

The Relevance of Anxiety and Mindfulness in Joe Eurell's *The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness*

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Abstract

Article History:

Received : 14/02/2024

Accepted : 10/07/2024

Published : 16/07/2024

Keywords:

Anxiety,

Joe Eurell,

Mindfulness,

Sigmund Freud,

The Shooter's Moment of

Mindfulness

This paper exposes anxiety and its coping mechanism towards mindfulness in Joe Eurell's flash fiction entitled *The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness*. This paper employs qualitative method with closed reading as data collection technique and content analysis as data analysis technique. Through Freud's paradigm of reality anxiety, the story is analyzed to explore the protagonist's disturbances of mood, as well as of thinking, behavior, and physiological activities. The main character's experiences in combat scenarios highlights how the protagonist's mindfulness moments function as a temporary situation from the anxieties rooted in external dangers, unconscious conflicts, and moral dilemmas. In conclusion, anxiety is always temporary while mindfulness remains forever. Psychological turmoil could always be coped up with ideas and practices of prolonged mindfulness.

Kata Kunci:

Joe Eurell,

Kecemasan,

Mindfulness,

Sigmund Freud,

The Shooter's Moment of

Mindfulness

Abstrak

Tulisan ini memaparkan persoalan kecemasan dan *mindfulness* dalam karya Joe Eurell berjudul *The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness*. Tulisan ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan metode menyimak sebagai teknik pengumpulan data dan analisis konten sebagai teknik analisis data. Melalui pemahaman Freud tentang kecemasan, cerita ini dianalisis untuk mengeksplorasi gangguan tindakan dan pemikiran protagonis. Pengalaman kecemasan karakter utama menyoroti bagaimana *mindfulness* berfungsi sebagai upaya mengatasi bahaya eksternal, konflik tak sadar, dan dilema moral. Kesimpulannya, kecemasan selalu bersifat sementara sedangkan *mindfulness* cenderung lebih permanen. Gejala psikologis selalu dapat diatasi dengan gagasan dan praktik *mindfulness* yang dipraktikkan terus-menerus.

INTRODUCTION

The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness is a flash fiction written by Joe Eurell. The story revolves around an unnamed protagonist who is described as a professional shooter. Throughout the story, the protagonist describes the transformative moments he experienced during his career (Eurell, 2021). The story explores the concept of mindfulness, in which the shooter becomes extremely aware of his surroundings, thoughts, and actions and becomes anxious. This increased awareness happens at a critical moment of decision-making. The protagonist explains how time slows down when someone pays attention to details that she/he does not normally notice before (Eurell, 2021; Hill, et al., 2012). In this moment of mindfulness, the shooter realizes the weight and importance of his actions. He must struggle with the moral implications of the role and the possible consequences of further decisions. This introspection causes the protagonist to question his work and its impact on the world that he currently lives in (Eurell, 2021; Hill, et al., 2012).

This flash fiction explores philosophical themes surrounding anxiety, responsibility, and self-awareness. This story summarizes a transformative moment that causes the shooter to reconsider his intentions and question the morality of the decisions. There is a big chance that the questions he asked is related to his own psychological trauma in having experience of seeing any victim he has shot before. One main idea to deal with anxiety is mindfulness to help people see more clearly, respond more effectively, and ultimately make wiser choices (Hill, et al., 2012; Shapiro, 2020). It can help manage anxiety by encouraging awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. By developing mindfulness skills, people can learn to observe their anxious thoughts and feelings without getting lost in them or reacting impulsively. The techniques are done consciously but will make peace unconsciously as well (Hill, et al., 2012; Shapiro, 2020).

