restlessness was weakened, the feeling of discomfort also subsided"* (Participant 3). This was related to the sub code 'soothing of mind' (19%): *"Relaxing my body during meditation also calmed down my mind"* (Participant 2).

Mindfulness impedes Well-being

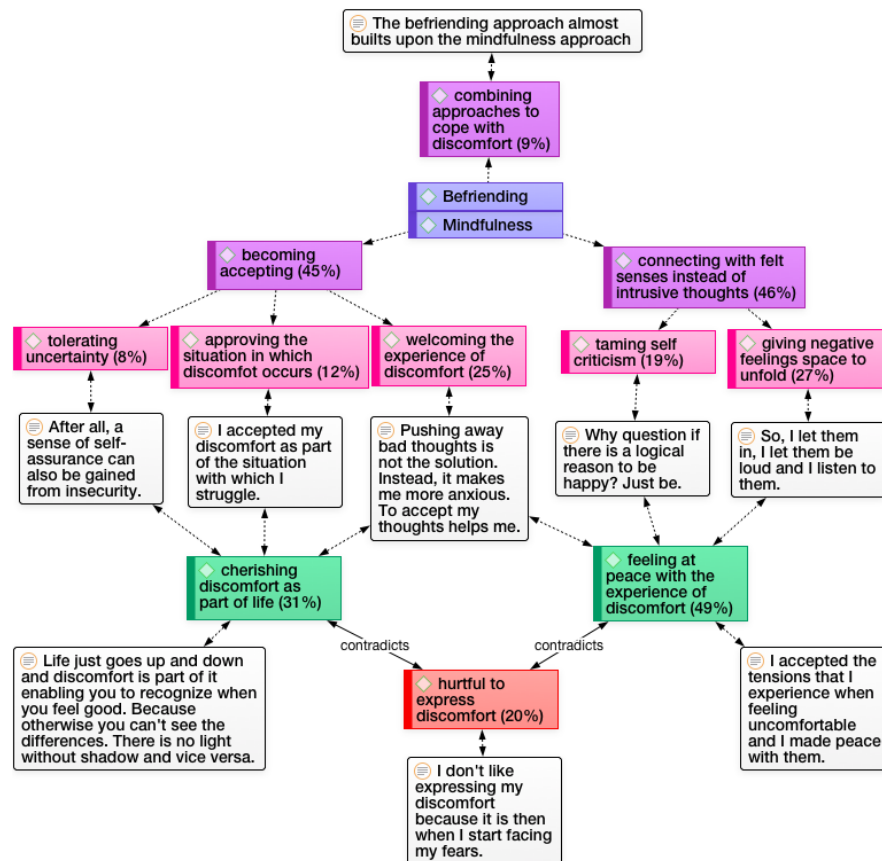
Two sub codes demonstrated how mindfulness impeded well-being. First, creating awareness was 'not a solution for the causes of discomfort' (18%): *"Meditating may make my emotional situation better for a moment, but it doesn't make my problem go away"* (Participant 5). Reason was that participants desired to shift the focus away from their distressed state of mind instead of paying even more attention to it: *"I became aware of not feeling so well"* (Participant 1). In the same way, participants considered becoming mindful 'not suitable to every discomforting situation' (10%), in which coping would be required. *"You have to take your time to become mindful. This can be inconvenient and draining in a way that your discomfort only upsets you further"* (Participant 4). *"Especially in social situations"* (Participant 3) the approach

was not viable. Overall, mindfulness did not result in negative feelings if one did not require an immediate solution to abolish discomfort.

Commonalities of Befriending and Mindfulness as well as their Impact on Well-Being

Two thematic commonalities between befriending and becoming mindful and the possibility to combine both approaches were identified based on participants' reports (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The commonalities of befriending and mindfulness as well as their impact.



Note: Purple boxes identify themes of both approaches. Pink boxes summarize codes. Green and red boxes entail sub codes. White boxes entail quotations illustrating codes and sub codes.

Aspects of Both Approaches that Increase Well-Being

‘Connecting with felt senses instead of intrusive thoughts’. When connecting with felt senses instead of intrusive thoughts, the individual freed their mind from thoughts that amplified feelings of discomfort. Individuals instead solely focused on exposing themselves to discomfort.

