

Mindful Lives: A Mindful Inquiry Approach To Understanding
The Lived Experience Of Mindfulness Practices

by

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The Lived Experience of Mindfulness Practitioners: A Mindful Inquiry approach to understanding the essence of mindfulness practices for enhancing wellness

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Abstract

Mindfulness-based interventions have been growing in popularity, and numerous quantitative studies have documented the effectiveness of such interventions in stress reduction and improving overall health and well-being. Relatively little research has been conducted to explore the lived experiences of individuals who practice mindfulness. The current research addressed the questions: (a) What is the lived experience of individuals who practice yoga and/or mindfulness for wellness, and (b) What is the role (if any) of shared experience (group practice) in mindfulness practices? Qualitative interviews were conducted with six females between 26-45 years of age. Findings in the areas of practitioners' experiences of mindfulness in formal practice, and the experience of mindfulness in relationships with the self, with others, and with the environment are discussed. Implications for research and counselling practice are discussed, including the potential role of mindfulness in enhancing relationships.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introducing the phenomenon

Mindfulness is a general term referring to a particular type of awareness that has been linked to states of positive well-being, and is cultivated through practice (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Practices include meditation, mindful movement, body awareness, mindful eating, walking meditation, and conscious breathing (Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness meditation is a traditional Buddhist practice that involves cultivating a particular quality of present-focussed awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a). Singh Khalsa and Stauth (2002) discuss mounting scientific evidence regarding the positive effects of mindfulness practices on mind-body physiology. Given the increasing evidence regarding the benefits of mindfulness practices in promoting mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, it is important for professional counsellors to understand the historical origins and modern applications of these practices as they are increasingly finding their way into the field as counselling interventions.

Yoga is a practice that has existed for over 2000 years and has traditionally been passed from teacher to student via oral transmission. Although the physical postures of yoga are most commonly practiced in the West for the benefits to physical health, there are actually many aspects to and types of yoga, combining meditation, ethics, life-style, body postures, diet, breath control, and intellectual analysis (Criswell & Patel, 2003; Walsh, 2004). The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali are the first written record of yoga teachings, and this traditional text remains the basis of many yoga teachings of today (Cope, 1999). Contemporary publications by master yogis exist, many being co-authored by academics or by psychotherapists who are also yoga teachers, making links between traditional

knowledge on the benefits of yoga and the findings of recent scientific studies (Cope, 1999; Rama, Ballantine, & Ajaya, 1976; Weintraub, 2004). Yoga is often referred to as a mindfulness practice in studies on the effects of mindfulness as a clinical intervention (Netz & Lidor, 2003). The practice of yoga postures along with attention to breath and conscious relaxation fosters mind-body connection, with mindful awareness being a main principle of practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

In mindful breathing exercises, one becomes especially aware of the breath entering and leaving the body and with asanas, the breath is linked with movement, so that there is synchronicity between various body systems. Prana means life-force, and breathing practices (pranayama) are intended to bring conscious awareness to one's essential life-force (Levine, 2000). The physical practice of yoga is intended as a moving meditation, where the breath is a constant tool to return to mindful awareness, an awareness that can be taken into daily living (Cope, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Awareness may be focused on the breath at times when one is experiencing difficult emotions, to foster or regain a feeling of grounding. The benefits of bringing awareness to the breath, through mindfulness practice, in promoting calmness and relaxation have been well documented (Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Walsh, 2004).

Mindfulness practices enhance awareness of the thought patterns that flow in the mind, as well as increasing awareness of sensations and tensions held in different parts of the body. Through these practices, one is able to observe the mind objectively, leading to increased self understanding, with the purpose being to calm thought patterns, so that one is able to 'be' more clearly (Levine, 2000). Awareness of tensions in the body allows one to consciously let go of these tensions, which may have been creating blockages,

preventing action and following through in other areas of life (Rama et al., 1976).

Continued scientific developments lend validity to traditional Eastern understandings of mind-body connection (Baer, 2003; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001).

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness practices (e.g., meditation and yoga) in promoting mental and physical wellness (Baer, 2003; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001) and the effects of yoga in improving physical health have been well documented for decades (Harrigan, 1990; Raub, 2002; Singh Khalsa & Stauth, 2002). While there is extensive literature and research from India on the psychology of yoga, there has been less research on the effects of yoga on mental and emotional wellness in North America (Slede & Pomerantz, 2001). It is also noted that such empirical investigations may miss some of the less easily quantified aspects of mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a). In providing qualitative descriptions of the experience of mindfulness practice, the current research addresses this gap in the literature.

Literature on mindfulness meditation and various yoga practices were drawn upon to give additional information about the effects of mindfulness practices. Integrating the literature on mindfulness and yoga is reasonable as yoga can be considered a mindfulness practice according to the operational definition proposed by Bishop et al. (2004). That is, yoga satisfies the two components of mindfulness, “self regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience” and “adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment [...] characterized by curiosity, openness and acceptance” (p. 232). Yoga is a practice that also fits with Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) definition of mindfulness, in that it involves “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in

the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p.4). In fact, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Kabat-Zinn as an intervention for individuals with chronic pain and illness, incorporates both yoga practice (postures and breathing) and meditation, making it impossible to separate the effects of meditation and yoga in the studies of MBSR.

By combining the practices of mindful breathing, mindful exercise, and meditation, mindfulness practices provide a holistic means for promoting mind-body health which challenges the traditional bio-medical model in which body and mind are treated as separate entities. Research regarding the integral nature of human functioning demonstrates the need for holistic health care practices that incorporate emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health (Luskin, 2004; McKee & Chappel, 1992). The current research provides new understandings of the benefits of these practices as experienced in the lives of practitioners.

Statement of the Problem & Purpose of the Study

While empirical evidence exists regarding the wellness benefits of mindfulness practices, the scholarly literature is lacking qualitative descriptions of the experience of mindfulness practices, including yoga, for individuals who practice regularly (e.g. an average of three times per week). This type of regular practice constitutes a lifestyle that is supportive of health, as benefits of practice increase with time (Slede & Pomerantz, 2001). Mindfulness-based practices are growing exponentially in popularity in North America yet relatively little is known about the lived experience of practitioners from an academic perspective (Baer, 2003; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001). This research addressed the questions: (a) What is the lived experience of individuals who practice yoga and/or

mindfulness for wellness, and (b) What is the role (if any) of shared experience (group practice) in mindfulness practices? The second part of the research question addresses the fact that many mindfulness programs are taught and practiced in groups.

Purposes for undertaking the current study are both personal and professional. As previously outlined, I have experienced the beneficial effects of mindfulness practices in my personal and professional life, and I wished to understand more about what makes these practices effective as counselling interventions and practices for enhancing well-being. As a researcher, I found myself gravitating towards the qualitative tradition as these methods of conducting research allow space for honouring the stories of individuals and provide rich data about the topic under investigation in ways that quantitative research cannot. It is hoped that telling the stories of diverse practitioners will increase understanding of how mindfulness practices are experienced and integrated into the life-worlds of those who practice.

Additionally, I wondered what impact shared experience has in the practice of mindfulness. Hanh (1991) feels that community is an essential component of mindfulness practice. One existing qualitative study using MBSR, which is delivered in group situations, found that group dynamics had influenced participant experiences (Cohen-Katz et al., 2005). Additionally, a qualitative inquiry into the therapeutic effects of a yoga ashram or residential yoga community cited lifestyle and social support as major components in facilitating change (Wilson, 1985). The current research explored the experiences of practitioners with regards to shared experience and group practice.

Books and articles written by individuals who are both yoga practitioners/teachers and scholars have been helpful resources in conducting this research. These are valuable

sources of qualitative descriptions of yoga and mindfulness practice by the foremost experts of the practice. However, these descriptions are largely absent from the scholarly literature. By interviewing a range of individuals that practice mindfulness, it is hoped that myths about the advanced level of practice needed to attain benefits will be dispelled and increased understanding about the qualitative dimensions of mindfulness will develop (Cope, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Because of the common historical and cultural roots of mindfulness practices, the overlapping of the various practices in the literature, and the fact that many practitioners of yoga also practice mindfulness meditations, both yoga practice (e.g. physical postures, breathing, and meditations) and mindfulness meditation are included in the current investigation (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a; Singh Khalsa & Stauth, 2002). In fact, a recent publication by a senior yoga teacher (Boccio, 2005) advocates for an understanding of yoga and mindfulness meditation as one integrated practice. Currently, however, the understanding of yoga in North America is mainly of the physical practice, while mindfulness meditation is most frequently associated with Buddhism (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a). It is hoped that approaching mindfulness practices in a holistic way will provide opportunities for understanding the integral nature of mindfulness, as the quality of mindfulness may be brought into any activity, and is ideally a way of engaging with the world (Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Overview of Thesis

The previous section represents the introduction to the research and the rationale for conducting the proposed qualitative study. The subsequent section consists of a

literature review which begins by sketching the historical background of yoga and mindfulness meditation practices. The current study is based on the fact that yoga and other mindfulness practices are ancient traditions with well documented holistic health benefits (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a; Walsh, 2004). Mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual benefits of mindfulness will be reviewed. Associated Eastern systems of psychology will be briefly discussed, and implications for counselling will be introduced.

An outline of the research methodology follows the literature review. Rationale for a Mindful Inquiry based, qualitative approach, specifically an interpretive phenomenology, is outlined. Entering assumptions are listed, and the process of inquiry, including selection of co-researchers, and data collection and analysis procedures are detailed. Ethical considerations are discussed, and letters of informed consent and certificate of ethical approval are included in appendices. Chapter four outlines the findings of the research, based on the coding of interview transcripts, which resulted in two main categories – Relationship with Practice, and Self in Relation. Discussion of findings and links to the literature follow, along with the researcher's reflections on the process of conducting this qualitative Mindful Inquiry.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

In the review of the literature the historical roots of yoga and mindfulness meditation practices will be examined. A description and definition of these practices will be provided. Literature documenting the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of mindfulness practices will be reviewed. Eastern systems of psychology will be briefly introduced and contrasted with traditional Western psychology. Finally, implications for counselling will be discussed.

Historical Context of Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness is a broad term that refers to a quality of intentional awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003b). Mindfulness practices include sitting meditation, and mindful movement (e.g., yoga, tai chi, and qi gong). The current research will focus on mindfulness meditation and mindful yoga practices. Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years within the diversity of Hindu traditions “to help individuals in attaining harmony and balance between the body and the mind to achieve the highest potential” (Criswell & Patel, 2003, p. 201). Mindfulness meditation is rooted in Buddhist teachings, often called the ‘heart’ of Buddhist practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The historical Buddha is understood to have studied yoga, which suggests a common root for the mindfulness practices to be examined in this review (Boccio, 2005). Contemporary Buddhist mindfulness practices include sitting meditation, walking meditation, conscious breathing, and mindful eating (Hanh, 1991).

Although the physical postures of yoga are most commonly practiced in the West, for the benefits to physical health, there are actually many aspects to, and types of yoga,

combining meditation, ethics, life-style, physical postures, diet, breath control, and intellectual analysis (Criswell & Patel, 2003; Walsh, 2004). Kabat-Zinn (2003a) notes that mindfulness, as a quality of attention, is not inherently tied to these spiritual roots, but rather is a universal human capacity. That being said, there is a spiritual component to the experience and practice of mindfulness for some practitioners (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998; Singh Khalsa & Stauth, 2002; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001).

The eight-limbed system of yoga, also called raja yoga, described in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali includes the asanas (physical postures) and pranayama (breathing exercises) that comprise all physical yoga practices (Feuerstein, 2003). In the *Yoga Sutras* these physical practices are intended to prepare the body for sitting meditation (Levine, 2000). The first two limbs of the *Yoga Sutras* are concerned with ethical training – the yamas (attitudes toward the world, or restraints), including non-violence (ahimsa), and truthfulness (satyam) and niyamas (observances, or attitudes toward oneself), including contentment (santosha), and self knowledge or study (svadyaya) (Levine, 2000). The yamas and niyamas are considered guidelines for spiritual growth (Criswell & Patel, 2003). The other four limbs comprise the mental training, or mindfulness meditation practice of yoga – withdrawal of the senses (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation/pure thought (dhyana), and self-actualization (samadhi).

In combination, the eight limbs of raja yoga form a holistic system for cultivating wellness in the individual. The last limb represents the culmination, or an ultimate goal of yoga practice. Through the physical and meditative practices of yoga one learns to be mindful, compassionate, and non-judgemental; a state of mind that may be carried into daily living, resulting in clarity, stability, wisdom, and freedom (Cope, 1999; Iyengar,

2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2003b). Criswell and Patel (2003) refer to the secondary goals of yoga, including peace of mind and heart; awareness of influence of the mind on the body and on one's environment; control of emotions; and physical health. Since the practice of yoga is so multifaceted, the aspects of the practice being referred to will be specified throughout the review.

Hatha yoga is a term often applied to the practice of physical postures (asanas) and breathing exercises (pranayama), although today there are many different styles of physical yoga practice, developed by various teachers of yoga. Other yogas, which do not depend on the physical practice, include jnana yoga, known as the mental or intellectual discipline of yoga; bhakti, the yoga of devotion or love; and karma, the yoga of action or service (Criswell & Patel, 2003). Feuerstein (2003) uses the analogy of a tree to describe the branching of yoga in many different directions, all rooted in the same core ideas.

The practice of mindfulness meditation is outlined in the teachings of the historical Buddha, and continues to be expanded by contemporary Buddhist teachers. The teachings of the Buddha constitute a "coherent phenomenological description of the nature of mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release" through training of the heart and mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a, p. 145). Mindfulness meditation differs from meditation which involves mantra repetition or visualization, in that it involves cultivating present awareness and insight through letting go of the past (which no longer exists), and the future (which does not yet exist), attending instead to what is actually happening in the here and now, without evaluating or judging (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In addition, one strives to observe the emotions and thoughts that arise in the present

moment without identifying or attaching to them, simply noticing what is happening in the here-and-now (Epstein, 1995; Kabat-Zinn, 2003b).

The experiential components of mindfulness, including the practice of physical postures with attention to breath, sitting meditation, and conscious relaxation, foster mindful awareness and mind-body connection (Baer, 2003). Awareness of thought patterns, of cognitive constructs, and of tensions and sensations in the body is developed through mindfulness practices (Walsh, 2004). In becoming able to observe the mind objectively, increased self-awareness develops – an internal witness to experience in the present moment (Levine, 2000). Awareness of tensions and sensations in the body, and somatic experiences of emotions, allows one to consciously release these tensions and relax, facilitating effectiveness in one's daily life (Cormier & Nurius, 2003). A review of the scientific evidence regarding the qualities and effectiveness of mindfulness in promoting health will be conducted in the subsequent section.