Anxiety itself manifests itself as a heightened emotion characterized by intense nervousness, tension, and a sense of approaching danger or fear (Hill, et al., 2012; Jaiswal, et al., 2019; Shapiro, 2020). The story suggests that the shooter

experiences anxiety in a difficult situation, likely due to the solidity of the situation and the possible consequences of the actions. From that background, this article would like to answer the question of how mindfulness copes up with anxiety in *The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness*? This paper indicates the concept of mindfulness can play a vital role in helping the shooter cope with anxiety by fostering a state of present moment awareness and allowing the individual to concentrate on their immediate surroundings while still maintaining their feelings.

METHOD

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between Joe Eurell's *The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness* and anxiety by Sigmund Freud alongside literary concepts and psychological ideas. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data collection and analysis include obtaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in reference lists. The research data comes from both Joe Eurell's flash fiction and Freud's arguments. Each of them is read, then, broken down into its every particular element. The discourses of the flash fiction are mainly included to pinpoint significance of superiority complex through the premises and logics used in Freud's ideas. The following analyses, then, include how the story illustrates sincerity. Here, Joe Eurell's flash fiction is the object while Freud's idea is a tool to analyze.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Anxious Attention and Prolonged Question of a Shooter

Mindfulness and anxiety are closely related to each other either at state or trait levels. Those are often linked through the character's internal anxious struggle and the act of captivation in mindfulness (Jaiswal, et al., 2019;

Listyaningsih, et al., 2022). The correlations are also seen in Eurell's flash fiction with anxiety and mindfulness reflected in the data as follows:

"You thumb the safety, taking a deep breath to anchor you." (Eurell, 2021)

This quote is about anxiety often leaves individuals feeling overwhelmed and on edge, as if they are constantly on the lookout for potential threats. In such moments, taking a deep breath can be a powerful tool to anchor oneself and find a moment of calm (Eurell, 2021). The act of "thumbing the safety" suggests a metaphorical gesture of preparing oneself for potential anxiety triggering situations. It symbolizes the conscious decision to engage in a moment of mindfulness, to pause and take control over one's emotions before reacting (Jaiswal, et al., 2019; Listyaningsih, et al., 2022). The shooter knows that he is anxious, but he has to remain calm. This situation does not get any better at all since he further questions anything more.

"Inhale, hold and release." (Eurell, 2021)

By doing so, the quote refers to a breathing exercise commonly used in mindfulness practices. This technique involves taking a slow and deliberate breath in, holding it briefly, and then exhaling slowly. Focusing on this breath serves as an anchor that redirects attention away from anxious thoughts and towards the present moment (Eurell, 2021). The shooter understands that his decision to shoot is never good from any perspective. There is no single kindness, but evil, in his triggering thumb. Somehow, he has to do it.

"Shocked when the stubble grew out gray, despite your Daddy's being coal-black when they buried him, the same color as his lungs after a lifetime of digging for it." (Eurell, 2021)

The mention of being "shocked" when the stubble grew out gray signifies a sense of surprise or unease. This unexpected change in physical appearance, specifically the color of the character's stubble turning gray, raises anxiety or discomfort (Eurell, 2021). It hints at the character's awareness of own aging or mortality, sparking reflective thoughts on the passage of time and the nature of life. His anxiety pushes him to suggest a moment of introspection and self-observation, possibly touching upon mortal life and the implications of time

passing (Bouchard & Thériault, 2003; Aren & Hamamci, 2024). It encourages the character to reflect on mortality, legacy, and the temporal nature of life. This is when mindfulness slowly flourishes as he engages in self-reflection and heightened awareness of other's mortality.

“Mindfulness is what the doctor called it, the sessions they forced upon you along with your discharge.” (Eurell, 2021)

The quotation says that the character has likely experienced a challenging and intense situation that led him to be under psychiatric care. His doctor pushes him to mind his thoughts as the practice of mindfulness. Anxiety often plays a significant role in mental health conditions, and in this case, the individual must see mindfulness as a therapeutic approach aimed at managing anxiety and promoting mental well-being (Bouchard & Thériault, 2003; Aren & Hamamci, 2024). The quotation may indicate that the shooter really comes to the doctor or he just heard it from somewhere. Either way, he knows that being anxious is not right and he needs to adapt mindfulness in his further thoughts.