The theme ‘connecting with felt senses instead of intrusive thoughts’ (46%) was most prominent in improving discomfort. Participants cleared their mind from burdensome cognitions and exposed themselves to their discomfoting feelings: “*Emotions are a fine thing (...). Why would I overthink them (...)? Just be*” (Participant 5). To particularize, the code ‘giving negative feelings space to unfold’ (27%) was used: “*Instead of closing my eyes to [discomfoting emotions], I look them right in the face, and I make space for them*” (Participant 1). In addition, the code ‘taming self-criticism’ (19%) emerged: “*I will make it clear to myself again and again that it is okay to feel uncomfortable at one point or another*” (Participant 4). Subsequently, participants reported increases in well-being, which has been summarized using the sub code ‘feeling at peace with the experience of discomfort’ (49%), “*I can come to terms with most human-induced problems, at a personal level that is. I can achieve personal peace* (Participant 5)”. Personal peace involved returning to one’s familiar untroubled self: “*I notice that with every breath I take my heart gets a little lighter. I notice that I start feeling like myself again*” (Participant 2).

‘Becoming accepting’. When becoming accepting, the individual tolerated that discomfort occurred. The individual approved to receive discomfoting thoughts and feelings. The theme ‘becoming accepting’ (45%) displayed this. First, an individual was ‘welcoming the experience of discomfort’ (25%): “*Happiness and unhappiness are elements of the human experience and even as I cherish the former, I need to come to terms and accept the latter*” (Participant 5). In addition, participants were ‘approving the situation in which discomfort occurs’ (12%): “*As soon as a situation arises, in which I feel uncomfortable, I accept it*” (Participant 4). Finally, the code ‘tolerating uncertainty’ (8%) mirrored that participants came to terms with not being able to prevent discomfort from occurring. “*The only thing that I can do is to realize that I cannot do anything*” (Participant 2).

Altogether, accepting improved participants' well-being because “*without acceptance there is no chance for change*” (Participant 4). The sub code ‘cherishing discomfort as part of life’ (31%) illustrated this. “*Life goes up and down. Discomfort is part of it - enabling you to recognize when you feel good. Otherwise you can’t see the differences*” (Participant 5).

‘Combining approaches to cope with discomfort’. When combining approaches to cope with discomfort, the individual felt it would be beneficial to use the befriending and the mindfulness approach consecutively and repeatedly. Few participants declared themselves to be in favour of ‘combining approaches to cope with discomfort’ (9%) to optimize their well-being:

“During the mindfulness approach, I have become calmer and more positive. During the befriending approach, I learned something about myself, which I can use in the future. That’s why a combination is preferable when coping with my discomfort” (Participant 3). The reason named for this was that *“Mindfulness helps to create awareness and to give discomforting fears a shape, while befriending then helps to integrate these fears”* (Participant 1).

Aspects of Both Approaches that Impede Well-Being

Although the above mentioned themes mainly had positive effects on individuals’ well-being, it was initially ‘hurtful to express discomfort’ (20%), as mere exposure was exacerbating participants’ negative emotions: *“You do nothing else than to see how discomfort feels and what’s going on in your body (...) If you then can’t cope with your emotions, it just makes things worse”* (Participant 2). However, if one was able to successfully cope using either approach, the effects of mere exposure to discomfort could be balanced.

Discussion

To summarize the findings, integrating discomfort as part of the self, inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort, and actively trying to improve the discomforting situation were found to be distinctive elements of befriending. These elements were unique to the befriending approach, as becoming mindful entailed three contradicting elements (i.e. detaching oneself from discomfort, putting discomfort into perspective, and creating an awareness of discomfort). Common elements of befriending and mindfulness were becoming accepting of discomfort and connecting with bodily symptoms of discomfort instead of unrelated distressing cognitions. The possibility to combine befriending and mindfulness has also been identified. Finally, befriending led to feeling complete, while the impact of mindfulness on peoples’ well-being was feeling free from discomfort. Examining these outcomes more in-depth, one may note that some of these conclusions were contemplated, while others may be interpreted with caution.

Before interpreting the results, it is relevant to mention that this study is novel. Previous studies assumed that befriending and mindfulness would relate without comparing both (Gehard & McCollum, 2007; Khong, 2010). Since this was the first study to explicitly look at differences and commonalities between both approaches, comparison with other research may be limited.

First, to examine the unique elements of befriending, one may review the definition that was made available. Previous conceptualizations defined befriending as (1) allowing discomfort

to arise and to expand (Welwood, 1979), (2) connecting with discomfort (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011), and (3) inquiring about discomfort (Robbins & Hong, 2013). This study partly revised the given definition of the befriending approach based on the distinctive elements participants identified. First, the current research did not support the suggestion that allowing discomfort to arise and to expand would be a distinctive part of befriending. Instead, participants tried to improve their discomfort. The most prominent explanation for this outcome is that participants might not fully allow themselves to feel discomfort. Secondly, findings partly relate to the proposition that connecting with discomfort would be distinctive of befriending (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011; Robbins & Hong, 2013). This study found that individuals integrate discomfort as part of the self. Connecting with and integrating discomfort may refer to the same element of befriending, as both entail sympathizing with the self (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011). Differing analysis processes may explain this difference. The names of themes may differ between studies since inductive codes were developed. Thirdly, outcomes of this study and Robbins's and Hong's field research (2013) indicate that befriending entails inquiry by asking about the meaning and aptitude people can gain from expressing their discomfort.