Mindfulness and Wellness

Problems of Specificity in the Literature

A difficulty in reviewing the literature on the effects of mindfulness meditation and yoga has been the lack of differentiation between these practices, and the citing of the benefits of meditation and 'yoga' together. Some studies examine the effects of meditation only (Davidson et al., 2003), while others only examine the effects of the physical practice of yoga 'stretching' (Ghoncheh & Smith, 2004) or pranayama (breathing) techniques only (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005). Other studies do not provide adequate definition of the intervention under investigation, which render the results

unclear, as does lack of specificity or quality of some of the studies (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001).

The majority of studies involve Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which combines the practices of yoga postures, breathing, and meditation in the mindfulness program, rendering the effects of each inseparable. However, researchers may also add elements to the MBSR intervention, such as a loving-kindness meditation, which is incorporated in research by Shapiro and co-researchers (Shapiro et al., 1998; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000; Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005), further complicating the findings of these studies. Part of the difficulty lies in the defining of mindfulness, meditation, and yoga for the purposes of a research study.

Qualities of Mindfulness

Defining mindfulness is a central concern in the literature, and much recent research has been focussed on this area. While there is the recognition of mindfulness as a quality with diverse benefits, attempts to operationally define this quality are difficult due to naturally occurring variations and an elusive quality attributed to the deceptive simplicity of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2004).

Kabat-Zinn (1990) defines the attentional and attitudinal qualities of 'non-doing' or 'just being' as including nonstriving, nonjudging, acceptance, patience, trust, openness, and letting go. These are comprised within his frequently used operational definition, or mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a). Kabat-Zinn (1990) also stresses that practice,

the continual cultivation of these qualities, is essential in order to nurture the ability to be mindful, and to experience the full power of mindfulness in daily life.

Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) expand on mindfulness' intentional qualities of attention, as defined by Kabat-Zinn, to include affective – 'heart qualities' – of gratitude, gentleness, generosity, empathy, and lovingkindness. This sense is captured in the following:

When utilizing mindfulness qualities, people focus attention on themselves in a nonjudgmental and gentle way, open to whatever they may find. This attention involves a stance of impartiality, letting go, and cultivating patience for whatever is present, a willingness to just listen to and accept in lovingkindness all the parts of one's whole.
(p.130)

The authors also term their conception of mindfulness as "intentional systemic mindfulness," defining both the 'how' of mindful attention, and the 'why' (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000). The 'why' qualities point to a larger contextual underpinning that incorporate multiple levels of intention. The authors use the example of how mindfulness practice for the purposes of decreasing blood pressure may become more expansive with this systemic awareness:

This in turn may lead to enlarging the intention, recognizing that the heart not only is a whole system but also is part of a larger system, the body. From there the conception of the body as a psychosomatic self may arise. The self may then be recognized as embedded within interpersonal relationships, family, and community, and in this way the

intention to heal interpersonal relationships is also added. That awareness may stimulate the further recognition that these relationships are part of a larger community (humankind), which in turn may create the intention to acknowledge the connectedness of all beings. Finally, the recognition may develop that this greater community is connected to the earth and that humans are interconnected and interdependent with all beings and with the earth itself. (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000, p.132)

While this type of experience will not fit for all mindfulness practitioners, an awareness of the multiple contexts of practitioners' lifeworlds, and the possible interpersonal and transpersonal dimensions of the experience of mindfulness practices is essential.

A proposed operational definition of mindfulness incorporates two components: the self-regulation of attention on present-moment experience and an orientation of openness and acceptance towards these experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). Brown and Ryan (2004) point to difficulties in operationalizing mindfulness, including a lack of clarity around the basic terms used to define this quality, and to some difficulties in Bishop et al.'s implication that mindfulness is primarily about attention to internal stimuli, which negates the enormous benefits of mindfulness in daily life. Additionally, focussed attention, *or* conscious awareness may be emphasized in mindfulness practice according to Bishop et al., which presents possibly contradictory forms (Brown & Ryan, 2004).

Hayes and Feldman (2004) draw on the concept of equanimity in describing a quality of emotional balance represented in mindfulness which involves neither avoidance of experience or the over engagement in experiences. The authors discuss the

applications of mindfulness as a promising therapeutic tool in cultivating an emotional balance based on awareness, acceptance, an ability to regulate mood, and a flexibility of thought.

Practitioners of mindfulness meditation and yoga describe other subjective dimensions to the nature to mindfulness practices, for example, the intention for many practitioners in carrying these qualities into everyday life and fostering mindful being and relating in the world (Farhi, 2004; Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Indeed, this intention is integral in traditional teachings of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, and the Eight Limbs of yoga (Levine, 2000). To separate the attentional qualities of mindfulness is to provide only a partial view of the nature of mindfulness practices for individuals who have taken up the path as a life practice.

Mindfulness-based Interventions

Mindfulness practices have become increasingly popular as therapeutic interventions and have been widely studied as techniques for reducing negative states and increasing positive states (Baer, 2003; Scherer-Dickson, 2004). Ramel, Goldin, Carmona and McQuaid (2004) observed the effectiveness of an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program in reducing rumination in a sample of individuals with a history of depression. Hayes and Feldman (2004) describe the implications of mindfulness in emotion regulation, as mindfulness helps to cultivate a middle ground between avoidance (e.g., distraction, cognitive distortion, and substance use) and over-engagement (e.g., rumination, obsession, and compulsive behaviour). Mindfulness “seems to represent an emotional balance that involves acceptance of internal

experiences, affective clarity, an ability to regulate one's emotions or moods, cognitive flexibility, and a healthy approach to problems" (Hayes & Feldman, 2004, p. 257).

Post-intervention levels of stress were significantly lower, and positive states of mind were enhanced in a group of individuals completing an 8-week MBSR program (Chang et al., 2004). Brown and Ryan (2003) describe the benefits of mindfulness in promoting self-awareness and positive emotional states, thereby positively impacting overall psychological well-being.

Shapiro et al. (1998) demonstrated the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based stress reduction program in reducing feelings of anxiety and depression, as well as increasing empathy and spiritual experiences for groups of medical and premedical students. This MBSR program incorporated affective dimensions through a loving-kindness meditation, and intentional-systemic elements as defined in the previous section. Qualitative examples of interpersonal and transpersonal dimensions to participants' experiences are attributed to this integrative intentional-systemic approach (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000). A further investigation was designed to examine the effects of MBSR for health care workers, specifically to test the effectiveness of MBSR in decreasing stress, job burnout, and psychological distress, while increasing overall life satisfaction and self-compassion in professionals currently working in the field (Shapiro et al., 2005). Decreases in negative states were reported, and trends point to potential benefits of mindfulness interventions for health care professionals in reducing stress and increasing well-being and self-compassion. Differences between intervention and control groups were not statistically significant in many areas, likely due to low participant numbers. The authors

found attrition to be a particular difficulty, with many participants citing a lack of time to participate in the MBSR group (Shapiro et al., 2005).

A study by Harinath et al. (2004), which combined yoga postures, breathing, and meditation, found participants in the experimental group experienced heightened well-being following a three month program of practice. Campbell and Moore (2004) studied the effect of a six-week yoga program consisting of pranayama, asana, guided relaxation, and meditation, with the aim of enhancing self-awareness, self-acceptance, and calm. Results of the beginner group were compared with a group of regular practitioners and a group of individuals who did not practice yoga. Findings indicated the effectiveness of yoga practice in reducing and preventing depression, anxiety, and stress. A study of the physiological and psychological effects of practice of the eight-limb model of yoga in healthy women found reduced scores in somatic complaints and emotionality, and higher scores of life satisfaction (Schell, Allolio, & Schonecke, 1994).

Increased mood enhancing benefits of mindful exercise versus aerobic exercise have also been documented (Netz & Lidor, 2003; Singh Khalsa & Stauth, 2002). Balancing effects of the physical practice of yoga are due to relaxation and stimulation of the nervous system through stretching and strengthening, which results in production of mood enhancing endorphin, as well as stimulating a relaxation response (Singh Khalsa & Stauth, 2002). Because of these results participants may experience heightened well-being after just one session, although greatest benefits accrue over time (Slede & Pomerantz, 2001; Weintraub, 2004).

As the link between physical and emotional health is becoming more widely accepted, the benefits of yoga and mindfulness meditation practices have implications for

holistic health treatment. In addition to having emotional/psychological benefits, mindfulness-based interventions have been found to have positive effects on physical health, including managing chronic pain and stress-related illness (Baer, 2003; Grossman et al., 2004). Biological changes related to mindfulness include increased immune response, and left-sided anterior brain activity, related to positive affect (Davidson et al., 2003). Ornish (as cited in Walsh, 2004) demonstrated the effectiveness of meditation and yoga, in addition to a low fat diet, in reversing coronary artery disease.

As with studies of MBSR, physiological effects of yogic practices in calming the central nervous system, decreasing cortisol levels, and increasing immune response have been found (Campbell & Moore, 2004; Harrigan, 1990; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001). A review of medical literature regarding the applications for Hatha Yoga as an alternative therapy cites improved strength and flexibility, as well as possible aid in controlling blood pressure, respiration, heart rate, and metabolic rate, and improving overall physical health (Raub, 2002). Benefits of yoga in the treatment of addiction are also noted (Harrigan, 1990; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001). Reviews of the literature on yoga and psychological effects note that there have not been a great number of rigorous empirical investigations, given the mounting evidence that positive benefits do exist (Slede & Pomerantz, 2001). Weintraub (2004) notes the power of the pharmaceutical industry in influencing treatment for conditions such as depression, which has perhaps resulted in the lack of study of the benefits of yoga as a clinical intervention.

Mindfulness Interventions in Groups

Although Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a group intervention, only one of the studies cited examined the effects of participation in a group, and the possible

effects of shared experience and meaning-making, on participants, despite the fact that social support and a group environment are part of MBSR programs, and research has found these variables to be related to psychological well-being (Chang et al., 2004). In the MBSR study by Cohen-Katz et al. (2005) participants experienced both positive and negative reactions as a result of group participation. Participants also reported feeling compelled to share their experiences with the teachers of the program in many instances. Incorporating these qualitative descriptions of the impacts of MBSR in reducing nurse burnout and stress came about partly as a result of unexpected qualitative data that the teachers of the course received (e.g., e-mails and stories) regarding the participants' experiences of mindfulness. Clearly the participants wished to share their lived experiences and meaning making process of learning mindfulness. Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) sees individuals as social beings, existing within their particular lifeworlds. Taking these lifeworlds and practice group experiences (if applicable) into account was an important component of examining the lived experience of practicing mindfulness in the current research.

Mindfulness and Relationships

The role of mindfulness in the relationships of practitioners is also important to consider, as interpersonal relationships are influential to well-being. The concept of mindful communication is integral in Buddhist practices, comprising practices such as deep listening and loving speech (Hanh, 1991). Cope (1999) and Kabat-Zinn (1994) describe the benefits of relating mindfully with oneself and with others, in intimate relationships, parenting relationships, and challenging relationships. The effects of mindfulness-based interventions in enhancing empathy, point to the potential benefits of

mindfulness in enriching relationships (Cohen-Katz et al. 2005; Shapiro et al. 1998, 2005). Grayson (2003) has described the possibilities for mindfulness practices in creating deeper connections for couples. The role of mindfulness in effective interpersonal communication, particularly in aiding efficient and creative information processing, and sensitivity to diverse perspectives, has also been highlighted (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Responses to an open ended-question regarding perceived benefits of a MBSR course included responses that spoke to interpersonal and transpersonal dimensions of mindfulness (Shapiro et al., 1998, 2005).

Mindfulness practices provide a means of nurturing emotional intelligence, an essential determinant of life success, which includes awareness of one's emotions, ability to manage emotions, ability to motivate oneself, ability to recognize and respond to the emotions of others, and the ability to handle relationships with others (e.g., interpersonal and social competence) (Goleman, 1994). Mindfulness practices may also be useful as a community-building tool, in fostering connections among communities of practitioners (Boivin & Hudson Breen, 2005).

Mindfulness and Eastern Psychology

Western psychology has traditionally focussed on returning individual imbalances in mental health to a more 'normal' state, working from a model of pathology and disease. Mental health is restored or facilitated in psychotherapy through learning to change thoughts and behaviours, which produces changes in affect (Corsini & Wedding, 2005). There has been little focus on developing human potential, outside of existential and humanistic theories of psychology, and health is usually associated with ego strength or a sense of individualism. From this perspective, Western psychologists have

sometimes pathologized meditation and yoga practices, and the experiences of practitioners (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Misunderstanding of Western psychology has also occurred, as mindfulness practitioners have sometimes dismissed Western systems as superficial in their lack of regard for deeper dimensions of human experience (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Although greater integration and mutual respect is evolving, misunderstandings still remain.

Eastern systems of psychology, which Welwood (2000) terms a 'Psychology of Awakening' and Levine (2000) terms a 'Positive Psychology,' are becoming increasingly accepted in the West, as empirical investigations provide scientific evidence of the effects of meditation practice on reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and other difficult emotions (Baer, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004; Cormier & Nurius, 2003). As Eastern mindfulness practices have gained increasing popularity in North America, Eastern systems of psychology, including concepts of self and identity, and a different understanding of the nature of suffering and dis-ease (i.e. disease is conceptualized as suffering as a result of attachments and disconnection from one's true nature), have also garnered interest (Epstein, 1995; Khong, 2003; Levine, 2000; Walsh, 2004; Welwood, 2000). It is essential to recognize, however, that Western research on meditative practices has been interpreted within Western frameworks, exclusive of the systems of psychology and philosophy that these practices developed in conjunction with (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Walsh and Shapiro also point to the lack of appreciation in most Western research for the role of meditation in understanding various cognitive and psychological processes.

Eastern therapies cultivate a sensitive awareness that enables individuals to access their essential selves (Walsh, 2004). "The self-concept and its boundaries are then

increasingly recognized as constructed rather than given, fluid rather than rigid, and capable of considerable expansion. [...] This finally culminates in a sense of one's interconnectedness and inherent unity with all" (p.22). Eastern systems view dis-ease as arising due to lack of awareness of one's true nature, attachment or craving, or a sort of existential anxiety that resonates with Heidegger's notions regarding "being-in-the-world" (Khong, 2003; Walsh, 2004; Welwood, 2000). The eight-limbed system of yoga described previously is regarded as a hierarchy of human development in yogic psychology, with the ultimate goal being the experience of higher consciousness (Rama et al., 1976). Eastern theories of psychology and personality also incorporate practical models of values for living – the eight-fold path of Buddhism and the yamas and niyamas of the Yoga Sutras. These models provide ways of being and living for practitioners, as well as incorporating a focus on transpersonal growth – the idea that individuals come to greater awareness and experience of connection "to something *greater* than the individual self" (Fadiman & Frager, 1976, p.353).