“You block out all other thoughts, especially the one that buzzes through your head louder than the tinnitus.” (Eurell, 2021)

This quote prolongs the idea of the presence of an overwhelming and persistent thought that contributes to increased anxiety. The comparison to the volume of tinnitus indicates that this thought is especially intrusive and prominent (Eurell, 2021). It highlights the character's preoccupation with a particular anxious thought, which may appear from the internal conflict he experiences in the story. The quotation also signifies the character's effort to engage in mindfulness by intentionally redirecting attention and focusing on the present moment (Bouchard & Thériault, 2003; Aren & Hamamci, 2024). He needs to block other thoughts to observe his own thoughts without becoming overwhelmed by them. By doing so, the character is creating a temporary resting from the anxious mental state and embracing the practice of mindfulness as a coping strategy.

“... whether you can take a life when your wages come in a brown paper bag and not with a 401k.” (Eurell, 2021)

The quotation above refers to the character's internal struggle regarding his ability to take a life. The mention of wages coming in a brown paper bag suggests a sense of financial instability that contributes to the character's anxiety. He wants the money but he hesitates to pull the trigger. The mention of a 401k in this quote is used as a metaphorical contrast to the character's situation (Eurell, 2021). A 401k is a retirement savings plan offered by many employers in the United States that represents a level of financial stability, security, and long-term planning. By aligning the character's wages coming in a brown paper bag versus having a 401k, the quote underscores the character's precarious circumstances and potentially adds to the sense of anxiety and uncertainty.

“The shot will send the vehicle down the embankment towards them and their death somehow upsets you more, despite the mark's life being no less precious in the eyes of your Lord and Saviour.” (Eurell, 2021)

The quote describes a critical moment where the individual is faced with the decision of taking a shot. This shot will result in the vehicle turning down an embankment and potentially causing the occupants' death (Eurell, 2021). The phrase “death somehow upsets you more” suggests that the potential loss of life affects the individual on an emotional level. It highlights the internal conflict and chaos he experiences, despite the knowledge that all lives are equally precious in the eyes of “Lord and Saviour.” This internal struggle stems from a clash of personal values, moral beliefs, or ethical considerations (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021).

In terms of anxiety, Eurell's story is thick with a portrayal of the weight and stress of making difficult decisions with moral implications. It illustrates the emotional burden and the chaos that contradict compassionate nature. Mindfulness can provide a space for self-reflection, allowing individuals to examine their emotions, values, and responses to morally challenging circumstances (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021). It is not sure whether

the shooter pulled the trigger or not, but what is exact is his hesitant feeling that finally comes to surface after he killed many people before.

Mindfulness as Psychological Traits of Well-Being

The term mindfulness is used to describe practices as well as a dispositional trait (Baer et al., 2019). It is a general tendency to pay attention to open, non-judgmental, curious, and objective perspectives of all thoughts, feelings, and sensations (Crane et al., 2017). The idea of mindfulness is quite broad since it covers both ideas of clinical and everyday psychology. It goes beyond clinical symptom reduction and toward positive human functioning and flourishing (Zadok-Gurman et al., 2021; Listyaningsih, et al., 2022). Then, mindfulness stands in stark contrast with common daily experience, as both a skill and a practice; the practice of mindfulness begets the skill of staying mindful. The stronger one's ability to adopt a mindful state throughout the perpetual ups and downs of life, the less suffering one will experience (Crane, 2017; Hofmann & Gomez, 2017).