The outcomes of the current study may also be compared with researchers' propositions of commonalities that exist between befriending and mindfulness. Previously, studies listed the same element for befriending and mindfulness without referring to the other approach (Bishop et al., 2006; Feldman & Kuyken, 2011; Zizzi 2017). This study thus extended prior research by substantiating contemplated commonalities between befriending and mindfulness. The current and existing studies propose that becoming accepting of discomfort is a common element of befriending and mindfulness (Zizzi 2017; Bishop et al., 2006; Feldman & Kuyken, 2011). In addition, Khong's (2010) findings related to this study. Both studies argue that mindfulness and befriending may entail solely paying attention to bodily symptoms of discomfort while shifting focus away from intrusive thoughts. Finally, the outcomes of this study support previous propositions in that alternating befriending and mindfulness may be beneficial (Ajinkya, Jadhav & Ajinkya 2015). However, caution is required, as participants merely had the idea to alternate befriending and mindfulness but applied both approaches separately.

Propositions of earlier studies on how befriending and mindfulness differ may be discussed next. Prior studies insinuated that differences pertain to awareness, inquiry, and attachment. Befriending was to start with becoming aware (Welwood, 1979), while mindfulness

was to aim at creating awareness (Bishop et al., 2006). Inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort was to solely pertain to befriending (Robbins & Hong, 2013). Befriending was to differ from mindfulness in forming an attachment with discomfort (Ray & Sutton, 2007) rather than a non-attachment (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). This study contradicts these findings. Awareness may distinguish both approaches, yet, differently than contemplated: awareness was not part of befriending. A possible explanation may be that participants considered creating awareness as preparation for befriending but not as part of the actual process. Even so, inquiry may be unique to befriending caution is needed when asserting that drawing meaning from discomfort would be too. The same applies to mindfulness when participants put discomfort into perspective. Plausibly, changing the meaning of discomfort might then be a by-product of reflecting their experience and not mindfulness itself. Finally, non-attachment is not identified as part of mindfulness. Participants indicated that they detached from their discomfort. Where detachment suggests separation from discomfort, non-attachment entails non-reactive engagement in the present (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). This difference might have occurred because participants could have misunderstood instructions to become mindful, in which case limitations of this study could have influenced the results. This notion will be further discussed in the ‘strengths and limitations’ section.

Finally, the effect of befriending and mindfulness on peoples’ well-being may also be discussed. Respectively, suggestions on how befriending may be able to balance limitations of mindfulness will be considered. That should, however, be done with much caution, as little research examined the differing effects both approaches have on well-being. Participants tend to feel complete when befriending discomfort, even though they may still experience negative feelings. Diversely, when applying the mindfulness approach, participants' well-being may only increase when they feel free of discomfort. While befriending, it is consistent for participants to feel complete with the experience of discomfort, as it helps them deal without altering their characters (Ray & Sutton, 2007). Also conforming to earlier studies, participants excluded discomfort from the self while becoming mindful (Dobkin, Irving & Amar, 2012). This exclusion may transform the perception of the self, as significant experiences are denied (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). The befriending approach may take up this critical shortcoming of mindfulness by keeping an individual’s sense of the self intact.

Future Research

Future research may investigate traditional folk approaches further because mindfulness and befriending were reportedly beneficial for participants' mental health. Both approaches are more prevalent in Eastern compared to Western literature (Vázquez & García-Vázquez, 2003). There may be more such approaches, which practitioners from Western countries can also thoroughly examine. Fostering visibility of befriending, mindfulness, and other indigenous techniques may thus have value in scientific literature, in the sense that it can improve the mental health of citizens living in Western countries, as proven by empirical data (Robbins & Hong, 2013).

Findings of the current study contradict those mentioned in previous studies (Bishop et al., 2006; Gehart & McCollum, 2007; Ray & Sutton, 2007). Inductive analysis procedures could have caused these differences. A second suggestion for future research is, therefore, to alter the analysis of this study. Future studies may solely rely on deductive coding to evaluate whether differences between befriending and mindfulness are replicable. Doing so, a unanimous thematic foundation for the befriending approach could be created.

Finally, this study addressed only one limitation of mindfulness that befriending could balance. The limitation of how befriending could preserve rather than transform an individual's sense of the self when coping with discomfort. Yet, mindfulness indeed has more limitations. It may lead to heightened negative emotions and may only be suitable to specific people and situations (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Future research may investigate how befriending might balance these aforementioned limitations of mindfulness that this study has not addressed. At this, examining the differing effects of both techniques on well-being further could be helpful.