Western scholars of Eastern psychology also view these Eastern systems as the practical developmental-transformative components of positive psychology (Levine, 2000; Luskin, 2004). Feuerstein states that the primary message of all forms of yoga is "happiness is our essential nature, and our perpetual quest for happiness is fulfilled only when we realize who we truly are" (1996, p.2). This is a marked departure from traditional Western systems of psychology.

Meditation is often spoken of as a cognitive-behavioural technique in the context of therapy, and while cognitive-behavioural models may explain many of the benefits of meditation practice, it is important to recognize "the unique qualities and characteristics

of mindfulness as a meditative practice” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a, p.145). These qualities include the cultivation of present-focussed awareness, insight, and compassion. Research on cognitive-behavioural therapies have demonstrated the positive effects of progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), guided relaxation, and diaphragmatic breathing as tools for managing difficult emotions, including anger and anxiety (Cormier & Nurius, 2003). These techniques are essentially the same as mindfulness practices, but without the philosophical components. While one study comparing the effects of PMR and yoga stretching found higher rates of relaxation in the PMR group at five weeks post-test, it is not mentioned whether the yoga group was taught yogic relaxation strategies or instructed by a qualified yoga teacher (Ghoncheh & Smith, 2004). Teaching only ‘stretching’ is an inaccurate representation of the physical practice of yoga.

It should be noted, however, that while mindfulness may be an effective practice for many individuals, on its own or in conjunction with psychotherapy, or other professional care, mindfulness may not be appropriate for all individuals (DeMonte, 2003; Nespore, 1993). The current qualitative study was designed to elucidate the less easily quantified aspects of mindfulness practices, and how practitioners experience the positive benefits of practice for enhancing wellness.

Counselling Applications

Mindfulness as a wellness practice has implications for counsellors. As a personal practice, mindfulness may enhance counselling work, particularly in enhancing counsellor presence and capacity for compassion and empathy (McCartney, 2004). Findings regarding the effects of MBSR in increasing empathy in practitioners have clear implications for counsellors, as empathy is a necessary quality in counselling practice

(Cohen-Katz et al. 2005; Shapiro et al. 1998, 2005). Mindfulness techniques introduced into counselling sessions as interventions may assist clients in achieving desired personal goals. According to Kabat-Zinn (2003a) it is essential for counsellors who introduce mindfulness techniques in therapy to be actively engaged in a personal practice, so as to embody the qualities of mindfulness in their work with clients.

Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) elaborated on the possible implications of mindfulness for health care professionals in the following:

The framework of intentional systemic mindfulness could provide the explicit quality and context for the interaction between physician and patient. The intention to attend to the medical situation in an open, nonjudgmental, and compassionate way within a systemic framework may be profoundly healing for both physician and patient. (p.132)

Aims of physicians in cultivating these qualities of compassion, openness, and non-judgement, in a meaningful and genuine manner through mindfulness practice, have clear links to the qualities of therapeutic counsellor presence.

A preliminary review of the fit between MBSR and nursing practice revealed several important possibilities which have parallels to the helping professions at large. The implications for mindfulness in assisting helpers to be less caught up in thoughts, and more present with the individuals they are working with, is key as is the self-awareness that develops through mindfulness practice (Cohen-Katz et al., 2004). Additionally, mindfulness may help to reduce burnout by enhancing abilities to manage stress and to increase satisfaction with helping work through an enriching of relationship-centred care (Cohen-Katz et al., 2004).

Walsh (2004) also cites the benefits of meditation and yoga practice for enhancing empathy, perceptual sensitivity, psychological development, and self-actualization. “[T]his is a particularly important finding since empathy may be diminished by doctoral training programs yet is one of the essential therapist skills identified by Carl Rogers (Raskin & Rogers, 1995).” (Walsh, 2004, p.45). Nespor (1993) describes the positive benefits experienced personally and professionally in incorporating yoga in the practice of psychiatry. The benefits of mindfulness in preventing stress and burnout in health care professionals is also of interest (Cohen-Katz et al., 2005; Nespor, 1993; Shapiro et al., 2005). Therapists who practice mindfulness report greater self-awareness, insight, acceptance, and compassion, and practitioners recommend mindfulness practice as an aspect of therapist training (Walsh, 2004). Mindfulness-based practices may also be appropriate alternatives to drug treatment for many individuals, enhancing feelings of self-control and agency in the healing process (Baer, 2003; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001; Weintraub, 2004). Given the varied and practical benefits of mindfulness practices, engaging in mindfulness has direct relevance for counsellors, and their clients.

Summary

This review of the literature represents an initial examination of the wide array of scholarly and practitioner literature that exists on the topics of mindfulness practices. Historical roots of yoga and mindfulness meditation practices were explored, with the aim of providing context for understanding these traditional practices. Details differentiating and describing the practices were outlined. Studies of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits of mindfulness practices were reviewed, and Eastern systems of psychology, as they differ from Western concepts of psychology, were

introduced. Limitations of the literature, including a lack of scholarly qualitative evidence regarding the effectiveness of mindfulness practices, were noted. Implications for counselling, including the fostering of empathy, were discussed. A variety of literature exists on the benefits of mindfulness practices in promoting well-being, and reducing negative states—both empirical studies and anecdotal evidence in publications by practitioners. While qualitative descriptions of experiences of mindfulness exist in practitioner literature, there is a lack of understanding about the lived experience of individuals who come to mindfulness practice to enhance well-being in the academic literature. The proposed research will explore the essence of mindfulness practice in the tradition of Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). The following chapter will detail the methodology to be used in undertaking the proposed Mindful Inquiry.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The following section will describe the methodology used to address the research questions: (a) What is the lived experience of individuals who practice yoga and/or mindfulness for wellness, and (b) What is the role (if any) of shared experience (group practice) in mindfulness practices? Rationale for a qualitative approach will be outlined, and the specific method for the inquiry will be discussed. Mindful Inquiry, and more specifically, interpretive phenomenology, provides the framework for the design. Entering assumptions of the researcher will be discussed. Data collection and analysis procedures will be reviewed

Qualitative Approach

While some quantitative studies have been conducted, describing the effects of yoga and mindfulness meditation on mental and physical health, this type of data does not provide rich understandings of the benefits as experienced by individuals who participate in these practices. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study in order to provide thick descriptions of individuals' experiences with yoga and mindfulness as a practice fostering mental health.

One characteristic of qualitative research, which will have a particular impact in this study, is the fact that "qualitative design is holistic. It looks at the larger picture, the whole picture, and begins with the search for understanding of the whole" including "description of the role of the researcher as well as description of the researcher's own biases and ideological preference" (Janesick, 1994, p. 212). Working with a holistic

model of health, this research will attend to the experience of mindfulness practitioners in a holistic fashion. In addition, “qualitative research seeks to understand the world through the eyes of the participant,” (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p.126) and so allows the researcher to focus on the in-depth, lived experiences of individuals, and the meaning made from experiences, thus honouring these subjective realities. Janesick (1994) describes three essential ‘rules of thumb’ that are common to qualitative research: “1) look for the meaning and perspectives of the participants in the study; 2) look for relationships regarding the structure, occurrence, and distribution of events over time; 3) look for points of tension” (p. 213). These points informed the creation of interview questions, and generally shaped the qualitative nature of the research.

Research Design

The research design was significantly influenced by the concept of Mindful Inquiry, as proposed by Bentz and Shapiro (1998). This guiding framework is outlined below. Choice of interpretive phenomenology as a methodology followed logically through engagement in the process of mindful inquiry. Applicability of this approach is discussed.

Mindful Inquiry

In accordance with Mason’s (2002) suggestion that “qualitative research requires a highly active engagement from its practitioners,” (p.4) and in the spirit of describing the role of researcher and researcher bias (Janesick, 1994), Bentz and Shapiro’s (1998) approach of Mindful Inquiry will be explained, as the guiding philosophy that informs the present research design. Mindful Inquiry combines the traditions of critical theory,

phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Buddhism to provide a holistic and coherent philosophy of research.

Mindful Inquiry places the researcher, an individual with a particular lifeworld, in the centre of the research. The researcher is called on to act as a philosopher in engaging with the process of conducting research, which is seen as a journey involving many turns in the spiral of Mindful Inquiry. These turns include the critical, which call on the researcher to examine historical and sociocultural conditions, in which the research is conducted, as well as personal experiences and how these influence one's research work. Critical turns also require that the researcher be sensitive to power differentials within the research process and how these differences may affect outcomes. The researcher must link the inquiry "to the project of reducing suffering or increasing freedom, justice, or happiness in the world, either locally or globally or both" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 47). This last critical turn has particular resonance for the researcher as an aim of the current research, as well as having direct parallels to philosophical underpinnings of the practices under investigation.

Phenomenological turns require the researcher to engage in producing a phenomenological description – a deep description that captures the meaning or essence¹ of the personal experience of the nature of the phenomena that the research seeks to understand. This was accomplished through reflexive journaling throughout the research process (Appendix A). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) also include the use of imaginative variations (considering how the phenomenon would be different if certain variables were

¹ In seeking to understand 'essence,' a concept of Husserlian origins, the researcher will remain mindful of the risk of oversimplification, while seeking to describe the 'being' of experience. This is in accordance with van Manen's position, that "essence is not a single, fixed property by which we know something; rather, it is meaning constituted by a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities" (1997, p. xv).

changed), identification of modes of consciousness and typifications brought to the situation by researcher and participants, and descriptions of the lifeworlds and intersubjectivities involved, as phenomenological turns.

Hermeneutical turns ask the researcher to examine the pre-existing interpretations that exist within the research texts, “to allow the movements of understanding to happen on their own time” (Bentz & Shapiro, p. 51), and to create space for new meaning to emerge. This speaks to the need to engage in the research as a process, and to avoid shaping the research in a pre-determined direction. In addition, the researcher must be attuned to her or his own pre-existing values, beliefs, and interpretations.

Buddhist turns require that the researcher look deeply at the personal needs held with regards to the inquiry, and to become aware of one’s construction of “other” in the research (Bentz & Shapiro, p. 52). Buddhist turns also invite the researcher to conduct research in accordance with the Eightfold Path, practicing compassion and mindfulness in conducting ethical work. These turns are not necessarily sequential, and the researcher will likely find her- or him-self circling back through various turns as the research progresses.

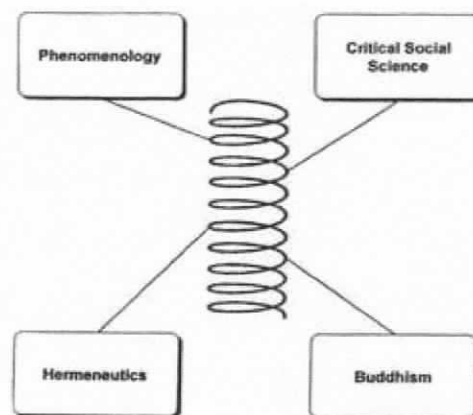


Figure 1. The Spiral of Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p.43). Used with permission of the authors.

Interpretive Phenomenology

Moustakas (1994) stresses the importance in phenomenology of focusing on a topic of study that holds personal meaning, in addition to having significance for the wider society. The review of the literature provides further support for the topic of study, and the need for a qualitative approach to this subject.

Phenomenology and hermeneutics are integral components of mindful inquiry, and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology is the research method more specifically employed in the current study. Phenomenological inquiry with individuals “involves listening to, watching, and generally engaging in empathic understanding of another person” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 99). Given this description, phenomenology was chosen as an approach particularly suited to the present inquiry, as phenomenology lends itself to understanding the thoughts and feelings that illustrate the lived experience of individuals engaged in the practice of mindfulness.

Lopez and Willis (2004) stress the importance of differentiating between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology, and of being explicit in one’s approach. Interpretive phenomenology builds on Husserl’s tradition of descriptive phenomenology, which seeks to illuminate the essence of individual’s lived experience. Interpretive phenomenology (based in philosophical hermeneutics), is informed by Heidegger’s modifications of descriptive phenomenological inquiry, and moves beyond description to seek out meaning through focus on “what humans experience rather than what they consciously know” (Lopez & Willis, p. 728). Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology places emphasis on “allowing an opening or clearing to occur” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 113); a space in which new meanings may be perceived through mindful attention to

language. Heidegger's hermeneutics also draws attention to the existential qualities of being, and invites the researcher to engage in meditative thinking, which is particularly suited to Mindful Inquiry, and to this research, as the research questions are aimed at understanding the experiences of being as a mindfulness practitioner (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Khong, 2003).

While bracketing, the practice of suspending prior personal understandings, knowledge, or expectations about a subject during the research process, has been used as a technique to lend rigour to descriptive phenomenological inquiry, interpretive phenomenology rejects this possibility (LeVasseur, 2003). Rather, the researcher must make these understandings and knowledge explicit. In fact, "presuppositions or expert knowledge on the part of the researcher are valuable guides to inquiry and, in fact, make the inquiry a meaningful undertaking" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729).

As an individual engaging in the intellectual study of a phenomenon manifested in a practice, it is personally important to have direct experience with the practice under investigation. In the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, personal experience with the phenomenon will form an overt, integral, and unavoidable component of the present study. This personal background informing the interpretive research will involve blending the meaning-making processes of researcher and participants (co-researchers), which is known as co-constitutionality or the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, as cited in Lopez & Willis, 2004). The meanings reported in the research findings will represent one possible interpretation of the lifeworlds of participants, one that is logical and credible within the framework of the research (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

In addition to providing an interpretive understanding of the co-constructed research narratives, an additional aim was to give voice to experiences that are not presently well accepted within the academic literature. Critical hermeneutics takes the assumption that interpretation is always influenced by socially accepted ways of seeing and knowing reality (Thompson, as cited in Lopez & Willis, 2004). In addition, “because socially accepted worldviews reflect the values of individuals within any given social context, the lived experiences and personal voices of persons who are not members of privileged groups are often discounted” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). In an era that increasingly favours managed-care models of service provision, it is important to critique the lack of highly regarded scholarly research regarding the benefits of a practice that have been documented anecdotally for centuries. This critical lens is in accordance with the philosophy of Mindful Inquiry (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998).

Entering Assumptions

Many of the ontological beliefs shaping the assumptions of the researcher have been described within the framework of Mindful Inquiry. In the spirit of active reflexivity, with the aim of increasing the credibility of the study, assumptions will be examined throughout the research process. Additional assumptions include the following:

- 1) That inherent benefit and meaning exists in the lived experience of yoga and other mindfulness practices.
- 2) That participants will honestly inform the researcher with data describing this lived experience, including emotions and thoughts regarding the phenomena of mindfulness.

