

**Hobbies And Mindfulness:  
Stress Reduction, Self Help and Modern Meditation**

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## Abstract

**Background:** Our modern society stresses the importance of productivity and improving every aspect of our lives, always pushing the limits of what is possible. It seems a disproportionate amount of importance is placed on the individual's well-being.

**Objective:** This study aims to research mindfulness and hobbies and the benefits obtained by those who practice them in hopes of discovering if the two can be interchangeable when seeking self-help, stress reduction, and personal development.

**Design and Method:** The research method is based on peer-reviewed literature consisting of scholarly articles, journals, dissertations, blogs, and online articles. The research performed is qualitative and includes literature from 2006 to 2021. Hobbies and Mindfulness were studied to evaluate their similarities and differences and are reported in the results section. The main research questions are: *What are hobbies? What is mindfulness? Do the methods of practicing mindfulness and hobbies overlap? If so, what are the common benefits received? Can engaging in certain hobbies be considered a form of mindfulness?*

**Results:** The significance of this study is that hobbies and mindfulness can produce various benefits for the individual both physically and psychologically.

**Conclusions:** The two are viewed differently in society, but the outcomes of both are more often than not similar enough to be interchangeable with the same outcomes for the individual. Both are initially practiced for various reasons, with the results being similar. If one is seeking the benefits of either but unable to practice a certain hobby or mindfulness, the two are interchangeable. Some hobbies are seen as a waste of time or something performed with nothing constructive or beneficial being gained. This study concludes that hobbies are indeed a form of mindfulness and produce many of the same results. Hobbies are simple, repetitive tasks that keep the body active while giving the mind the ability to be mindful of itself and time to focus on the needs and wants of the individual.

**Keywords:** *Hobby, Mindfulness, Meditation, Stress, Self Help, Active Rest*

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

With the coming of the information age and modern technology, our society has seen ever-increasing importance placed on speed and efficiency. Our technological lives are driven by the next upgrade that assures us faster connections, more memory, increased processing speed, more efficient routes, brighter screens with clearer images, louder audio, and longer talk time. Our connections are instant and encouraged due to technology. Society praises those who can be the most productive with their time, urging us to fill our days with constructive and productive tasks that lead us to be as efficient with our time as possible. There is work to be done, money to be made, people to connect with, bills to be paid, or repairs to be done. When our days are filled with a never-ending to-do list, we rarely have time to take a step back and evaluate where we are rather than where we are going or should be.

Research has found that taking breaks is vital to maintaining physical, psychological, and emotional health during times of increased work-related stress. However, it is often difficult for one to balance being productive while being mindful of their day to day life. This study explores how incorporating a hobby into one's life fulfills our trained mindset to be productive while offering a meditative and mindful state. The literature review will define mindfulness, explore the benefits received from the practice, how certain hobbies can produce a mindful state, and the similarities between the two.

I chose to research this topic for several reasons. From my late teens to early twenties, I spent the academic year in school and summers as a camp counselor in the Pocono Mountains. I became aware of a drastic difference in the speed and intensity of life between the two. The academic year included work and school, and I found everyone in my life, from professors, classmates, coworkers, friends, and family members, all had a high level of stress and fatigue.

Their days were filled with tasks to be completed in all aspects of their lives. The opposite was happening during my summer life. Taken away from the stress of the school year, most people I interacted with during the summer were, for the most part, carefree, had lower levels of stress, and were happier even as their days were filled with activities. How could this be? I began to see that the activities done over the summer were not work; they were for personal growth, companionship, friendship, and mental health. This idea led me to question how both ways of life were filled with things to do, but the impact on the ones physical, emotional, and psychological health were in some ways opposite, leading me to my research questions.

In seeing the ever-increasing daily tasks, we are burdened within our modern-day society, as well as being aware of an increase in stress and anxiety-related disorders. I believe the two will become more prevalent in the future. Although model kit building has always been a hobby of mine, I have realized that it serves as a form of therapy over the years. Since I engage in a hobby, I will need to put my bias aside since I believe I derive positive mental health from my hobby. Therefore, I decided to look further into the benefits of hobbies in general and examine if they can serve as a form of meditation and self-help to aid those struggling with stress and anxiety.

The main terms used to search for material to research included *mindfulness, meditation, hobby, physical, psychological and emotion health, active rest, self-improvement, serious leisure, cognitive performance, and neural efficiency*. Once sources were found, they were studied and put into three categories: Mindfulness and meditation, hobbies, and those found that are comprised of both.

### **Definitions**

**Mindfulness** - defined as enhanced attention and moment-by-moment awareness, a heightened state of involvement and wakefulness, being in the present, and maintenance of an open and non-judgmental consciousness (Mahmood, Hopthrow, & Randsley de Moura, 2016).