Sigmund Freud exposes that the basic anxiety that human beings face is reality anxiety. It is the fundamental of anxiety in which there is such a threat indicated there. It also highlights the presence of internal conflicts within the unconscious mind (Sutton, 2022; Annasai, et al., 2023). The idea of this anxiety is quite in vain. On one hand, this anxiety is very common since people may face any threat or even pain based on their everyday occasions. People get anxious every time and the mechanism to defend the self is quite usual as well. However, on the other hand, the anxiety could also be more severe regarding any reality that someone faces (Sutton, 2022; Annasai, et al., 2023). Not everyone may get easily anxious towards an event, but when someone feels it then it could be really traumatic. It is like a dynamite being kept in a hot box; it may blow up anytime waiting for any trigger to come with.

Realistic anxiety involves actual threats to physical safety as well. It is similar to fear, in that there is a real and external object that could harm people, but it differs from fear in that people may not be aware of a specific danger

(Sutton, 2022; Annasai, et al., 2023). Freud's theory of reality anxiety emphasizes the fear of concrete and genuine external threats. Moreover, Freud identified defense mechanisms as strategies to manage anxiety stemming from these internal conflicts. Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings (Sutton, 2022; Annasai, et al., 2023). The suggestion of mindfulness offers a glimpse of the transformative power of being fully present and self-aware, aligning with Freud's emphasis on the significance of raising unconscious conflicts to conscious recognition.

Through the intertwinement between reality anxiety and mindfulness, some important aspects must be underlined. The first one is that mindfulness is not part of the defense mechanism. It is not an idea to cope up with any fear or threat. Mindfulness is not a temporary tool to escape from reality (Listyaningsih, et al., 2022; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). It is about facing reality bravely by indicating a total conscious mind towards any event. The second one is that mindfulness may cope up with anxiety, but it is always bigger than any threat. Mindfulness stays inside someone's mind and self. It brings prolonged calm that will pay attention to anything that may happen. The third one is that mindfulness is not something that could be totally clinical at all. It relies on psychological understanding of self (Listyaningsih, et al., 2022; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). the self could only understand her/himself by any matter. No one could understand self besides that particular person.

Intertwinement of Reality Anxiety and Mindfulness

The flash fiction of *Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness* combines the characteristics of the genre with a nuanced exploration of the relation between anxiety and mindfulness (Eurell, 2021). Through its briefness, vivid imagery, and emotional depth, the story takes the complex interaction between these two concepts. The brief format enables the story to focus on a specific moment or experience, screening the essence of the characters' emotions and thoughts into a powerful narrative that is sustainable. The vivid imagery attached throughout the

story contributes to its impact and connection to anxiety and mindfulness. Through carefully chosen words and descriptions, the author brings to life the heightened sensory experiences that often accompany anxiety (Eurell, 2021). These generated descriptions bring into the characters' minds, allowing them to empathize with the intensity of emotions related with anxiety.

The exploration of anxiety in relation to mindfulness is a central aspect of this fiction. The story suggests a moment of introspection and self-awareness for the shooter, where the practice of mindfulness seems to show up within the chaotic situation. By exposing this moment, the story highlights that mindfulness is a powerful tool for managing anxiety (Allen, et al., 2021; Kumar, 2023). The flash fiction correlates with Freud's theory of anxiety and mindfulness through the portrayal of the character's internal struggle in the face of potential danger. Freud's theory suggests that individuals respond to external threats with a visceral reaction, potentially leading to a heightened state of vigilance known as reality anxiety (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021).

In the story, the character's potential experience of anxiety or perceived threat aligns with Freud's ideas about how individuals respond to reality. Additionally, the integration of mindfulness within the narrative implies an intentional effort to ground oneself and regulate emotions, resonating with Freud's emphasis on conscious and unconscious mental processes in coping with anxiety (Bodhi, 2011; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). The portrayal of the character's internal struggle and the potential use of mindfulness within the narrative can also resonate with Freud's conceptualization of defense mechanisms as adaptive processes that help individuals manage anxiety and cope with threatening stimuli. By recognizing the potential impact of anxiety and the application of mindfulness techniques in a challenging scenario, the story reflects connections with Freud's theories and their relationship to coping strategies and emotional regulation (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021). These connections also provide insight into the complexities of human response to threat and the potential role of mindfulness in addressing anxiety-inducing situations as outlined by Freud's theories.