- 3) That qualitative research is a meaningful pursuit, and that the current research will help to bridge the disconnect that exists between practice of yoga and mindfulness (for mental/emotional benefits) and academic (counselling) knowledge.

Process of Inquiry

The following section will outline the process to be followed in conducting the Mindful Inquiry. Procedures for selection of co-researchers will be described, and data collection methods, including sample interview questions, will be outlined. Data analysis methods will be described, with attention to means of ensuring quality of the study.

Selection of Co-researchers

Moustakas (1994) stresses the importance of engaging participants who also have interest in and consider meaningful the topic, and who have personal experience with the phenomenon. In addition, participants must be willing to participate in lengthy audiotaped interviews, and to review their transcripts and data themes. This is a significant commitment on the part of the co-researchers. Since yoga practice often includes the practice of meditation, and the fact that there are many parallels in the philosophy and theory of yogic and Buddhist mindfulness traditions, the current study will focus on individuals who practice yoga and/or mindfulness, in order to access a range of experiences and provide a wide potential sampling base.

Co-researchers were recruited through purposeful sampling, specifically homogeneous sampling, as the research was seeking individuals with an established mindfulness practice (Creswell, 2005). Given the evidence that regular, consistent practice creates the most benefit for practitioners, it was asked that individuals who participate as co-researchers have been involved in a regular mindfulness practice for the

purpose of enhancing wellness. Regular practice was defined as an average of three times per week, with practice including physical postures, breathing exercises and/or meditation, for at least the past year. These criteria are based on evidence that, while immediate benefits are often reported upon beginning a yoga and/or mindfulness meditation practice, greatest benefits are experienced as a result of longer-term, consistent committed practice (Baer, 2003; Slede & Pomerantz, 2001).

Poster advertisements in yoga and meditation centres in a medium-sized Canadian west-coast city were used to recruit participants (Appendix B), as well as word-of mouth, snowball sampling, whereby participants refer other potential participants to the researcher. Data was collected through in-person, in-depth interviews with six individuals, ranging in age from 26-45 years of age, providing a range of experiences and significant data with which to compare themes across individual experiences. All interviewees were female, one identified as Indo-Canadian and the others identified as Caucasian. Participants were acquainted with the interviewer prior to interviews, through a brief pre-interview explanation of the research purpose, informed consent procedures (Appendix C), and confirming eligibility for participation. All individuals who expressed interest met the sampling criteria, and interviews were conducted with the first six respondents. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym and record it on their demographic sheet. These pseudonyms are used throughout the report. Each individual was interviewed once, with a follow-up e-mail consultation occurring after analysis of all data was complete.

Interview Protocol

The primary researcher conducted all of the interviews, which were between 60 and 90 minutes long (average length of 65 minutes). Several participants were clients of the yoga studio where the researcher practices, and there was previous informal acquaintance in these cases.

Interviews were semi-structured – the initial question invited participants simply to tell the researcher about their practice (Appendix D). Prompts were used to elicit further elaboration, for example “Could you say more about ____?” and “What meaning do you make of that?” Participants were also asked to share their experiences and thoughts on the phenomenon of shared experience, through group practice. The researcher asked participants to tell her about their “experiences of group practice.”

The research interviews were somewhat informal conversations, in the tradition of phenomenological inquiry, but also included characteristics of semi-structured interviews, in that there were interview questions prepared, and these questions served as a guiding framework to provide similarity and cohesiveness of content across transcripts. Elements of qualitative interviewing, and issues of framing and interpreting interviews as discussed by Fontana and Frey (1994), were taken into consideration, including attention to the contextual nature of the interview, attention to language and non-verbal communication, and the importance of researcher reflexivity.

As the researcher in this qualitative study, who constitutes the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and as a practitioner of yoga and mindfulness, I engaged in reflective journaling throughout the research process, with regards to my own experience and process (Appendix E). These journal entries and memos from data

analysis inform the discussion section of this final report. The purposes of this are two-fold: to become aware of any personal biases that may affect the proposed research (Tobin & Begley, 2004), and to determine the quality of my own experience of mindfulness practice (which is good practice in beginning research), as other practitioners may share my experiences (van Manen, 1997). In addition, mindfulness practice itself provided an important basis to my approach to the research, as it impacts mindful presence as a researcher. Overtly, mindful presence as a researcher may be achieved in incorporating Moustakas' (1994) reflective-meditation epoche, a form of bracketing that prepares the researcher to "perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance and presence" without labelling or judging the experiences being shared (p. 89). While this practice is derived from Husserl's phenomenology, it is still appropriate to engage in this type of reflective-meditative grounding before interviewing participants, and it fits well with the Mindful Inquiry model.

Data Analysis

A key point of the research was to examine the essential meaning of the experience of mindfulness as a practice for mind-body wellness through the use of the co-researchers own words and descriptions. Steps for phenomenological data analysis were followed, beginning with transcription of the interviews and organization of data in preparation for coding. Next, all transcripts were read through in order to gain a general sense of overall meanings, and the researcher made notes (memos) on ideas that arose. This was followed by a second reading, focussing on identifying 'significant statements,' following a coding process to create categories and themes to describe the essence of the experience, and reflecting on these in an effort to make meaning of the experiences

described (van Manen, 1997). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) liken the “deconstructing and reconstructing process” of phenomenological analysis to grounded theory analysis (p. 99).

Specifically, transcripts were coded according to a Colaizzi-style coding process (Colaizzi, 1978; Crotty, 1996), informed by van Manen’s (1997) method of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection (Appendix F).

The steps for analysis were as follows:

- 1) Read all transcripts for a holistic sense of their content, making notes (memos) of ideas that arise.
- 2) Re-read transcripts with a focus on identifying ‘significant statements’ regarding the phenomenon under investigation, rather than informational content, reflecting on the question “What is going on here?” in an effort to make meaning of the experiences described (van Manen, 1997, p.86)
- 3) Assign theme words which summarize the essential meanings of participants’ words in the highlighted sentences and phrases.
- 4) Organize themes into clusters, which further categorize similar experiential structures or meanings.
- 5) Further group similar clusters to form categories of meanings that describe the experience being investigated.

Following these steps for analysis involved some fluidity between stages, as well as circling back through the turns of Mindful Inquiry. Creswell’s (1998) suggestion that the researcher “analyze their data for material that can yield codes that address topics readers would expect to find, codes that are surprising, and codes that address a larger

theoretical perspective in the research” (p. 193) was a helpful guiding principle. This is in accordance with Lopez and Willis’ (2004) assertion that researchers “must go further by interpreting the meanings for practice, education, research and policy to create informed and culturally sensitive health care knowledge” (p. 730).

Quality of the Study

Means were undertaken to ensure the quality of the research study, including primary validity criteria: credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity; and secondary validity criteria: explicitness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity, as described by Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001).

Following the established procedure for data generation and analysis, as described above, ensured thorough interpretation of the data or credibility of data and analysis. Member checking was employed by asking co-researchers to review the clusters and categories extracted from the data. Analytic techniques such as memoing and reflexive journaling were employed, as well as extensive literature review of academic and practitioner materials (Whittemore et al., 2001). Non-academic literature by mindfulness practitioners was examined for quotes that fit the categories shared by co-researchers, to further deepen the rich descriptions and provide triangulation of data (Denzin, as cited in Janesick, 1994).

By nature of the subject matter, and by incorporating practitioner literature as well as literature from other health sciences, the study moved beyond the dominant discourse of psychology, incorporating interdisciplinary triangulation (Janesick, 1994). This was also a means of satisfying the hermeneutical turns of the Mindful Inquiry Model (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted through the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix G), and informed consent procedures were used with all participants in accordance with these ethical regulations (Appendix C). In addition, in conducting research according to the principles of Mindful Inquiry, ethical research moves beyond the idea of avoiding harm, to being mindful of the effects of the research on all participants, and to prepare a space within the inquiry that:

invites the participants of the study to occupy it as they are becoming.

Mindful inquiry is a creative act. It seeks not only to discover or to record what is there, but to allow what is there to manifest itself in a new way (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 54).

In this way, Mindful Inquiry requires that the researcher strive to conduct research that is linked with greater emancipatory purposes, creating space to improve the lives of individuals.

Summary

This chapter describes the methodology used to address the research questions: (a) What is the lived experience of individuals who practice yoga and/or mindfulness for wellness, and (b) What is the role (if any) of shared experience (group practice) in mindfulness practices? Rationale for a qualitative approach was discussed, and Mindful Inquiry, the guiding philosophy for the project, was outlined, forming part of the discussion of the entering assumptions of the researcher. Interpretive phenomenology, the specific methodology to be employed, was reviewed, along with data collection and

analysis procedures. Considerations for ensuring quality of the study and ethical conduct were also presented.

Chapter Four: Findings

Essence of Mindfulness Experiences

The experience of mindfulness practice as it was described by participants is truly holistic, and forms a web that extends throughout the lives of those who take up the practices. In clustering and categorizing the data, it has been challenging to separate or create divisions between these interwoven themes, especially as this sense of interconnectedness is part of the values and experience of the practice. In this way, the categories, clusters, and themes that have emerged from the data seem more like interlocking stones in a pathway representing the practitioners' mindfulness journeys, rather than completely separate and sequential groupings as they are presented for the sake of clarity in this section.

Category, Cluster, and Theme Structures

Circling through the Mindful Inquiry spiral, questioning the ways of coding the data (with relation to previously noted assumptions and personal experience with mindfulness), and striving to represent the stories of the practitioners in as true a form as possible has been a complex and rewarding process. The final categories represent a way of understanding the experience of mindfulness practices, based on this researcher's endeavour to be mindful with the data (Appendix E), in "a spirit of perpetual and persistent inquiry—as in, 'What is this?'" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a, p.146). Comparing and contrasting the words of practitioners across themes, clusters, and categories, while coming back to the spiral of Mindful Inquiry to check out the categorizations that were happening, has resulted in two main categories: 1) Relationship with Practice, and 2) Self in Relation, each of which are comprised of three clusters of themes (Table 1).

Table 1

Categories and Respective Clusters

Categories	
Relationship with Practice	Self in Relation
Clusters	
Mindfulness Journey	Ways of Being
Experiences of Practice	Mindfulness in Relationships
Group Practice	Relationship with Environment

The first category, *relationship with practice*, represents the journey of practitioners – the ways in which they have come to the practice, and how they have experienced the teachings and traditions of formal practice, as well as their experiences of practicing with groups.

The category of *self in relation* comprises the experiences of practitioners outside of their formal practice, the ways in which mindfulness has become integrated into their lives and relationships, and their ways of being in the world. It is understood that these two categories, while distinct, are not mutually exclusive, as all of the clusters and themes derive from the experiences of practitioners' multidimensional lifeworlds.

A. Relationship with Practice

Within the category of *Relationship with Practice*, themes encompassed descriptions of practice and the ways individuals related to their personal practice. Groupings of themes in this category became the clusters of practitioners' *mindfulness*

journey, their *experiences of practice*, and responses to the question regarding experiences of *group practice* (Table 2). I began the interview by asking participants to tell me about their practice, and this led to descriptions of how they came to their practice, a feeling of resonance with the practice, and how their practice has changed over time. Each of the practitioners has a unique mindfulness practice, which will be briefly introduced before further exploration of the theme clusters.

Table 2.

Relationship with Practice Clusters and Respective Themes

Clusters		
Mindfulness Journey	Experiences of Practice	Group Practice
Themes within Clusters		
Seeking	Refuge	Connection/safety
Ebb and flow	Calming/energizing	Importance of teacher
Resonance	Holistic	Challenges
	Integration	
	Empowerment	

Sara had practiced meditation in groups and on her own, and had also practiced yoga for several years. Our conversation focussed mainly on the ways she is practicing mindfulness throughout her life now, when she goes jogging, when she is in nature, and when she cooks. Her descriptions were also influenced by her experience in a Somatic Therapy group, which increased her awareness of mind-body connections and emotions.

Sarah had practiced yoga and meditation for many years, but had come to a new practice, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, several years ago. My experience of her in the interview was of a deeply mindful presence, and a reverence and care in describing the practice. When I asked her to elaborate on the feeling of groundedness, for example, she described how she was feeling in the moment, as she felt quite grounded, and very aware of herself in the moment.

Jo had practiced yoga and meditation separately for many years, on and off, and had come to an eight-limbed yoga practice about a year before our interview, as she found her interests in Eastern philosophy and the physical practice of yoga connecting through the deepening of her personal practice as she completed yoga teacher training. Jo invited me to her home for our interview, and I was able to see what she described in terms of creating an environment for her mindfulness practice at home – an environment that was very peaceful and uncluttered.

Jane is a yoga practitioner, who practices some meditation and is a registered yoga teacher. She had a background as a personal trainer, and first came to yoga as a physical practice which would enhance her fitness. She spoke animatedly about the deeper dimensions of her yoga practice, which had come almost as a surprise. Learning about yoga philosophy in her teacher training program was particularly interesting for Jane, as it provided a deeper meaning to the practice.

Anandita had been introduced to yoga as a young child, and developed a new relationship with meditation and yoga as an adult, partly as a result of participating in a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program. Returning to yoga as an adult meant looking at practices which had been a part of her culture growing up with fresh eyes, and

coming to a newfound understanding and respect for the practice. She was completing yoga teacher training at the time of our interview, which was a new dimension of her yoga journey.

Lola had also practiced yoga for many years, practices some meditation, and is a registered yoga teacher. Lola also invited me to her home for our interview, and we sat in the space where she would practice. Lola's yoga journey has been very much self-directed, as she first began practicing asanas completely independently, with the aid of a video and books. She began teacher training primarily as a way of deepening her practice, unsure at first if she would ever teach. Her transition to teaching has involved being very mindful of preserving the authenticity and integrity of her personal practice, and the tradition of yoga.

Mindfulness Journey. Themes within this cluster included seeking, ebb and flow, and resonance. These themes clustered around the experience of coming to mindfulness practice, the change that these long-term practitioners have experienced in their practice, and the sense that each individual's practice was distinctively meaningful to them.

Seeking referred to the sense practitioners had of looking for something which they found in their practice. Several of the participants who practiced yoga described seeking a physical practice which would promote wellness or promote weight loss, but came to experience benefits beyond the physical.

According to Jo, "even when I was a young teenager, I was attracted to, I don't even know what the term is, metaphysical or, but that was totally not part of my life growing up." Jo's interest stemmed from an intrinsic sense of what she was seeking, and she began to read and explore ideas. Lola also described herself as "as seeker," stating

that she read a great deal, discovering breathing practices and philosophy, and eventually yoga asanas. Her practice was “was really self directed for me at first [...] I started doing it and sort of discovered it on my own...”