Strengths and Limitations

One may first note multiple strengths that characterize this study. This study contributes to the scientific literature by laying out a thematic framework for the befriending approach. Several elements that are unique to the befriending approach were identified. In addition, the sample was small but notably heterogeneous. Hence, this study could collect an in-depth perspective of differing social groups on how befriending is unique compared to mindfulness (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Furthermore, confounding bias was prevented by randomly assigning participants to the sequence in which they should engage in the befriending and mindfulness approach (Pourhoseingholi, Baghestani & Vahedi, 2012). Also, the study design amounts to a

strength of this study. By giving participants the task to engage in the befriending and the mindfulness approach and reflect on and talk about their experiences, this research became collaborative (Ntinda, 2018). Overall, the advantage in clinical research is in the fact that researchers can use the voice of those who struggle to cope with discomfort to tailor approaches more specifically to their needs (Overcash, 2003).

Few critical remarks concern the reliability and validity of the results. The researcher analysed data independently and without further supervision or a test of inter-rater reliability. Therefore, the reliability of the data analysis might be restricted, as a different analyst might draw different conclusions (Fink, 2010). Still, the researcher reported the analysis procedure as transparently as possible to allow replicability. In addition, the instructions provided may have hindered participant's application of mindfulness and befriending techniques. These instructions involved terminology that individuals may not know. That may have restricted content validity (Fink, 2010). To balance constrained validity, the researcher took participants' narratives at face value: "truth is whatever the participant tells you" (Overcash, 2003, p. 183).

Practical Recommendations

Befriending discomfort has implications for mental health workers because therapists often inherit an attitude of fixing problems (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). It is therefore important for therapists to acknowledge that not every experience of pain can be changed. The concept of befriending informs the therapist's work. It takes the focus from dissolving a client's problem and offers a new perspective of discomfort being therapeutic. Therefore, therapists may implement a befriending attitude in their clinical practice (Gehart & McCollum, 2007).

For society, this study gives three practical recommendations. First, individuals should use the befriending approach when their aim is to feel complete with the experience of discomfort. Secondly, individuals should sympathize and welcome their discomforting feelings as part of themselves (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011). That entails not rejecting the experience of discomfort, even if one's feelings may be uncomfortable at first. Finally, individuals would benefit from inquiring about their discomfort (Robbins & Hong, 2013). One should ask themselves what value their discomforting experience has and what are the underlying reasons behind their emotional reaction.

Conclusion

Aiming to discover what is unique of the befriending approach, this study was the first to explicitly examine the differences and commonalities between befriending and mindfulness. The results of this study suggest that befriending is distinguished by integrating discomfort as part of the self, inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort, and actively trying to improve the discomforting situation. Detaching oneself from discomfort, putting discomfort into perspective, and creating an awareness of discomfort, in turn, distinguish mindfulness. Although effects on well-being occurred in both approaches, befriending and mindfulness had differential effects on human well-being. In the befriending approach, well-being was associated with feeling complete, possibly due to integrating discomfort as part of the self. In contrast, mindfulness led to a separation of discomfort and the self. It is therefore concluded that from a perspective of integrating the attempt to increase well-being with the usage of discomfort, it would be beneficial for people to employ befriending. Yet, future research may explore the effects of befriending and mindfulness on peoples' well-being more in-depth. Not only would both approaches be further distinguished but their benefits and limitations may become clearer.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Investigator: Hannah Hanckmann

Contact Person: Hannah Hanckmann (h.hanckmann@student.utwente.nl)

Dear participant,

I invite you to be a contributor to the research that I conduct in the context of pursuing my Master's degree as a student of the University of Twente. The aforementioned research encompasses two moments of data collection, which aim to discover how people befriend discomforting emotions as well as become mindful in the interest of increasing their well-being.

The first part of the study consists of writing two reflective journal entries, in which you disclose what you do to achieve (1) befriending a discomforting emotion and (2) becoming mindful. If you agree to participate, you will have to share personal thoughts and go through a narrative journey of encountering discomfort with devotion. The aim thereof is to discover the kinds of behavioural or intellectual patterns that contrast befriending personal discomfort from mindfulness.

Additionally, I invite you to take part in a small interview that depicts the second part of my research. You will have to answer questions targeting in what relation befriending your discomforting emotions and becoming mindful stand to your well-being. In this context, I aim to discover the effects that the usage of negative emotions has on your experience of mental health.

The information extracted from the journal entries as well as from the interviews will serve as data for my master thesis. All your data will be handled confidentially in that any personal information, including names or birth dates, will be anonymised. I do not believe that distress or disadvantages will arise through your participation in the study. However, joining in this research is on a voluntary basis and if any instance of uneasiness arises you can opt out at all times without explaining yourself.