Mindfulness, as portrayed in the story, refers to the act of being fully present in the current moment and aware of one's thoughts, emotions, and sensations without judgment. Mindfulness allows experience to flow into the present moment and recognize reality as it is (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021). He lives this experience, embraces it, and stays in it without pretending to avoid it. The shooter's brief release from anxiety and intrusive thoughts suggests that a moment of mindfulness can bring about a temporary sense of calm in the middle of distress. This connection underlines the potential benefits of mindfulness as a tool for individuals facing anxiety by offering a means of grounding oneself and finding mental clarity (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021). The story captures the intense emotions associated with anxiety through its brief, potent narrative. In just a few paragraphs, Eurell vividly portrays the shooter's inner turmoil and the overwhelming nature of anxiety, allowing readers to empathize with the character's distress. This emotional depth enables the audience to viscerally connect with the experience of anxiety as it unfolds in the story.

In parallel, the narrative also explores the concept of mindfulness through a moment of introspection and self-awareness experienced by the shooter. This momentary pause amidst chaos suggests the potential for mindfulness to offer temporary relief from anxiety's grip (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021). By demonstrating a brief shift towards mindfulness, the story hints at the transformative power of being fully present and self-aware, offering a glimpse of respite from the overwhelming nature of anxiety. Furthermore, the flash fiction also provides a relatable portrayal of the internal struggles associated with anxiety, while also offering a representation of how mindfulness can provide a sense of calm within the storm of anxiety (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021). This makes the story an accessible and thought-provoking exploration of the intersection between anxiety and the potential for mindfulness to offer moments of solace and clarity.

By practicing mindfulness, the shooter can ground himself, regulate breathing, and concentrate attention on the present situation, potentially reducing

anxiety and encouraging a clearer, calmer state of mind. Under intense pressure, he is able to make more informed and less impulsive decisions (Phillips, et al., 2012). The shooter's potential moment of mindfulness can be seen as a subtle instance of self-awareness, representing a brief respite from the grip of anxiety. This aligns with Freud's idea that bringing unconscious conflicts to conscious awareness can provide relief from anxiety (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021).

Mindfulness acts as a coping mechanism by helping individuals focus on the present moment, redirecting their attention away from anxious thoughts and worries about the future (Baer, et al., 2019; Sarmi, et al., 2024). This practice teaches people to acknowledge their feelings and thoughts without judgment, allowing for a greater sense of control and self-awareness. By grounding individuals in the present, mindfulness can prevent the increase of anxiety and promote a calmer state of mind. Engaging in mindfulness activities like deep breathing, like what the shooter does, can also trigger the body's relaxation response, leading to a reduction in physiological and psychological stress associated with anxiety (Baer, et al., 2019; Sarmi, et al., 2024). This form of self-care helps individuals foster a more compassionate and accepting attitude towards their own emotions and experiences, promoting emotional well-being and resilience. Through consistent practice, mindfulness can empower individuals to challenge negative thought patterns, ultimately leading to a more positive and adaptive approach to managing anxiety (Freud, 1937; Zadok-Gurman, et al., 2021).

The concept of feeling overwhelmed and on edge directly in quote "*You thumb the safety, taking a deep breath to anchor you.*" (Eurell, 2021) relates to the experience of anxiety. In the given context, the action of thumbing the safety and taking a deep breath signifies a state of heightened alertness, indicating an underlying sense of anxiety and the need to be prepared for potential threats (Baer, et al., 2019; Sarmi, et al., 2024). This aligns with the idea that anxiety often leaves individuals feeling overwhelmed and on edge, as they may constantly perceive potential dangers in their surroundings, leading to a persistent state of

alertness and readiness. The combination of the character's actions and the explanation emphasizes the obvious impact of anxiety, illustrating how it comes through the individual's experience and influences their behaviors in the narrative.