Ebb and flow was also part of the path of mindfulness, in that the frequency of practice changed for some, while others came and went from the practice completely at times. These variations in the expression of practice speak to the quality of active engagement that is mindfulness. That is, practice refers of the continual cultivation of the quality, rather than something one learns or rehearses (J. Kabat-Zinn, 2003a). In Jo’s journey with the practice, *ebb and flow* was experienced in the following ways:

I started meditating then, and then, sort of left it and came back to it, left it and came back to it and, as far as yoga, started that in my early twenties as well, as a way of reducing stress and a way of having a perfect body, which, [laughing] in my twenties was a huge priority, and the same, left and came back to it, and then I came back to meditation more, committedly, hmm, probably about seven years ago...

This renewed commitment to her practice coincided with the experience of *resonance* as well – the sense of fit that she felt with the practice:

Instead of just dabbling, I came to find more of a framework for it [...] and then it was interesting because I got really interested in Eastern philosophy and spirituality, over here, and over here I was doing yoga and really enjoying that, and I hadn’t and it seems amazing to me now when I think about it but, I didn’t realize that

all of the stuff that I was learning about Buddhism and other Eastern views, was yoga, [...] so it was really exciting to see those two, you know, the physical and the mindfulness part come together for me, it was really exciting.

For Anandita, *ebb and flow* of practice was experienced as a developmental process as she questioned and then rediscovered the practice:

I started practicing yoga, as far as I can remember, at about three, it's something that I grew up with and then something that I rebelled against as a teenager, because I grew up with it, and then in my late teens, early twenties kind of came back to it largely because of injuries. I had been in several car accidents and I was having really hard time dealing with the pain and frustration, and the yoga and meditation, those practices ultimately helped me get back on my feet.

The *resonance* Anandita experienced was in returning to the practice following a break from it. Coming back to the practice re-inforced its value to her, and there was also some frustration with herself for not remembering it sooner in her time of need:

You know I had this in my bag of tricks, I had this in my coping skills, but at the same time there's a greater appreciation for it now and what it can do, there's a greater respect for it [...] and I guess there's also a knowledge I have now, whereas before I knew what yoga was but I had nothing to compare it to, and now I know what life is like without the

practice and I don't want to go back to that.

Lola also experienced *ebb and flow* in her practice, saying "it definitely comes in stages for me," and also finding that the type of practice changes for her - at some times attending several public classes a week, whereas she currently prefers to practice at home, guiding herself through asana practice. For Lola, *resonance* was experienced in a sense of fit for her with the practice. She said:

I feel like once I started to learn more about it...I felt like I had known it all my life, even though I hadn't officially sort of, been practicing it, because it related to so much of what I was already interested in.

The sense of resonance came with recognizing a fit with the philosophy and practice of yoga or as Lola describes, that discovering yoga "felt like coming home."

For Jane, yoga was initially a good form of exercise, and *ebb and flow* in her practice came as she began to change the ways she practiced. Jane came to experience her practice of yoga more fully as she immersed herself in a slower, more restorative style of practice following an injury that forced her to make changes to the way she exercised. Overcoming an eating disorder also allowed her to engage in the practice in different ways. "I guess just over the years, my practice has changed, because the reasons for me doing it has changed," she said, describing how she has experienced a deepening of her practice, and an experience of mental and emotional dimensions of the tradition.

Sara made a conscious choice to take a break from her formal practice, and focus more on incorporating qualities of mindfulness into other areas of her life. This was a part of the *ebb and flow* of practice for her. "I've decided to stop my yoga practice for a little

while and the main reason behind that was that I was making myself go and that didn't make any sense to me." Others experienced this sense of struggle in relation to ebb and flow in their practice as well.

Sarah's relationship with meditation changed several years ago due to recognition that she had become overly attached to her formal meditation practice. It is difficult now at times to look back on the discipline of her former practice, as part of her experience of *ebb and flow*:

Now it's challenging cause there's kind of a relationship with ego there, right, cause it was a discipline to meditate every single day for half an hour, for, I did that for quite some time, right, and yes I had the desire to do so but it also took discipline, still, so now that I've kind of freed myself up from that kind of intense relationship with it, it's challenging now to bring myself to meditate when now I just think oh you know, it would probably be good for me to meditate...

This speaks to the ebb and flow that practitioners may experience on a daily basis, as they continually re-commit to the practice, and also illustrates why the words practice and discipline are used to refer to meditation and yoga.

Sarah talked about a strong *resonance* with the path of mindfulness, and particularly with the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. She first discovered the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh through a quote from his poetry, "from *Call me by my true name*" which she paraphrased:

'My pain is so deep it fills all the four oceans, and my joy is so

warm, flowers bloom in my hands,' that's the basic idea of that, and I just loved it, I thought oh, yeah, that just really resonates with my relationship to life, and, the way I value being in the world.

Her relationship with her practice developed and changed through awareness of how she was relating to the practice. *Ebb and flow* occurred for her over the years as she made changes in her formal practice, and made a shift to the practice of engaged Buddhism:

I used to, at a time in my life, do an official kind of sitting meditation, every day, on my own, for like a half an hour or so, and I don't do that right now, I do my best to sit with the sangha once a week, and I do that more so, and then it's also, throughout my day...

This commitment to bring the practice into everyday life, and to practice mindfulness throughout their days, was shared by each of the practitioners, and will be explored in later themes.

Experiences of Practice. This cluster includes themes describe participants' experiences of their formal practice: *refuge, calming/energizing, holistic, integration, and empowerment.*

The theme of *refuge* captures practitioners' descriptions of finding respite in their practice, the enjoyment of coming into the space that is dedicated for practice, and the rituals of creating a space of refuge for practice in their homes. Sarah used the word *refuge* in describing her experiences of going to mindfulness practice, and this was the word I chose to use to describe the theme in practitioners' stories.

The environment was important for Sarah in that “it is generally cleaned and cleared of distractions as well, so it’s a calm environment.” Jane described a sort of ritual in creating a calm environment for her yoga practice, rolling out her mat, lighting a candle, and playing calming music, and how she appreciates the calm space of the studio where she practices. Jane finds that doing yoga stretches at the gym, while still beneficial, isn’t the right environment for her yoga, because of noise and the many different things going on in the environment.

If I do a yoga pose at the gym, I’m only half there, whereas, I feel like, when I do it in a class or at home, that I can really focus on what’s happening.

Lola described creating a space, having her props available, and lighting incense in preparation for her home practice. Jo talked about the importance of having a calm environment for her mindfulness practice at home, and the care she takes to cultivate this. For Anandita, there was a ritual of creating a “safe space [...] it’s kind of claiming, this is my space, and energetically setting up a bit of a buffer” for her asana practice, although she no longer felt the need to have this ritual for meditation. Sara spoke about seeking out nature at times when she was feeling ungrounded, retreating to the ocean, for example. Reflecting on her yoga practice, she also found that “often I will relax as soon as I enter the studio.”

Jane anticipated the enjoyment of her class upon entering the studio as well. She describes her experience of going to the yoga studio for class, with the intention of nurturing herself for that time, and being able to “just be quiet for an hour and a half.”

While there is an element of taking refuge in the practice, it is not about escaping from real life, or expecting a magical resolution to life's difficulties. For Jane, this means

I know if I come into yoga with a problem, I'm not going to leave and the problem's *solved*, but it gave me a little bit of a reprieve from the problem, it gave be a little bit of a break, and yeah, I *do* feel like it's a little vacation, it's like ok, I can just go, 'cause I always like coming here, I always feel better when I come here, it's good energy, the space is really nice [...] It's like I can tune out on what's happening in my life, but I'm tuned into what's happening during my practice.

This sense of being present to the practice, being mindful, and allowing oneself the time for practice creates a sense of refuge for practitioners. Anandita shared this sense, articulating an appreciation for "the quiet time in mindfulness practice, in meditative time, the reprieve really helps." Given the busyness of life in today's cities, the value of this retreat into a calm place of refuge plays a significant role in the experiences of practitioners.

The theme of *calming/energizing* captures practitioners' descriptions of the sensations and benefits of practice, and was described as feeling "grounded." Perhaps related to the refuge that practitioners find in their practice, they describe emerging feeling balanced, whether it is from a formal class, or a few moments spent breathing consciously during the day. Lola described a sense of wonder at her enjoyment of the experience of feeling grounded through her practice, which contrasted with her previous conceptions of being grounded meaning not being spontaneous or taking risks and having

fun. Her experience of being grounded through yoga incorporated a balance of being calm and alert.

Jo described how she feels when she is practicing regularly as:

Physically my energy feels better, I sleep better. As far as the yoga, my body just feels stronger, and, more relaxed, and I move differently when I'm practicing, so I feel much more fluid, instead of tight or constricted [...] like I went to a class today, and I've been working on a paper, and I was exhausted and I had a headache and I was just fried, and then when I left I just felt completely refreshed and renewed...

There is a complementarity in Lola and Jo's descriptions of the practice; there is both energy and rest, being alert and calm.

The sensation of renewal of energy was shared by Jane, who described gaining from her yoga practice "a bit of renewal, because I know, like any physical exercise, I know that I'll feel better afterwards." Although she might be feeling depleted before her practice, there is a sense of connecting with fresh reserves of energy. Practitioners were very aware of their physiological responses to the practice. Anandita described how yoga and meditation

Help[s] to actually settle the nervous system down through the mindfulness practice so the brain and the nervous system also understand, so it's kind of counteracting the fight or flight, and there's actually a third option, you kind of, as my doctor put it, you turn the volume down on the stereo so the nervous system is the stereo and the volume is ten and there's this constant firing, if you sit in mindfulness practice and let things settle, you actually

turn the volume down...

The idea of settling and energizing was shared by Sarah, who described how before going to her meditation group, following a busy day, she might be “feeling tired, and de-energized, and maybe a bit irritable, and just like, oh, I don’t really want to go.” She finds that after going to her meditation group

Every time, without fail, I feel better afterwards, and feeling better for me is, feeling more clear headed, more, in myself, less disconnected and fragmented, there’s a sense of calm that comes with that.

This sense of connecting with a feeling of vitality and calm was echoed throughout the stories of practitioners.

In addition to practitioners describing the benefits of their practice in terms of the immediate and long-term physiological benefits, there is a sense that the benefits of the practice are felt much more widely, particularly for yoga practitioners, and this sense is captured in the following theme - *holistic*. This theme includes practitioners’ words about the emotional and spiritual side of their practice. Jo described this by contrasting her yoga and meditation practice with former means of exercise:

One of the things I’m loving *so* much now is that I’m exercising my body, and that feels good, and, and I’m, you know, developing this mindfulness and it just feels really whole and complete, really, and I love it. [...] I’m not just mindlessly on a treadmill, you know, flipping through a magazine [laughing], I’m exercising my mind and I’m connecting with my spirit at the same time.

Jane feels her practice has “just been super helpful on so many levels.” She talked specifically about how good her practice makes her feel, physically and mentally. She also spoke about the holistic nature of her practice, in terms of how in yoga, one tries to “let our body and our soul and our heart take over rather than just our brain.”

Lola referred to her yoga practice as the “most comprehensive approach” she has ever encountered for nurturing wellness, and how her practice helps her feel that she is “building a foundation, a stronger foundation that I can kind of relax into.” She also commented on her appreciation of the way yoga practice exercises and integrates the body and the mind, and laughs as she looks back on ‘mindless’ exercise, saying:

I still can’t believe that people go to the gym and plug themselves in to their walkmans and read magazines and anything they can do to distract themselves from the task at hand. I used to do that, it’s like anything you can do to make yourself forget that you’re exercising, and now I’m just like, why would you even do that?

The importance of being present with the practice, connecting mind and body through the meditative movement was very clear in Lola’s story. The holistic nature of the experience was central to participants’ descriptions of their practice.

Building on the holistic experiences of practice, the theme of *integration* is present in the ways that practitioners described their experience of truly being present within themselves, through a sense of connection of mind, body, and spirit. For example Jo felt the benefits of her practice “comes back to the slowing down and being more, more present with myself, and being...more connected with my body too.” This reconnection with herself and her body as being very much linked with the breath:

Reconnected with myself, yeah, and the breath is just such a huge piece of it, and, that's always there for me, which is great, if I'm feeling worked up or upset about something, I can just, I can always come back to the breath.

Other practitioners also talked about the value of the breath as a tool to re-connect and integrate. Sarah described her experience of practicing mindfulness as a sense of "coming home" to herself, and spoke about "a felt sense of being in my body, as opposed to just my head, or even somewhat out of my entire body" that is fostered through mindfulness practice.

For Lola, "the physical integration, that happens just from practicing, going to a traditional yoga class and practicing, to me it's very integrating." Physical integration, a feeling of being in the body, was only one aspect of integration, however. Lola also experiences integration through the sense of acceptance and compassion that is nurtured through practice.

For me, coming to yoga, it's like it gives you space to be who you are, all of who you are, not just the good parts, not just the parts that are pure, and yoga-like, or whatever, but, all those parts, that's where I think the integration happened, because suddenly I kind of was able to exhale, literally and figuratively, to get in touch with breathing and not being cut off from aspects of myself that I had denied or that I felt were not acceptable or whatever.

A commonality in practitioners' stories is their descriptions of how the breath is experienced as a link to the practice, and a link to oneself, which is always present. For

Anandita, the experience is captured in the idea of gathering herself up, which she describes in the following:

I guess when I say gathering everything up, you know, brain is going off in one direction, my body is going off in another direction, taking that deep breath just kind of connects everything in one strain running through my body, and it brings everything back in line, and then, opening up, because again there's a relaxation and there's a sense of I am here, I am here right now.

Jo also talked about how her practice has helped her come to a greater sense of being embodied.

It's like, if I was, if I'm like 100% alive right now, I was like, 55% alive before, especially in the winter, yeah, so, there's not just, you know, my head that's alive, it's like my whole body, and it feels much more integrated.

The theme of integration encompasses practitioners' experience of coming to feel more whole, and more connected with themselves, through their mindfulness practice.

The theme of *empowerment* represents practitioners' experiences of coming to know or recognize new strengths within themselves, but is not about ego. For Lola, there had always been awareness that she was strong, but through her practice, there was a sense of tapping into greater reserves and increasing strength.

Yoga kind of gave me this wonderful sense of being grounded but also being able to go off and be able to feel free. It's a sense of freedom, it's definitely a sense of freedom, and strength and power, I don't even like that word, power, but it is a powerful feeling...