By signing this consent form you agree to have understood the instructions and the impact of this research. You also agree to the condition that the interview will be recorded and transcripts will be made. If you have further questions feel free to use the contact details as stated above to get in touch with the researcher. Upon request, you will receive a copy of this consent form.

‘I hereby declare that I have been informed in a manner which is clear to me about the nature and method of the research as described by the researchers. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree of my own free will to participate in this research. I reserve the right to withdraw this consent without the need to give any reason and I am aware that I may withdraw from the experiment at any time. If my research results are to be used in scientific publications or made public in any other manner, then they will be made completely anonymous. My personal data will not be disclosed to third parties without my express permission. If I request further information about the research, now or in the future, I may contact the contact person mentioned.’

.....
Date, Name Subject Signature

‘I - the researcher - have provided explanatory notes about the research. I declare myself willing to answer to the best of my ability any questions which may still arise about the research.’

.....
Date, Name Researcher Signature

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

To begin with, I would like you to fill out a small questionnaire about your demographics.

- How old are you?
- As what gender do you identify?
- What is your cultural background?
- What is your educational background?

Appendix C

Introducing Statement Participants

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to engage in the first part of this study. In a moment, I would like you to cope with a significant feeling of discomfort by first taking a befriending approach and afterwards a mindful approach. You do not have to carry out both approaches on the same day but accomplish both as soon as practicable. After you engage in either approach, I kindly ask you to immediately write a reflective journal entry about your experiences. This means you need to write two journal entries in total - one about your experiences with befriending and another about your experiences with mindfulness. Let me explain both procedures before you start.

By choosing the mindful approach, you will become aware of what is happening in the here and now using meditation and breathing activities to ground yourself in current experiences. *Becoming mindful means simply observing what kind of thoughts wander through your mind and what bodily sensations arise.* Each thought, sensation and feeling is noticed and acknowledged without being judged, elaborated or reacted to. In short, **attend** your feelings **without reacting** to them.

If you choose the befriending approach in turn, you start off by becoming aware of a specific discomfoting feeling. Befriending means perceiving your feelings as they arise and being honest about every discomfoting thought and feeling that wants to make its way through to your mind. Once you achieve this, *befriending is about exploring the meaning of your feeling of discomfort*: listen to yourself, pay attention to what thoughts and feelings hurt and ask yourself what benefit you might gain from expressing this discomfort. In short, **get attached** to your feelings and embrace yourself.

The main difference between a mindful and a befriending approach to discomfort is that in the former awareness is the end-goal, while in the latter awareness is the starting point. By being mindful you compassionately experience the present moment. By befriending, however, you use the awareness of a specific discomfoting feeling to discover its meaning. Also, mindfulness requires detachment that is disentangling yourself from the feelings and or thoughts that dominate your mind. Diversely, befriending allows for attachment that is affiliating with your feelings and integrating them into your self-image. In this way, mindfulness is about simply

being in the present, while befriending entails to discover for yourself the most effective and tender ways of coping.

Appendix D

First Approach: Befriending

Now that you will start befriending a specific feeling of discomfort, I would like you to write this process down in the form of a journal entry. Keep the definition of befriending that has been provided above in mind but feel free to bring in your own interpretation of the indicated concept. Please be thorough and reflective. You can take as long as you need for the writing, seeing that befriending discomfort might take time and differs between individuals. Do not worry about linguistic accuracy but be as creative as you want and do not limit yourself. At minimum I like you to write one A4 page but feel free to express and share more.

Begin by thinking of a situation that makes you feel strong discomfort. Let yourself flood with these feelings and become aware of this experience. I would like you wanting to feel discomfort. Stick to this experience and focus your awareness on the inner turmoil it could cause. Can you bear up this feeling? Stay with it for a few seconds. If it becomes too much to bear: pause but then stay with it for another few seconds and so on. Once you find yourself in the middle of this discomforting emotion, shift your awareness to inquiry and work with your discomfort.

Ask yourself the following questions. Did you achieve to become aware of your discomfort? What exact emotions are present in your heart and what do they do with your body and mind? What discomforting beliefs do you perceive? **What do you think about yourself in this state of mind? What are the core features of yourself that determine how you feel about discomfort?** What does it feel like to genuinely express yourself right in this moment? **What is it like to be you?**

When you have accomplished befriending a discomforting feeling, continue with the reflective journal entry by answering the following questions: **How will you use this experience to welcome discomfort as a part of yourself?** Do you even want to acknowledge your pain as a defining feature of yourself? How can you make room for discomfort in your heart? Consider how you could come across your pain in ways it can help you to accept the feelings or thoughts you might have about yourself that you do not like. Please think openly and write down your contemplation process explicitly. **What insights did you gain about yourself in the state of mind you just experienced?** If you would like to add any more reflective insights about your

experience and how it affected you as a person, feel free to write these down too. Actively explore your unfolding feelings and try to be open to any message that might unfold.