**Meditation** – is the act of one engaging in contemplation or reflection to engage in mental exercise (such as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

**Hobby** - A hobby is a leisure activity that is engaged in most commonly for pleasure and relaxation (Crawford, G, 2009).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be traced to eastern Buddhist spiritual traditions and has been described in many ways. One definition describes the practice as a state of being that brings attention to the experiences occurring in the present moment in an accepting and non-judgmental way (Baer et al., 2006, p. 27; as cited in Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). It comprises several characteristics such as a receptive sensory awareness and affirmation of the individual's emotions, thoughts, intentions, and outside influences in a preconceptual state. The individual is aware of what is happening without evaluating, analyzing, or reflecting and focuses on the moment-to-moment experiences without a future goal. Mindfulness is an inherent human capacity that varies from person and situation (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). Highly experienced mindfulness-based meditation teachers consider the act to include a deliberate intent to pay attention to and evaluate the moment-to-moment experience and be aware of the necessity of mindfulness training as a gradual acquisition. The practice should be acknowledged as distinct from everyday modes of consciousness and incorporate attitudes of openness, acceptance, kindness, curiosity, and patience (Grossman 2011).

Mindfulness has expanded into several categories, which have evolved. McCaw (2020) conducted research about mindfulness in education, which divided mindfulness into two categories, thick and thin. Thin mindfulness relates to the psychological aspect, considered an ethically neutral practice with the intent of individual self-improvement. It is regarded as an inherent human trait that can be improved over time. With an emphasis on the individual, its practice is used as a tool to support desired psychological features and enhance the individual. Thick mindfulness is conceived in ontological terms, and its practice is considered an integral

part of the soteriological pathway. It leads one to a philosophical analysis of human existence, the idea of impermanence, life consisting of satisfactoriness, and the view that nothing has an essential, abiding essence (McCaw, 2020). While thick mindfulness plays a significant role in mindfulness, when referring to mindfulness, we will be focusing on the idea of thin mindfulness, its modern philosophies, and its benefits to the individual's psychological, emotional, and physical well-being.

## **Hobbies**

Much like mindfulness, the term hobby could mean different things depending upon who is asked and in what context it is used. Beginning with a dictionary definition, a hobby is a pursuit outside one's occupation, regularly engaged in during one's leisure time for relaxation or pleasure (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Although not all activities done during leisure time are hobbies. Because of this, research conducted about leisure has further defined hobbies as "an immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity" (Stebbins, 1997 as cited in Harari, D. 2019, p. 5). Harari's research about hobbies and their effects on employee's lives looked at several definitions of hobbies (2019). More intense or extreme activities, such as skiing or long-distance running, were labeled as serious leisure (Harari, 2019). Harari incorporated the ideas of hobbies throughout multiple definitions and conceptualized a hobby as an activity done regularly outside of one's work or family role that is planned, voluntary, and intended to be gratifying (2019). This research attempts to incorporate mindfulness and hobbies; the study will be focusing on hobbies that give the participant the ability to practice mindfulness while engaging in their hobby of choice.

## **Meditative Hobbies**

With society promoting productivity and efficient use of time, individuals have been trained to keep “doing” something. The act of sitting still and meditating is a lot to ask. Rad’s (2019) article on meditative hobbies explores the hobby of knitting and its relation to meditation, in which she brings forth the idea of active rest. Active rest is built on the idea that the body requires time to recover after an intense workout; however, the body needs to keep moving the muscles and joints to prevent stiffness (Rad, 2019). Rad argues that the brain falls under these requirements as well (2019). She relates an intense workout of the body to a mentally taxing job on the brain, such as studying for an exam. Rad considers meditative hobbies as those that occupy your hands or feet just enough to allow your brain to be quiet and focus on a simple, repetitive, and soothing task, such as knitting, walking, gardening, quilting, or model kit building (2019). Such hobbies are known to have profound psychological benefits in the form of life-long personal development. Activities that combine mental activity and skill into a craft-related hobby have been shown to improve cognitive performance and neural efficiency (McDonough et al., 2015; Park et al., 2014, as cited in Adams-Price & Morse, 2018).

Šiftová (2020) brought to light an activity that is said to be both a hobby and a form of meditation. Šiftová’s study focused on investigating foraging in Central and Eastern Europe and what motivates the practice among its population. Foraging is defined as “the extraction of wild resources from a natural environment” (Love & Jones 2001, p. 107, as cited in Šiftová. 2020). There are various motivations for foraging, such as gathering resources. One might be motivated to forage for personal use. The gathering may be for craft materials or ingredients for certain meals. Additionally, some foragers may gather materials or food to be sold for profit.