This awareness of a personal strength and power is an important element of the practice for Lola, as is the acknowledgement of her fragility. Not shying away from strengths or weaknesses combines to form a humble sense of empowerment.

Anandita spoke about how her practice has fostered a sense of confidence and trust in herself and her abilities, which she feels has been helping to attract positive experiences in her life, and helped her to avoid acting out of fear. For example, she described a recent experience with job searching, where she chose not to take a position that she knew would not be fulfilling, which left her open to possibility, and a job which was a better fit presented itself.

I do think my practice had a lot to do with it, having the confidence and knowing this is what I'm good at, this is what I want to do, this is what I can do, and I'm not going to settle.

This also included a sense of being in charge in her life, and having freedom to make conscious choices. She contrasted being a mindful practitioner with a time when she was not practicing a mindful yoga:

When I was practicing yoga, and I wasn't practicing mindfully, things were happening to me, and now, I don't feel that things are happening *to* me. Things happen, and I can choose to go in one direction, or another, or I can choose to stand still and let it go past me.

This awareness through practice fostered a sense of calm and empowerment for Anandita.

Anandita also spoke about how certain yoga asanas foster feelings of strength and energy when she practices them:

Strengthening physically but also strengthening emotionally and mentally, so drawing on energy, for example, in warrior, it's a very dynamic pose, [...] and it's also really good to be grounded and centred, to feel confident, to feel strong in yourself.

For Sara and Jo exercising their bodies created feelings of freedom and empowerment. Additionally, for Jo, recognition of strength came about through participating in a ten-day silent retreat six years ago. “[E]ven now, like every time I find myself struggling, in a challenging situation, I go, if I could do that, I can do this, so it's been a real source of strength for me.” For Sarah, strength is experienced simply in being present for herself – “It's a certain kind of strength that comes with that too, that, like I'm there with myself, so I have what I need, to deal with whatever I'm met with.” It seems that being present and recognizing one's resources cultivated a sense of empowerment for practitioners.

Group Practice. The cluster of themes that represent practitioners' experiences of formal practice in groups comprise those elements that constitute shared experience, as well as the importance of a teacher or guide, and individual experiences of the benefits and challenges of practicing with a group. All practitioners interviewed have had experiences of group yoga and/or meditation practices, and several had either a regular group or yoga studio where they practice. The theme of *connection/safety* encompasses the positive experiences that practitioners have had in sharing the practice with others. The intentionality of those who come to the practice, either in meditation groups or in public yoga classes, is an important key to this sense of connection and safety.

For Sarah, the importance of community is quite central to the mindfulness practice. Her mindfulness practice involves regular meditation with a sangha, which means spiritual community. The sangha is central in Buddhism, and especially so in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. Taking part in the sangha practice, which includes meditation, readings, and discussion, involves for Sarah, “a connectivity in that, and, the value of your participation, like you matter, you’re a part of this, a part of this happening right now.” This connection between members is strengthened through opportunities to share experiences of the practice, and an intention of practicing the values of mindfulness within the community. Part of Sarah’s connection with community involves the support that she receives in going to the meditation group by getting a ride from one of the other practitioners, which enables her to go more regularly. There is a real sense of community among members, and joining a community of practitioners in the same tradition was very important to Sarah when she moved to a new city. Sarah had a sense of comfort in connecting with the group, and in knowing there are other groups of mindfulness practitioners in this tradition all over the world.

An additional element of the experience of comfort with the sangha members, is a sense of trust. Sarah describes this experience in the following passage:

The people that I know that do this particular practice, the mindfulness, right, it’s on a deep core level, pretty, as much as I can with another person, I feel that I know where their intention lies, and what a deep aspiration of theirs is in life. And it resonates with mine, and there’s a real trust that comes with that. [...] In terms of values in life, compassion is a big value, so I can trust people where I know that compassion is a big

value with them, so I feel safer.

The importance of intentionality and shared values in fostering trust and community was present in other practitioners' stories as well. For Jane, the experience is related to the studio where she has practiced for several years.

Here I am in this room full of people at my yoga studio and everyone is here for the same reasons, like everyone's kind of got the same mindset [...] it is a safety thing, like, I know if I close my eyes, when I open them here, I know what's happening around me.

Jane appreciated for the sense of calm and ease that is shared after final relaxation in yoga classes – “I like it at the end of the class when everyone is chill and smiling at each other and it's nice and quiet.”

For Lola, practice with a group can also be very positive, as in the following example:

I've had some practices in even in really busy classes where I really do feel connected to the person next to me, like I remember being in a twist one day and looking over and our hands were almost touching and I just wanted to reach out and grab her hand, I didn't even know this person, you know...so I do think there's something wonderful about practicing in a group if it's the right dynamic...

The importance of group dynamic, again, is a significant determinant of positive experience, and this awareness of the dynamic or energy in the room is something that several of the practitioners talked about.

Jo shared her sense of wonder at the shared experience of mindfulness practice.

Either meditating in a group or doing yoga in a group, how, you can be lying 4 inches away from someone you've never known before, with your eyes closed and in a completely vulnerable position, and be completely relaxed, like, there's times where I've kind of gone, there's so few places in the world or times in your life when you would actually be lying down, completely off guard, right next to a stranger, and I think that there's something really, powerful with that.

She feels this is due to the sense of safety that is created when people come together to practice, which is fostered throughout a shared practice. In terms of a sense of shared energy, Jo's experiences of this have been more with meditation practice than with yoga. Sara had noticed that when practicing meditation with a group, it was much easier to feel mindful and grounded than it was when she practiced on her own at home. Anandita also spoke about the necessary variable of intentionality in creating positive mindfulness practice experiences:

I think for anybody to have or to be part of that to experience, again they have to be open to, I'm not saying they have to believe in mindfulness or energy flow or anything like that, but I think that something will happen just if they are open to experience...and I know from an intentional standpoint, with group meditation for instance, it can be really powerful, if everyone there is meditating, even if they're not meditating with a specific intention or focus, it's almost like um, a comfy blanket or a safety net. If you're unsettled or you don't quite know what you're doing, there is something to tap into and to be able to settle in to.

This sense of safety that exists in an environment with likeminded practitioners was also important for Anandita in terms of the comfort that is created, so that if emotions come up in the practice,

You know that there are people around you who again, won't judge, will understand, won't panic, and, will allow that experience to happen, as opposed to trying to fix it or make it better, which I think a lot of people try to do.

Having a shared set of values, and knowing that the others one is practicing with have the intention to be present without judgement is a powerful force in creating safety and a sense of community among practitioners.

The theme of *importance of teacher* represents a mediating influence in the experiences of group practice. Practitioners spoke about the importance of a teacher who is skilled at creating safety, nurturing individuals' practice, and facilitating group practice that fosters the positive experiences represented in the previous theme. As four of the practitioners have sought training to become teachers themselves, these individuals may be particularly attuned to the qualities of good teachers, and the role of teachers in mindfulness practice. Jane highlighted the importance of experiencing yoga "with the right instructor." She also spoke about how her own positive experiences in yoga have been influenced by the instructor, and getting to know and connecting with the instructors as people over her time at the studio, adding "I think it's important to feel a connection with the person that's teaching you".

For Anandita, having the right teacher helped her to focus and be present in her own practice, by facilitating a positive environment through their presence. Anandita

described the teachers who have really helped her as “really calm, very open, very perceptive.” She went on to describe:

I think certain teachers, if I’m doing asana with a certain teacher, certain teachers are better at creating a safe space for everyone than other teachers are, so, if I can take a class with a certain teachers, and even though I’m bothered by other practitioners, I can still take that deep breath and say, it’s only because I’m tired, and they’re tired too, and they’re doing their thing over there... [...]the teachers that I’ve had who’ve really helped me are.

Anandita also shared her thoughts about the format of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, that the eight-week program “starts things off really well, but then there’s nothing else to help sustain the change, and that’s not good, because it’s like lighting a fire and leaving people to burn.” She talked about the importance of a teacher in helping students come to a place of being able to guide themselves.

Lola had felt a desire for a mentor, particularly after completing teacher training. She differentiated this from having a guru, which would not fit for her, saying ,

I think there’s lots of teachers in life, and they come in all shapes and forms, but I did feel like there was a lack of consistent mentoring. I felt like, oh, I’m going to be a teacher, I want my *own* teacher.

Lola examined the need she felt for a teacher, and through introspection and reading, came to a realization that “the teacher is within,” and began to cultivate her inner teacher, which she described as “lighting a fire under yourself.” This metaphor of ‘lighting a fire,’ which was shared by Anandita, speaks to the activation of mindfulness and the

transformative change that may occur through this process, which will be discussed further in subsequent clusters.

For Sarah, the key teacher in her tradition is not someone that she practices with on a regular basis, but is still someone with whom she feels a connection and a sense of gratitude towards, and identifies as her teacher. A sense of connection with the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh was what initially brought her to practice in that tradition, a feeling of resonance with his teachings and the way of being in the world that was modelled.

The theme of *challenges* represents the drawbacks, or less positive experiences that practitioners have had in practicing with groups. For Jane, this meant that “sometimes, when the [yoga] classes are huge, it’s hard to connect [...] Probably in a smaller class it would be more of a group feeling.” Lola also felt that sometimes the last thing she wants is to touch the person next to her, in contrast to the feelings of connection she sometimes has felt. For Anandita, group yoga practice can be restrictive, as it does not always allow the freedom to practice as would feel best for her body at that time, as well as the fact that other practitioners can be distracting or disruptive to one’s personal practice.

Lola pointed out that these challenging experiences regarding practice in large groups may be a result of the disconnect between modern yoga instruction and traditional methods. She had learned from one of her own teachers, that “these practices were usually done one on one, teacher to student,” and that some traditionalists feel that “the group dynamic has [...] warped its essence, the essence of yoga.” Lola also expressed a sense that the modern yoga class, often with dozens of students in rows, has attracted varying levels of commitment to the traditional path of yoga. “Everybody is there for

different reasons, and some people come and they don't respect it and you feel that, like I always feel that in the room." Modern practitioners may be meeting needs with their practice that do not include beliefs in traditional yogic culture or spirituality. Because of a sensitivity to the different energies present in group practices, Lola finds that particularly for meditation, she has had more positive experiences practicing on her own.

B. Self in Relation

The category of *self in relation* encompasses the lived experiences of practitioners, their *ways of being* and relating with themselves, their experiences of *mindfulness in relationships*, and their *relationship with environment* (Table 3). In grouping the clusters, it made sense to create the category of *self in relation* by combining these clusters, as the ways of being that describe practitioners' relationships with themselves form the foundation for relating with others – with the intention of being present and non-reactive, having awareness of self, and an attitude of compassion. Sarah spoke to this interlocking nature of mindfulness in relationships, saying "there's such a relationship there between being mindful of the self and being mindful of others, I see that as intricately linked."

Table 3.

Self in Relation Clusters and Respective Themes

Clusters		
Ways of Being	Mindfulness in Relationships	Relationship with Environment
Themes within Clusters		
Slowing down	Being present	Noticing
Present awareness	Mindful relating	Appreciation
Acceptance	Interbeing	
Compassion		

The clusters include themes of relating with the self and others, embodying the dimensions of mindfulness that are found in operational definitions of mindfulness. These themes include qualities that practitioners consciously strive to cultivate and practice in daily life, and their descriptions of the qualities are embedded within lived experience that occurs through the intention to live mindfully. Kabat-Zinn (2003a) notes that this emphasis on nurturing and refining one's inherent capacity for mindfulness and bringing this quality to daily life is a key tenet of Buddhist traditions. This category represents the experiences of mindfulness integrated into the lifeworlds of participants.

Separation of themes was challenging at points as it was important for the researcher to remain true to the words of practitioners, which were sometimes used interchangeably or with slightly different meanings by different individuals. Care in

grouping the themes involved asking questions from the Mindful Inquiry spiral regarding how the researcher was relating with and conceptualizing the ‘other’ and her experiences.

Ways of Being. This cluster includes practitioners’ descriptions of how mindfulness has been experienced in relating with themselves, and comprises those qualities which are commonly found in definitions of mindfulness – attention, awareness, acceptance, and compassion. The cluster of Ways of Being interlocks with the former cluster of practitioners’ experiences of practice, and the subsequent clusters of themes describing practitioners’ experiences of mindfulness in their relating with others and the environment. They have been separated in this way in order to illustrate the lived experience of mindfulness practitioners beyond formal practice.

The first theme, *slowing down*, builds on the idea of the refuge of mindfulness practice, but speaks to practitioners’ being mindful in everyday life. Mindfulness has helped Anandita “to slow down, and it helped my brain to slow down.” Jo feels almost that “time stretches out” as a result of the energy that she has gained through mindfulness, creating an ease and a feeling that even during busy times she doesn’t need to rush. For Sarah, there is a symbiotic relationship between breathing and slowing down, which is a key part of her practice. She found that “it’s kind of one and the same really, breathing helps me to stop, and when I stop, I remember to breathe more.” The practice of breathing is key, and practitioners speak about the breath in relation to many of the other themes that emerged. With relation to the following theme, practitioners talked about the breath as a link to the present moment.

The second theme, *present awareness*, speaks to practitioners’ non-judgemental awareness of their subjective reality, including emotions, thoughts, and sensations in the

present moment. Jane described this awareness of her body and emotions in saying, “I can feel like when I start to get stressed and my hands start to clench and my shoulders come up.” Non-judgemental awareness of the responses of the body allows practitioners to use the tools of their practice to calm or ground themselves. For example, Jane went on to describe how she would do some breathing upon awareness of stress in her body. The idea of cultivating awareness is the first step in living the practice in daily life, and practitioners spoke about the non-judgemental quality of this awareness as well, and the importance of being aware of judgements, when they do come up, without judging the judgements.

Jane describes how she lives out the present awareness that she cultivated through mindful yoga practice: “I think because of the practice, like having to learn how to be present, and live in the moment and be in the moment, that it’s helped me...” Expanding on this sense that the practice has been helpful in her daily life, in terms of being present, she expressed the following:

Instead of worrying, like, oh my god, this is going to happen, and what if this happens, or like, dwelling on what happened before, it helps me be more present in what’s happening now.

This means being fully aware and in the present moment, as much as possible, and recognizing when she is not, and drawing attention gently back to the present.

Awareness of thoughts is an important element of present awareness, as being aware that one is caught up in thoughts, or as Sarah describes, “trips of the mind,” is key.

For Jo, awareness of her mind and thoughts also lends a sense of perspective and an opportunity to be more present.

The mindfulness that I have allows me to be aware of the thoughts that I'm having and realize that, you know, that my thoughts might not be accurate [...] to recognize what is happening and be able to step back from that...