Appendix E

Second Approach: Mindfulness

Now that you will participate in a mindful approach, I would like you to write this process down in the form of a journal entry. Keep the definition of mindfulness that has been provided above in mind but feel free to bring in your own interpretation of the indicated concept. Please be thorough and reflective. You can take as long as you need for the writing, seeing that becoming mindful might take time and differs between individuals. Do not worry about linguistic accuracy but be as creative as you want and do not limit yourself. At minimum I like you to write one A4 page but feel free to express and share more.

Begin by thinking of a situation that makes you feel strong discomfort. Let yourself flood with these feelings and become aware of this experience. I would like you wanting to feel discomfort. Stick to this experience and focus your awareness on the inner turmoil it could cause. Can you bear up this feeling? Stay with it for a few seconds. If it becomes too much to bear: pause but then stay with it for another few seconds and so on. Once you find yourself in the middle of this discomforting emotion, engage in a small meditation that aims to ground you in the present moment. Use the following text as an inspiration or a guidance to successfully engage in a mindful meditation:

Stand up straight, with both feet right next to each other. Your knees should be slightly bent, not locked into position. Keep track of several breaths; feel your breath flow into and out of your body.

Make note of how your body feels. Being in touch with your body means you will be able to feel the life energy it holds. You do not need to do anything special to feel this energy. Then, imagine how tall a tree stands, and imagine how you are standing as tall as a tree. Trees have strong roots that connect them to the earth. Their roots run deep, and provide them with nourishment and power. A tree is strong if its roots run deep. As a tree is rooted in the earth, so too are you rooted in life itself.

Feel your feet connect you to the earth. Every time you breathe in, imagine energy from the earth flowing into your body. Every time you breathe out, imagine your breath leaving you through your body and your feet into the earth. Breathe in, and feel the energy flow in. Breathe out, and feel your breath flow out. Breathe in and out like this for a minute.

Firmly rooted in the now, that is how a tree stands tall in its trunk. Stand tall in your body, and feel how firm you stand; this way, you will not be bowled over by any storms that blow through your life. Realize that taking good care of your body will help make you more resilient. Focus your attention on all parts of your body (your feet, legs, torso, arms, and head) for about a minute.

The crown, the branches, and the leaves of a tree are wide open and receptive. Fierce winds and storms may shake the branches, blow the leaves from the crown – but the tree remains rooted in the earth. Even though it may be shaken to the core of its trunk, a healthy tree holds its ground.

Life will continually feed you with new impressions, impressions to which you should be open and receptive. Realize that any storm in your life will pass. Realize that all things are transient. Remain anchored in the now.

Try to look at yourself and your surroundings with compassion. Take a compassionate look at your current situation in life, at the people around you, at yourself.

End the exercise by stretching and moving around.

Float in your state of awareness and ask yourself the following questions. Did you achieve to become aware of your discomfort? What exact emotions are present in your heart and what do they do with your body and mind? What discomforting beliefs do you perceive? **What do you think about yourself in this state of mind? What are the core features of yourself that determine how you feel about discomfort?** What does it feel like to genuinely express yourself right in this moment? **What is it like to be you?**

When you have accomplished becoming mindful, continue with the reflective journal entry by answering the following questions: **How will you use this experience to welcome discomfort as a part of yourself?** Do you even want to acknowledge your pain as a defining feature of yourself? How can you make room for discomfort in your heart? Consider how you could come across your pain in ways it can help you to accept the feelings or thoughts you might have about yourself that you do not like. Please think openly and write down your contemplation process explicitly. **What insights did you gain about yourself in the state of mind you just experienced?** If you would like to add any more reflective insights about your experience and

how it affected you as a person, feel free to write these down too. Actively explore your unfolding feelings and try to be open to any message that might unfold.

Appendix F

Follow-Up Interview Scheme

Hello,

Thank you for taking time to participate in the second part of my study. This part consists of a small follow-up interview on how the mindful and befriending approach in the first part of this study made you feel considering your well-being.

I will ask 6 questions, which I presume to take around 15 to 30 minutes. Please answer honestly and extensively. If you have any questions yourself, you can ask me whenever one arises. With your consent, the following interview will be audio recorded. You can be assured that all the responses you give me will be handled confidentially, meaning that after I transcribed this interview, recordings will be erased. Do you have any questions or remarks before we start with the interview?

Okay, then we may now begin [*starting audio recorder*].