When interviewing foragers, Šiftová asked about their motivations for doing so; it was revealed that the most frequent answer was not for what was gathered; instead, it was the physical exercise, relaxation, and fresh air. “The most important thing is that I take a walk. It is almost a passion; it is my passion” (Šiftová, 2020, p.318). The study revealed that of the interviewees, the third most important reason for mushrooming (foraging) was not for profit or recourses, but for “relaxation or as a hobby,” and interviewees mentioned being in almost a meditative state (Šiftová, 2020, p.318). “I often search for silence and positive energy in the forest...” (Šiftová, 2020, p.318). “It is a Czech sport, mushrooming every day, it is a hobby” (Šiftová, 2020, p.318). Foraging has a myriad of diverse motivations and connotations far from mere economic ones. However, one motivation for foraging is clearly dominant – to walk outside, in the forest, in the fresh air, in the silence of the forests (Šiftová, 2020).

### Chapter 3: Methods

The research performed is qualitative in its nature. I sought to understand the evolving definitions of meditation, mindfulness, and hobbies. In doing so, I researched scholarly articles, dissertations, popular news, and blog sites on meditation and hobbies in search of a broader understanding of the topic. Through simple googles searches, I was able to find a variety of news and blog sites. Peer-reviewed scholarly articles, journals, and dissertations were found through my college library and Credo Reference search engines. Sources found were written and published from 2006 to 2021. I only included research that was relevant to hobbies or meditation that helped give further insight into the two. I compared the articles of study for any overlapping themes or opposing views.

The research questions I chose to explore are as follows.

**RQ#1:** What is mindfulness?

**RQ#2:** What is a hobby?

**RQ#3:** Do the methods of practicing mindfulness and hobbies overlap, if so, what are the common benefits received?

**RQ#4:** Can engaging in certain hobbies be considered a form of mindfulness?

The initial search terms were simple. They consisted of *hobbies*, *meditation*, and *mindfulness*. When sufficient research was done with the initial search terms, more specific terms were used to further explore certain aspects of the study. Those terms consisted of *hobbies and long-term health*, *importance of breaks during work*, *meditation through occupation*, *crafts as hobbies*, *impact of mediation on overworked individuals*, *hobbies*, *and their impact on efficiency during work*, *research as a hobby*, *active rest*, *serious hobbies*, *thick mindfulness*, *and thin mindfulness*.

My research was limited in the amount of time I was given to finish the assignment. The paper was completed over a summer semester at SUNY Purchase College. During the time given to work on the assignment, some restrictions related to Covid-19 were in effect, limiting the ability to perform interviews and use the library on campus.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **RQ#1:** *What is mindfulness?*

The research performed on mindfulness elaborated on the most common misconception of what mindfulness is. Rather than just a phrase used for one that is mindful of their day-to-day lives and their current situation, mindfulness is a much broader practice. Those who wish to experience personal growth, including psychological and physiological benefits, can practice the more broadly used form of mindfulness which is referred to as Thin Mindfulness (McCaw, 2020). Thin mindfulness was described as a way to be more aware of one's surroundings and thoughts, and emotions. Similar themes ran through the journals researched on the topic. They agreed that mindfulness is a personal practice done by individuals with the intent of bettering themselves in a solitary way. Openness, kindness, patience, and acceptance were all important components of living a mindful life.

When referring to the latter half of McCaw's (2020) research, we see a much different side to the practice of thick mindfulness. Thick mindfulness is a more profound, more philosophical, and not necessarily "happy" practice. After reading into thick mindfulness, I believe it to be less about the benefits to one's psychological health, sometimes to the contrary. Instead, it has the individual ponder their place in the world, the meaning of life or their lives, and strive for a deeper understanding of the inevitable end to all things and how that should be interpreted. It could be further interpreted as a deep philosophical crisis since many of the questions being asked are so far unanswerable. On the other hand, everyday mindfulness, or thin mindfulness, asks questions that help the individual interpret their own lives, society, and interactions with them.

Considering all the ingredients that mindfulness consists of, there is a very simple yet highly important, conclusion that can be drawn. Mindfulness is done by the individual, for the individual. It is a solitary practice that most strive to perform without effort for their benefit. The end goal is to be able to live your day-to-day life with an underlying level of mindfulness woven into it. The critical aspect I believe we can draw from this is the ability to perform this task effortlessly as a form of self-help.