Being able to perceive thoughts objectively is a key element of practitioners' awareness.

For Sara, "mindfulness practice is around being as aware as possible of how I'm reacting to my environment and what's happening in my life." Lola described this growing awareness as a sense of waking up, and that "when you start to practice yoga you really do realize how much asleep you've been in other parts of your life." When I asked her to say more about the experience of waking up, she shared how it comes about through "being sensitive to what you're feeling and what you notice, and comes from a certain wisdom into the opposite, you know, meaning that you've been shut down." This sense of awareness through contrasting being present with living in a less mindful way, was shared in others stories as well.

Jo described an awareness of these two sides of the experience, and a sense of being more in tune with herself and her behaviour, in the following:

Something I noticed is that I'm not so caught up in habits, so if I'm, I don't sort of engage in unconscious behaviours, like I used to, so if that's eating or, what do I do when I'm stressed, shopping, that, instead of unconsciously, or just sort of doing that to make myself feel better, I don't need to do that. I'm much more aware, because I'm more aware of what I'm feeling, I'm more aware of what's happening...

This practice of awareness is central to mindfulness, and Jo likened awareness to a muscle that needs to be worked to become stronger. Practitioners highlighted the importance of cultivating awareness throughout their lives, and in all of the situations and activities they are involved with. Lola described this in the following:

I try to bring that sort of awareness to, literally everything, especially when I'm doing things like, or, just around the house, just trying to cultivate that one pointed attention, on my breath, on my body, so that I'm not on automatic pilot and I'm not doing something mechanically...

Sometimes, the practice of a witnessing, and nurturing awareness was quite explicit. Practitioners spoke about this cultivation of a witness within present experience. For example, Sarah spoke about a practice of awareness in noticing when difficult emotions are arising for her, and greeting them.

To say, oh, hello irritation, if I notice that arises, or, hello anxiety. [...] Just being able to take that time to just acknowledge it and in doing that I find it dissipates and I feel closer to myself.

Anandita also spoke about the self awareness that comes about through mindfulness, saying "it gives me a much better understanding of myself, so again, I can say, ok, I'm angry..." Self awareness through mindfulness also came up for Anandita around managing pain.

Taking the time to recognize weak spots or the fact that in one particular moment doing one particular thing I was really not in as much pain as my brain thought I was, and so coming to recognize.

[...] really going back to, ok, what is actually happening right now.

This present awareness became a means of relating with herself, and decreasing experiences of pain, through a non-judging witness.

The theme of *acceptance* builds on practitioners' awareness of what is coming up for them in the moment, and encompasses ideas of acceptance of experiences and emotions, as well as a sense of perspective that comes through not resisting or denying experiences, but rather being with what they are experiencing. For Sarah, this means "more acceptance, so it's kind of like a letting go of...elements within the self that are binding or blocking, that can be blocking to a deeper more calm connection with the self and others." Acceptance in this way can be likened to a release of attachment. Sarah also added that "in general [mindfulness] helps me to be more at peace with myself, and in the world, really." Jo spoke about her intention to be present with whatever comes up in awareness as well, rather than "stuffing it" as she may have done in the past.

Jane was "way more accepting" of herself due to her practice, and she also elaborated on how acceptance helps her to

Realize that I can't change anything that happened before and

I have no idea what's going to happen later, so I might as well just be ok with

what's happening now, so I guess that's reduced my stress.

When Jane does find herself worrying she accepts this as well, while trying not to spend too much time with it.

Yoga has increased Jo's acceptance for her body and created an intrinsic quality as well.

Since doing yoga, it's like, instead of coming like I'm trying to put

these outside restraints on myself, what I do is coming from the inside, so I want to eat well, my body wants to move, and it feels good when it moves [...] It's like it's coming from the inside rather than the outside.

For Lola, there was even an element of surprise at this quality of the practice.

I spent kind of my earlier years as an adolescent and my early 20's being hopelessly cut off from my body and I had no idea that there was a physical practice out there that could make me... want to accept myself instead of want to change myself. That's kind of the thing that I've always been most fascinated with, in terms of my practice, is how to come from a place that's there's nothing wrong with me, you know...

This revelation around acceptance that is nurtured through her practice has become a central theme in the way Lola works as a yoga teacher.

The theme of *compassion* builds on the theme of acceptance, and includes the idea of nurturing, and a sense of lovingkindness – an attitude of caring – that is brought to one's being in the world. For Jane, the experience of yoga has helped her to be more compassionate towards herself. Her practice has “been so good for my state of mind. Just good. I love yoga. I'm way nicer to myself than I was before.” Compassion is important in Anandita's asana practice as well, particularly as she strives to take care of herself and accept limitations of her body that are a result of injuries. She said, “I'm learning to respect [my body] and respect what it can and can't do, and listen.”

Sarah spoke about the experience of compassion through mindfulness as well, linking “acceptance and compassion”, and a sense of “making contact more deeply with the self” as key qualities that have been particularly beneficial and meaningful for her.

Mindfulness in Relationships. The cluster of mindfulness and relationships is linked with practitioners’ experiences of self-awareness and self-compassion that were described in the previous cluster. In this cluster, values of mindfulness practice are brought into relationships with others.

This begins with *being present* with others, which builds on self-awareness, and involves being aware of the other, as they are present to what is actually happening in their relating. Sarah spoke about this intention of bringing mindfulness into interactions with people, “just in terms of trying to just really be there with them, listen to them, use, it would be deep listening in this practice, and, use mindful speech...” She went on to describe her thoughts in relation to a quote from her teacher on the nature of love that was meaningful for her.

The real act of loving someone is to be present to them, so, for me, that’s really connected in with my definition of love, more so in my life now, it’s like that’s a key element. If that’s not there, how can love really take place, right?

Sarah also described an interaction with a close friend during a day of mindfulness practice that involved a very meaningful felt sense of connection without words. To be truly present with another can be a very simple and profound experience when accompanied by intention of mindfulness. Yoga has helped Lola to value relationships, and be “more reverent, sort of, how lucky I am to have somebody in my life.” Jane also

spoke about the importance and benefits for her of being fully present in her intimate relationship, and how the awareness of being present and not being present in interactions has been cultivated through her practice.

Anandita noticed assumptions about what was going on around her, and the ways she was interacting with others. She found that “with practicing mindfulness really going back to, ok, what is actually happening right now, how am I interacting with the people around me” was very helpful. Jo described this same sense of gaining perspective through being able to “stand back” and really hear what is going on. Drawing on an awareness based on being truly present to what is happening with others forms the basis for responding in a mindful way.

Being fully present and aware in interactions with others allows practitioners to choose *mindful relating* in their relationships. This theme captures practitioners’ intention of mindful communication and interaction that grows from the intention of non-judgement and the qualities of compassion that were discussed in preceding themes.

Jo noticed the impact of mindfulness practice in her relationships, saying, “my relationships are better, because I’m not as reactive.” For Jane, mindfulness practice provides her with a way to be present in her relationships, even when they are challenging, and knows “it’s not going to solve my family problems, if I get in a fight with my boyfriend, it’s not going to make things all better but it definitely helps my perspective on things, and it sometimes makes me realize it’s not as big of a deal as I think it is.” This ability to be present and to engage with equanimity is central in participants’ experiences of mindfulness in daily life.

Anandita described how mindfulness has “been really good in terms of dealing with people because it gives me a way to stop and reflect a little bit, so, if somebody hits a nerve, you know, I can actually take a couple of minutes and say wait a minute, they hit a nerve and number one that doesn’t mean I have to react and number two they didn’t necessary mean to hit the nerve.” This awareness of self in relation provides practitioners with a choice in acting which incorporates acceptance and compassion. Anandita indicated a sense of deeper connection with family and friends, and a sense of openness, which is related to her non-reactivity.

Sarah spoke about this quality in terms of a commitment to living the values of mindfulness, that non-reacting includes extending towards others the attitudes she values:

An openness to viewing and relating [...] a commitment to connecting with compassion and acceptance. Like I certainly will get irritated by sangha members [...] and it was a real opportunity to be like, ok, so what are these teachings, you know, what am I reading about, what am I listening to, what am I aspiring to...

The interactions with others provide another opportunity to practice mindfulness in everyday life.

A challenge in separating themes of practitioners’ experiences of mindfulness, is the inherent value of interconnection in these practices. This sense of connection extends to experiences in relation to others and can be described as *interbeing*. Interbeing is a word from the Buddhist tradition which I first encountered in the works of Thich Nhat Hanh. Interbeing speaks to the sense that all living beings are connected, that there is a universality and connection among all life (Hanh, 1991). Sarah spoke directly to this

quality of interbeing, as something that is central to this tradition, that is, a focus on connectivity.

For Anandita, her practice also reminds her of the connectivity that exists among all beings.

[It] comes back to knowing that at the end of the day, there is this constant energy flow that goes amongst all of us and we're all here to help each other, to help each other learn, and to help each other grow.

This intention of approaching the world with compassion and a desire to help is rooted in the concept of interconnectivity, which is a value held in yogic and Buddhist spirituality. For Sarah, there is a realization that this concept is “a little bit radical,” to accept that human beings are “all connected, and, we depend of each other and we *affect* one another.” This sense of connectivity seems contradictory to some North American ideas about independence, but practitioners expressed a sense of freedom in embracing the value of interbeing, and being grateful for their relationships.

Relationship with Environment. Themes in this category contain aspects of practitioners' stories that had to do with a sense of deepened awareness of, and connection with, their environment, the natural world, and other cultures. The theme of *noticing* captures practitioners' experiences of noticing more, or becoming more attuned with their environment. Reflecting on how her yoga practice has influenced her life, Jane stated, “It's just helped me notice, what it feels like, I just notice more things, more things in nature.” Jane also explained how self-awareness is linked to awareness on a larger scale. “I think it's just that sense of turning inward, but then you can see more of what's happening around you.” In becoming more aware of herself, she became more aware of

her environment, describing how she would notice things more, like a tree in her neighbourhood, which she never really saw before, and truly see it.

In an e-mail sent after our interview, Lola shared some thoughts on this theme that she wished to include. She wrote that she has “become much more sensitive and attuned to [her] environment in both a local and global way.” Lola explained that her practice has made her more mindful of the influence of environmental factors such as media – the television programs she watches, music she listens to, and the interpretation of events present in the media – “all that external ‘stuff’ that I can avoid or face head on.” In our interview, she spoke about how “going out in nature [...] having a really wonderful walk by the ocean where I’m focussing on my breath” is yoga for her and how yoga has helped her to experience more in her life and in her environment. Sarah has also felt the impact of mindfulness in her relationship with the natural world, saying,

I see it in my relationship with nature, like I pay way more attention to flowers than I have before in my life, and I really like that, and perhaps the flowers do too, I don’t know...

Along with noticing, Sarah described a deeper appreciation of nature through mindfulness, elaborating that “there is a certain care that comes through when I look at a flower, an appreciation, reverence...” This illustrates the theme of *appreciation*, which speaks to practitioners’ greater sensitivity to and reverence for the beauty of the natural world. Sara spoke about her experiences in nature and her intention to “really experience it, really draw it in,” and appreciates the experience as it was happening. This sense was shared by Jane, who related an experience of seeing an owl in her neighbourhood one night, an experience that was one of the highlights of her year. She also talked about how

the noticing of new things is sometimes surprising, how “maybe just something I never noticed before, all of a sudden it’s so beautiful.” The idea of finding beauty in the natural world, and connecting with nature was very important in Sara’s story as well. She described spending time in nature, and appreciating a connection with the natural world, as one of her mindfulness practices.

Metatheme of Integrity

A guiding principle in coding the interview data for this study has been working with the integral nature of mindfulness and representing practitioners’ stories with integrity, demonstrating the interlocking, multifaceted dimensions of mindfulness. Working with the model of Mindful Inquiry, and continually coming back to these values, was part of the striving for integrity in conducting the research. Moving towards completion of the project, the need for a metatheme that encompassed the integral wholeness of practitioners’ lived experiences became clear. The metatheme that has emerged has to do with both definitions of integrity – the sense of authenticity and honesty in the living and valuing of the practice and its roots, which includes values and ethics about mindful living, as well as the sense of wholeness and integrality that practitioners experience through their living of their practice.

In keeping with the idea of the interlocking nature of the themes, clusters, and categories, the metatheme of integrity, in its meaning of integral wholeness, illustrates the interwoven nature of practitioners’ experiences. This metatheme of integrity is woven throughout the participants’ narratives including their descriptions of their experiences in relationship with their practice, with themselves, with others, and in their being-in-the-world. Sarah voiced this in expressing the challenge of describing her practice:

It's such a multilayered, rich practice, and I am finding it kind of hard when you ask me a question to stay with that, cause it is so expansive, which is great, just talking about it in this way is really showing me the richness of it, and how, extensive, for me, the way I experience it, the sense of value of it, it's quite huge, really.

Practitioners found it challenging at times when I asked them to say more about something, to elaborate, as part of the idea of mindfulness is not analyzing one's experience, but simply witnessing the unfolding of being.

An expression of valuing the richness and the integral nature of the practice was shared by Jo.

It's not just an hour and a half in a class or 20 minutes on the cushion, it's a whole lifestyle, and, and that's been, you know, it fits with my values and the that way I like to live, the way that I want to live, and the way that I want to be. And that was part of the meditation and the Eastern philosophy and yoga coming together is that it all really fit with the way I want to live my life and how I want to be and trying to walk as gently on the earth and to be as compassionate and kind, of a person as I can be and be as aware as I can, so, it all fits with my values, and, so, yeah, I mean in my work and in my relationships, so it's very separate from you know, doing 20 minutes on the cushion, or it's much *more* than 20 minutes on the cushion.

The holistic nature of her practice was evident as Sarah described the ideas of engaged Buddhism, particularly the idea that one becomes more attuned to the suffering

of others through increasing mindfulness of oneself. Sarah expanded on the teachings of her practice regarding mindful living as well, “like washing the dishes meditation, answering your telephone meditation, hugging meditation, mindful eating, I mean they’re very explicit that this isn’t just about sitting on your little cushion, right.” This idea of living the practice “off the mat” and “off of the cushion” is crucial for practitioners. Anandita said “I guess what it comes down to is living life, and living life consciously.”

Lola wrote that her mindfulness practice has led to “being a more thoughtful and mindful consumer materially/spiritually/mentally,” and Sarah spoke about the role of social responsibility in her tradition. Jane has begun to think more about how she consumes goods that are produced in different areas of the world. “I think that has to do with yoga too, like just being aware of, our resources on this planet, and where our clothes come from...” Practitioners describe this greater emphasis on living in accordance with the values of their mindfulness practice, and choosing a voluntary simplicity as they consciously questioned consumption and reduced their purchasing of things, especially clothes. Jane questioned the need to buy new things, instead of repairing and continuing to use the things she already has. Lola also described consuming less. Although she had “never been a pack rat,” she found she cares much less about buying things, and feels she doesn’t need “any more stuff” in her life.