In the quote of *"You block out all other thoughts, especially the one that buzzes through your head louder than the tinnitus"* (Eurell, 2021), it captures the concept of mindfulness in the middle of heightened awareness, where the character intentionally focused their attention, blocking out distracting thoughts to achieve a heightened state of concentration. This relates to the practice of mindfulness, where individuals intentionally bring their awareness to the present moment, often leading to a sense of calm and focus amid potential anxiety or stress (Graff & Lackner, 2022; Smith, et al., 2023). In daily life, this kind of intentional focus and blocking out of distracting thoughts can be applied when the individuals are attempting to manage anxiety or navigate stressful situations. By consciously directing attention away from intrusive thoughts and towards the present moment, individuals may process a sense of control and calm, aligning with the principles of mindfulness and potentially help in anxiety management (Graff & Lackner, 2022; Smith, et al., 2023).

Freud's theory of anxiety is also reflected in this instance, as intentional focus and blocking out of distressing thoughts can contribute to a sense of mental regulation and resilience in the face of potential anxiety-provoking stimuli (Graff & Lackner, 2022; Smith, et al., 2023). Mindfulness serves as a conscious choice to confront anxiety-triggering situations, representing a deliberate decision to engage in a moment of self-awareness and clarity. In this context, it symbolizes the active decision to pause and assert control over one's emotional response before reacting to the anxiety-provoking stimuli. This deliberate pause from the shooter emphasizes the individual's agency in navigating their emotional responses, indicating a proactive and intentional approach to managing anxiety-triggering experiences (Eurell, 2021; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). By choosing mindfulness in these moments, the individual is asserting their capacity to respond thoughtfully to anxiety, rather than reacting impulsively. This intentional practice illustrates the potential for mindfulness to serve as a powerful tool for managing

anxiety, allowing individuals to foster a sense of stability and control amidst challenging circumstances (Eurell, 2021; Shapiro, 2020).

Then, the quote “*mindfulness is what the doctor called it*” (Eurell, 2021) suggests that the character has been introduced to mindfulness as a therapeutic practice. Mindfulness-based therapies use relaxation and awareness exercises to help focus on the present moment (Graff & Lackner, 2022; Smith, et al., 2023). The correlation with anxiety and mindfulness in daily life is significant as mindfulness can serve as a valuable tool for managing anxiety. By processing present-moment awareness and acceptance, individuals can learn to observe their thoughts and emotions without being overwhelmed by them, potentially reducing the impact of anxiety and promoting a greater sense of calm and clarity in daily life (Shapiro, 2020; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). Integrating mindfulness practices into daily routines can lead to a heightened self-awareness, helping individuals recognize and address triggers of anxiety and contributing to improved mental well-being and resilience.

CONCLUSION

The Shooter's Moment of Mindfulness by Joe Eurell presents an affecting exploration of anxiety, mindfulness, and their intersection with reality. Through the lens of a shooter's thoughtful moment, the story digs into the depths of the human psyche, touching upon various psychological concepts such as self-awareness, Freud's theory of reality anxiety, coping mechanisms, and the role of mindfulness in managing anxiety. In the narrative, the shooter experiences a surge of anxiety, symbolizing the internal struggles and conflicts that plague individuals facing overwhelming circumstances. Then, in the story, the shooter's moment of mindfulness represents a crucial shift in consciousness, as he gets beyond his anxious state and adjusts to the present moment. This transformative experience highlights the intense impact of mindfulness in managing anxiety and fostering strength in the face of adversity. By grounding oneself in the present moment, individuals can release from catastrophic thinking, therefore reducing the grip of anxiety on their psyche. The flash fiction provides a thought-provoking

exploration of anxiety and mindfulness, illustrating the potential for strength and self-awareness even in the face of intense danger. The narrative underscores the transformative potential of mindfulness in managing anxiety, reflecting the complexities of the human psyche and the power of present moment awareness in navigating anxiety-inducing situations.

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