**RQ#2:** *What is a hobby?*

The themes and characteristics of hobbies were very similar to those of mindfulness and meditation when researching the two. Hobbies are also a pursuit of personal betterment; however, they mainly focus on the hobby itself. The individual finds a hobby that they find rewarding, whether it is something constructive or repetitive, and they practice or perform that hobby as a pleasurable activity. These are usually done during leisure time and are a form of relaxation, usually done relatively short amounts of time, but some can go on for longer. Once a hobby becomes a more strenuous activity is when it is said to become “serious leisure” (Harari, 2019).

The term “Hobbies” is easy to define and comprehend. On the other hand, a “Hobby” can be anything. Because of what constitutes a hobby is extremely broad and subjective, we can see that a hobby is something defined by the individual. For example, Individual A spends their weekdays working at a library sorting returned books and putting them back on the shelves. They read the synopsis of every book returned and kept a list to see if they would like to read the book themselves in their free time. On the weekends, they check out said books and read them on their time off. This individuals’ hobby is reading books that have been returned to the library they work at and feel a sense of accomplishment for completing the book and a better understanding

of their customer's interests. Individual B works for an insurance company where they read insurance claims 8 hours a day. They read all day, then sort the claims and then index them properly in their system. On the weekends, the last thing the individual wants to do is read. Their hobby is going for long hikes and listening to the sounds of nature, devoid of any computer system or claims to read. They have time to themselves, perform some physical activity, and have time to themselves when they can think about anything they like. Individual B feels a sense of accomplishment and peace. Individuals A and B have two completely different hobbies; however, they are getting the same results regardless of what that hobby is. Individual B would not enjoy the hobby Individual A performs on the weekend because the hobby is so closely related to what they do for a living; it can be seen as work and in no way pleasurable. As we can see, a hobby is subjective. One person's hobby is another's chore. A hobby is anything the individual themselves find pleasurable to do in their free time.

**RQ#3:** *Do the methods of practicing mindfulness and hobbies overlap, if so, what are the common benefits received?*

The research shows various similarities in both the execution and benefits received from those who practice mindfulness and those who engage in certain hobbies. A characteristic that the two shares are that a single person performs them. This is done for the individual. Both are performed with a low level of intensity to get a pleasurable and positive outcome. Most hobbies tend to have simple repetitive tasks with a low level of difficulty. Mindfulness is practiced by entering a mindful state of mind as much as possible until it becomes second nature. After performing these tasks over a long period of time, it is said to be performed through muscle memory. Mindfulness is practiced with the goal of obtaining the same effect, to practice until it is performed with little to no effort. Once the individual is occupied with their hobby of choice and they have reached the point of performing it through muscle memory and with little effort, is

when they can begin to obtain the benefits of mindfulness. They are occupied physically but have the room to be mindful of themselves, emotions, mood, likes and dislikes, desires, and overall awareness. It is safe to say the methods used to practice mindfulness or the hobby one indulges in are not the end goal; it is the benefits after the practice has become second nature. For example, those who practice knitting focus entirely on knitting; they engage in a repetitive task and give themselves time to think, which is something we are being offered less and less of in our society. The fact that our lives are filled with “to-do” lists and our days are becoming brimming with these tasks, we are left with little time for ourselves. As a result, our minds and bodies grow accustomed to doing something constructive. When an individual does have free time, the habit of “doing something” can be filled with a simple hobby, leaving the mind to finally think for itself without interference from the outside world.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

During the time of this research, there were times when I wished to expand upon the study. Conducting a qualitative study, I was relying on the written word and studies in the past. Being done through much of the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly through online databases consisting of peer-reviewed literature, I feel in retrospect the desire for more information based on quantitative research. The pandemic led to many being isolated from the outside world for months at a time, with little interaction with others face to face, relying mostly on technology to see and hear their loved ones. Isolating an individual has been shown to have negative effects both physically and psychologically. I believe many turned to their passions, or hobbies, in this time to keep themselves occupied as well as physically and emotionally healthy. If knowing ahead of time that this pandemic was to occur, I believe it would be a fitting environment for an individual to produce highly valuable quantitative research data on the benefits of their hobbies or meditation. A future study could range from high volume questionnaires sent to those knowing they will be isolated for an extended period and willing to participate in samples of blood to test their dopamine, serotonin, and other indicators of an individual's overall physical health. A quantitative study may lead to a better understanding of the effects associated with the topic of mindfulness and hobbies.

While the research itself was taxing, I was left gratified. Going into this project with experience with practicing a hobby, I was enthusiastic towards learning if that were the case for others. After extensive research, I now know that others view hobbies as a form of self-help as well. I feel confident that more extensive research can lead to a definitive answer that hobbies and meditation are interchangeable and both are serious forms of self-help.



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