We will start off with short clarification questions on your experiences with both, the befriending and the mindful approach.

- Have you had previous experiences with either approach? If yes, could you describe them?
- In your own view, did you achieve befriending the discomforting emotion as well as becoming mindful? If yes/ no - why?
- According to you, what were the differences of the befriending and mindfulness approach?
- What perks/ disadvantages did you perceive of the befriending and mindfulness approach regarding your coping with discomfort? What did and didn't you like about both approaches?
- To what extent did you think both approaches were helpful in coping with your discomfort? Why? Can you please elaborate?
- Which approach did you prefer in coping with your discomfort? Why?

Thank you. We will further go on with questions that relate the effects of a mindful and befriending approach to discomfort with your well-being.

- To what extent do you think both approaches to cope with your discomfort have or have not helped you to genuinely feel like yourself? Why? In what ways? What effect did that have on you?
- How did both approaches make you feel? Could you compare your well-being before and after befriending your discomforting emotions/ or rather becoming mindful?
- In what ways do you think befriending your discomfort/ or rather becoming mindful affects your well-being? Can you name examples?

Appendix G

Coding Scheme

Theme	Theme Definition	Code	Code Definition	Example Quote	Sub code	Sub code Definition	Example Quote
Integrating discomfort as part of the self	When integrating discomfort as part of the self, the individual recognizes that discomfort is a natural and valid feeling. Doing so, the individual shows efforts to welcome discomfort into their perception of the self.	Emphasizing oneself	The individual is responsive to and understanding with unwanted emotions.	Embrace your inner demons and make them a part of yourself – no matter how hard it seems. You already did it once; you can do it again.	Feeling complete	The individual feels genuinely able to express every part of their identity. That means the individual feels free to express negative emotions as they occur.	In the befriending approach I genuinely felt like myself or being on the way to becoming myself.
Inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort	When inquiring oneself to draw meaning from discomfort, the individual enters in dialogue with the self. This dialogue is directed to	Discovering the utilization value of discomfort	The individual evaluates which purpose the experience of discomfort could serve.	I need the feeling in advance. At first sight, the discomfort is inappropriate because it seems to be inconvenient. But that is	Finding purpose in discomfort	The individual discovers how discomfort can be beneficial in certain situations.	My discomfort helps to recognize what is important in a situation and to become clear about what I have to

	asking what purpose the experience of discomfort yields and what reasons may underlie their suffering. Explanations for the righteousness of discomfort are found.			only the case if I regard discomfort fleetingly.			do to perform well .
		Adapting one's understanding of discomfort	The individual looks for the root of their problem to be able to explain when and why their negative feelings occur.	You think about the reasons for your discomfort and its occurrence in specific situations.	Personal growth	The individual feels as if they matured as result of experiencing discomfort.	Discomfort comes back regularly and now I am able to explain to myself where it comes from, why I have it and how I can use it to draw positive energy from it.
Actively trying to improve the discomforting situation	When actively trying to improve a discomforting situation, the individual tries to transform their suffering into something positive. The individual tries to fix	Reframing discomfort positively	The individual changes the distressing meaning of discomfort until it becomes acceptable.	Chaos became a friend of mine. Darkness became a friend of mine.	Being hopeful	The individual believes the future will be brighter.	I generally try to see something positive in my experience of negative.
		Searching for solutions	The individual looks for a practical way to remove discomfort from	Solutions seem to flicker in front of my inner eyes like a slideshow	Gained confidence in one's ability to cope / Painful	The individual believes they can encounter discomfort without suffering / The anticipated solution cannot be	I noticed that I am able to deal with my discomfort and that I can

	discom- fort by either changing their perspec- tive, feelings or the discom- forting situation itself.	Refusing to wallow in painful thinking	The individual does not surrender to pain.	I do not think about myself and my emotional troubles a lot. I am always aware of my emotional challeng- es without having to think about them for days on end.	if the solution is non- realizabl e	implem- ented and thus discom- fort prevails.	thus try to integrate it. / Because the solution to my problem is also dependen t on other people, befriend- ing it didn't alleviate my degree of help- lessness.
Putting discom- fort into perspec- tive	When putting discom- fort into perspec- tive, the individual makes an effort to adapt their ordinary views on discom- fort. The individual relativizes their suffering by making their discom- fort dependent on a time frame or	Placing the self and discom- fort into a greater context	A specific situation of discom- fort is compared to other aspects of life or other people's experience s.	I realize, so to speak, that there is much more than just me. Simply concen- trating on myself and seeing how well I am actually doing in this world as a whole, helps me.	Moment- arily relief	The feeling of discom- fort diminish-es for a short period of time.	The perks of the mindful- ness approach is that in the moment where you are really over- whelmed by your emotions, it can really help you to calm down and to get relatively quickly back to

	the larger world.	fort as temporary	to come and go.	feelings only appear temporarily and thus go away again just as quickly as they came plays a major role for me.			your normal self again.
Detaching oneself from discomfort	When detaching oneself from discomfort, the individual disconnects from the problem that causes discomfort. The individual does not regard discomfort as part of themselves but as outside influence.	Externalizing discomfort from the self	Discomfort is excluded from the self-concept. That means discomfort is evaluated as non-defining part of the self.	The problem doesn't change anything about YOU. You are you and the problem is there but it only affects you in the situation. It doesn't change you as a person.	Feeling free of discomfort	The feeling of discomfort and the associated suffering is gone.	The discomfort is gone or I only experience it to a little extent. I see that I simply am and that the problem has no influence on me. So, I see myself separate from the problem.
		Distancing from emotional thoughts	The individual observes how thoughts and discomfort are connected and may influence each other.	But I think one should pause, become aware of the situation and only then act rather than			

				acting directly out of one's emotions.			
Creating an awareness of discomfort	When creating an awareness of discomfort, the individual focuses on the present moment. A non- reactive state of mind is created by paying attention to bodily sensations and thoughts that are connected to the discomforting situation.	Using grounding techniques	An individual uses breathing techniques to come down to earth and to calm themselves.	I focus on breathing and check in with the rest of my body.	Soothing of mind/ not suitable to every discomforting situation	A state that is characterized by relaxation as well as calmness/ Grounding techniques are not practicable in social situations.	I was really relaxed because I closed my eyes and laid down. / Meditating in a specific situation doesn't always work out - especially in social situations .
		Categorizing discomforting thoughts into the here and now	An individual actively recognizes their thought patterns and connects these to the present moment.		Breaking unhealthy mechanisms of avoiding discomfort/ not a solution for the causes of discomfort	An individual engages in healthy coping by facing discomfort/ Categorization of discomfort does not help to solve the origin of struggles.	Pushing away bad thoughts is not the solution. Instead, it makes me more anxious. To become aware breaks this. /
Becoming accepting	When becoming accepting, the	Tolerating uncertainty	An individual finds it okay that	The only thing that I can do is to	Cherishing discomfort as	Discomfort is valued as part of life /	Life just goes up and down and

	individual asserts that they find it tolerable that discomfort occurs. The individual approves to receive discomforting thoughts and feelings.	<div> <div>Approving the situation in which discomfort occurs</div> <div>Welcoming the experience of discomfort</div> </div>	<div> <div>Not only the discomforting emotion is tolerated but also the situation causing discomfort.</div> <div>When an individual experiences discomfort, then this feeling is allowed and tolerated.</div> </div>	<div> <div>realize that I cannot do anything.</div> <div>I accepted my discomfort as part of the situation with which I struggle.</div> <div>I think it is important to accept and acknowledge my own feelings.</div> </div>	<div> <div>part of life / Hurtful to express discomfort</div> </div>	<div> <div>An individual experiences a certain extent of suffering when exposed to discomfort.</div> <div>It is not so pleasant to deal with one's discomfort because you actually have to accept something that you regard as a personal weakness and that you would rather ignore.</div> </div>	<div> <div>discomfort is part of it enabling you to recognize when you feel good. Because otherwise you can't see the differences. /</div> </div>
Connecting with felt senses instead of intrusive thoughts	When connecting with felt senses instead of intrusive thoughts, the	Taming self-criticism	The individual refrains from harsh judgments about the self.	I recognize that I differentiate strongly between insecurity	Feeling at peace with the experience of discomfort /	<div> <div>The individual feels serene with the experience of discomfort /</div> <div>An individual experience</div> </div>	<div> <div>We can probably come to terms with most human-induced</div> </div>

	individual clears their mind from thoughts that amplify feelings of discom- fort. The individual instead solely focuses on exposing them- selves to discom- fort.			and self- con- fidence, which does not necessari- ly have to be the case.	Hurtful to express discom- fort	n-ces a certain extent of suffering when exposed to discom- fort.	problems , at a personal level that is. I mean achieving personal peace. /
		Giving negative feelings space to unfold	Letting negative feelings in.	I have found a new strategy on how to deal with my negative feelings. This strategy is to give my feelings space.			It is a little bit over- whelmin g because you start with doing nothing else than to see how your body feels and what's going on in your body. And at first that makes you feel even more uncomf- ortable.
Combin- ing approach - es to cope with discom- fort	When combin- ing approach- es to cope with discom- fort, the individual feels it would be beneficial to use the befriend-	/	/	A combi- nation of both is preferable for me when coping with my discom- fort.	/	/	/

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