There was also a sense of gratitude and appreciation of the practice in all its richness. For example, Lola talked about wishing she had discovered the practice sooner, but at the same time, feeling lucky that she had discovered it at all and had the opportunity to practice. This extended to a gratitude for all she has in her life – being born in North America and having the freedom and privilege to practice. Anandita

expressed a deepened respect and appreciation for the practice when she began to re-experience it after an extended absence. For Sarah, a gratitude for the tradition of mindfulness she practices included sorrow for the conditions which led Thich Nhat Hanh to become the teacher he is today – the Vietnam War and the immense suffering that he witnessed and experienced in his country.

Part of the sense of authenticity is the acknowledgement that mindfulness practice is a continuous path; there is no achieving of mindfulness as a final destination. As part of this journey, there are days that are challenging. For example, Anandita stated “It’s not like there aren’t days where situations come up and I still find it a struggle, but, overall, underneath, there’s a sense of calm and a sense of peace.” She also added, that “this is not something that happens overnight and it’s not a cure for anything.” Living life is a continual process that can be enhanced by mindfulness practice. This connects to practitioners’ experiences of ebb and flow in their practice, and to the sense of non-striving in one’s practice. Jo described it as letting go of “having to grasp or be effortful,” but rather experiencing the range of experience, even when there is struggle or challenge.

For Lola, authenticity includes a desire to be authentic in her practice, without getting caught up in doing it in a certain way. She describes this as especially important, because it means being congruent, and living a value she teaches, around approaching the practice with openness to experience, and not having an agenda. This also means preserving the authenticity of the practice in her teaching and practice, in an age where there is a commercialization of yoga practice that does not always uphold traditional values. She described this as a struggle sometimes. “Remaining authentic to myself and remaining authentic to the practice,” while noticing some frustration with an element of

“superficiality that still exists within the context of what I’m doing.” For Lola, maintaining the integrity of the practice is central to how she is developing as a teacher.

Finally, an observation in conducting the interviews and in listening to the tapes during transcribing, was the shifts in tone of voice as participants described the benefits they had felt through practice. There was sometimes a hesitancy, a lowering of voice, or use of a self-deprecatory tone, around the use of phrases that could be considered clichéd. For example, Jane said “I don’t think like, ‘yoga’s totally changed my life’ [in a joking tone], but then I think it has.” She went on to express the difficulty in describing the feeling of the practice without seeming gimmicky, reiterating “I love [yoga], I love the way it makes me feel physically, I love the way it makes me feel mentally, I always know it makes me feel better, and so it’s not gimmicky, because it’s something that I care about and feel passionate about.” There was a desire among all participants to express the experience in an authentic way, to capture the meaningfulness of the practice, the resonance that they felt, and for it to sound credible.

Jo voiced a challenge to herself as she heard herself tell her story of mindfulness practice.

It’s funny cause I’m hearing myself say this stuff, and it’s true,
and there’s a part of me that’s going oh my god this sounds so
hokey, because you know, it’s not stuff that I talk about that much
and I’m aware that there’s times where I’ve heard other people talk
about this stuff and kind of been, oh yeah, whatever...

This feeling, of embarrassment almost, appeared in the tone or words of several of the practitioners at various times.

This sense, while not always present in the words, but in the tone of voice and laughter of practitioners, is an essential aspect of the stories of these individuals who have taken up mindfulness practices. This theme reflects the desire to articulate that while the practice is all of the things captured in the previous codes, that it is also something more, something real and practical, yet ineffable, that runs through a practitioner's life as a constant thread. This also points to the difficulty of describing in language a non-verbal experience; that which is experienced without being consciously known. This thread weaves the other aspects of the experience together, as I listen to the stories, and is as profoundly simple as breathing, as awareness of the present moment, or the essence of 'just being' as some described it. Practitioners conveyed that the mindfulness practice, be it yoga asanas, mindful breathing, sitting meditation, or walking, was something more than the feelings or experiences that can be described.

There was an emphasis on integrity in the describing of their experiences of mindfulness practice, a mindful pause before answering, and a sense in the responses of trying to portray the experience with authenticity and a reverence for the tradition. The experience of the interviews left the interviewer with a strong felt sense of the value that practitioners hold for their practice. Sarah spoke to the challenge of describing experiences that were not often put into words, saying "I'm feeling like, whoah, I'm trying to describe things that are quite challenging to describe, but it's kind of fun to describe too." There was a confidence in Sarah's responses that seemed rooted in a deep respect for the tradition of mindfulness. Lola explicitly stated, "I think its important that yoga is represented in an honest and realistic way - it seems that a lot of people still perceive it as New Agey, far out, or dubious wish-wash - when in fact, in my experience,

it is actually extremely grounding and practical.” She was very clear about the importance of maintaining the integrity of the practice, as it becomes more separate from its roots in a standardization and main-streaming of the practice in some North American interpretations.

Summary

The findings of the current qualitative Mindful Inquiry include two main categories. The category of *relationship with practice* illustrates practitioners’ experiences of the journey of mindfulness practice – how they came to the practice, changes in their practice over time, and a sense of resonance with traditional mindfulness practices including meditation and yoga. Their experiences of the teachings and traditions of formal practice included a sense of refuge, feelings of groundedness, an appreciation of the holistic nature of the practice, and feelings of integration and empowerment. The category of *group practice* gathered the themes of practitioners’ positive experiences of connection and community through practice, including the importance of intentionality and a skilled teacher. Challenging aspects of group practice were also described.

The category of *self in relation* represents the qualities of mindfulness as it has become integrated into the lifeworlds of practitioners. This includes ways of being that represent qualities of mindfulness that are carried into daily life, and relationship with the self, with others, and one’s environment.

The metatheme of *integrity* summarizes the themes of wholeness that practitioners experience – that the practice of mindfulness is not contained by formal practice, and that the experience of mindfulness is something deeply authentic for practitioners, as well as

something that is challenging to describe. This included gratitude for the practice, and a desire to live in integrity with the values of the tradition.

These findings speak to the experiences of individuals who have come to experience the deeper dimensions of mindfulness practice, through a holistic felt sense of its many layers. There is a conscious choice among practitioners to carry the values into daily living as a necessity for living in congruence with the practice, as well as an intrinsic belief in the value of living with mindfulness. The following section will discuss these results in relation to the literature on mindfulness and the practice of Mindful Inquiry.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

Previous chapters have outlined the existing literature on mindfulness and laid the groundwork for the current research study. In the following section, findings will be considered in relation to previous research and the process of Mindful Inquiry will be discussed in relation to the current study. Implications for counselling, including directions for helpers and clients, will be explored, along with future directions for research. Limitations of the current study are also outlined.

Links to the Literature

Relationship with Practice

Findings in the category of *Relationship with Practice* speak to the journey of mindfulness practice for individuals with a long-term relationship with mindfulness, which is missing from the scholarly literature. As most quantitative studies focus on the results of an eight- or ten-week mindfulness based intervention, these long-term aspects are missed. This is unfortunate as many of the benefits practitioners described in this research demonstrate that the experience of benefits increases over an extended period of practice (Slede & Pomerantz, 2001; Weintraub, 2004).

The experience of ebb and flow is discussed in the practitioner literature and bringing the practice into everyday life is explicitly related to this. For example, although individuals may experience ebb and flow in their formal practice, living with the intention of being mindful means that one is still practicing (Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). For example, during the householder stage of life, when one is working, keeping house, and perhaps raising children, living and performing one's daily activities with

mindfulness can be considered one's yoga or mindfulness practice (Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Additionally, the challenge of re-committing to the daily discipline of practice, and the importance of a personal expression of practice, is frequently mentioned in practitioner literature, as an acknowledgement of the challenge of living mindfully in a society that often fosters mindlessness (Farhi, 2004; Iyengar, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This challenge and commitment was present in the experiences of the practitioners who shared their stories in this research, as they talked about finding a personal expression of mindfulness practices that fit within their lifeworlds. This commitment to the practice also speaks to the sense of resonance which practitioners experience with the practice, and this sense of fit provides a model and framework which is supportive of personal growth and well-being (Farhi, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Such resonance will not be the experience of all individuals who try mindfulness practices, but this speaks to the holistic nature of the practice, and its historical purposes (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a)

Experiences of practitioners with regards to the stress reducing, calming, and energizing aspects of practice are well represented in quantitative descriptions of the benefits of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness-based interventions are associated with decreases in stress and increased well-being (Baer, 2003; Chang et al., 2004; Scherer-Dickson, 2004). For yoga practitioners, the dual nature of the practice may also be attributed to the relaxing and stimulating effects of breathing and postures on the nervous system, which results in a balance of calm and energy (Singh Khalsa & Stauth, 2002). Practitioners also spoke about the benefits of mindful versus mindless exercise, a benefit described by Netz and Lidor (2003). Mind-body-spirit integration and the holistic nature of mindfulness practice is not discussed in most quantitative interventions, although

Kabat-Zinn is explicit about the importance of recognizing the richness of the traditions in terms of these holistic benefits (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a).

The themes of refuge and empowerment do not appear in the literature. In fact, attrition in some research studies was occasionally due to participants feeling overloaded by the commitment to attend MBSR sessions (Baer, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2005). One's mindfulness community is specifically referred to as a refuge in the Buddhist tradition. Practitioner literature is replete with examples of the sense of refuge and respite that practitioners experience in their practice, as well as the feeling of empowerment that emerges through immersion in the practice (Farhi, 2004; Hanh, 1991; Iyengar, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

The cluster of themes that represented practitioners' experiences of mindfulness practice with groups, such as a meditation sangha or yoga classes at a studio, expand on some of the qualitative findings regarding MBSR for nurses, and also raises some new issues with regards to group practice (Cohen-Katz et al., 2005). Practitioners spoke about the challenge of practicing with a group, sometimes in terms of the distraction present with other practitioners, which was an issue raised by participants in Cohen-Katz et al.'s study (2005). The benefits of practicing with a group and having the shared experiences of being part of a mindfulness community may also be felt in the short-term when participating in a MBSR program (Cohen-Katz et al.). It is likely, however, that the deeper sense of trust, community, and connectivity may need to build over time, through witnessing and being a part of sustained commitment to living and practicing mindfulness.

The experience of practitioners with regards to the need for some form of sustained mentorship is not captured in quantitative studies, but this feeling may account for numbers of participants who have not continued mindfulness practices at follow-up times in quantitative studies (Baer, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2005). This also speaks to the unanticipated and unsolicited qualitative data that emerged during a MBSR study with nurses, as participants felt compelled to share about the challenges and benefits of their experience with the program (Cohen-Katz et al., 2005).

Perhaps providing ongoing support or referrals for research participants could become part of the ethical requirements for conducting research on mindfulness-based interventions. There is also an assertion within practitioner literature about the importance of discovering one's inner teacher or guide as part of the mindfulness journey, an aspect of the experience that was mentioned in the current research, which may be helpful for newcomers to mindfulness to consider (Farhi, 2004). If researchers are mindful of the needs of new practitioners with regards to on-going mentoring, incorporating ways of nurturing a trust in one's inner teacher could also be beneficial.

Self in Relation

Findings in the category of *Self in Relation* represent the qualities of mindfulness found in the mindfulness literature. Practitioners spoke about the benefits of mindfulness in increasing the intention and ability to foster present moment awareness, non-judgement, and acceptance, as well as the impact of these ways of being on their relationships. These themes fit with the results of previous research and literature on the benefits of mindfulness in fostering qualities of emotional balance (Hayes & Feldman, 2004), as well as the impact of being present in fostering psychological well-being

(Brown & Ryan, 2003), and supporting integration of mind, body, and spirit.

Additionally, these findings support previous research that demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness in increasing self-awareness, acceptance, and empathy (Shapiro et al., 1998; Shapiro et al, 2005).

These findings also speak to the benefits of mindfulness in supporting healthy relationships, including self-awareness and personal well-being as well as the nurturing of presence and compassion for others (Shapiro et al., 1998; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000; Shapiro et al., 2005). Mindfulness practices foster a non-reactive way of communicating, based on a respect and feeling of connection among individuals.

Feelings of awareness and connection with the environment – nature as well as things such as media - and an appreciation for the natural world speaks to a conscious living and reverence for nature and the environment one creates for oneself. These findings highlight the nature of mindfulness in fostering awareness of interbeing, and a connection with the natural world (Hanh, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Integrity

The metatheme of integrity represents the overarching values of wholeness and authenticity that practitioners expressed regarding their practice, and is an important dimension of this research. The hesitancy or self-deprecation that practitioners experienced in describing their experiences of practice highlights the misunderstandings that have historically existed between Eastern traditions and Western science (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). For example, traditional Eastern values of collectivism seem to be at odds with Western values of individualism, which might pathologize the concept of interbeing

as enmeshment or co-dependence. Rather, for participants, the sense of connectivity and interbeing was valued and enhanced personal feelings of wellbeing.

Practitioners also emphasized the importance of understanding the integral wholeness of the practice – that it truly is a life practice, which informs all areas of life, an important theme in practitioner literature as well (Cope, 1999; Farhi, 2004; Iyengar, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Additionally there was a combination of confidence in some practitioners' descriptions of the richness of practice, and some hesitancy or questioning of the "what and how" of experiences of mindfulness in other descriptions. Practitioners' investment in the practice was evident, and their belief in the value of mindfulness practice was also clear. There was safety within the contexts of our interviews in that practitioners knew I also valued the practices. Furthermore, there was the security of confidentiality and anonymity, that was assured through the informed consent process. There was still some sense of hesitation at times, perhaps a fear that I would not understand or would judge these experiences. I felt privileged that practitioners shared these intimate experiences of mindfulness and of being given the opportunity to represent these experiences.

The feelings practitioners described around integrity resonated for me, as the researcher. The hesitancy or joking that accompanied attempts to describe mindfulness echoed some of my own challenges in describing the focus and value of this research and my own experience of mindfulness in a way that would be accepted in academia. The aim of this research was to give voice to the stories of individuals who have adopted the practice, as these stories have been largely absent from academic literature or marginalized in their less quantifiable aspects.

The Spiral of Mindful Inquiry

Critical Turns

The critical turns of the Mindful Inquiry spiral invite the researcher to examine the socio-cultural circumstances in which one is working, as well as the ways in which one's own psychology and experiences colour perceptions and actions (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). This meant continually returning to an awareness of the value I place in mindfulness, journaling about my experiences of mindfulness in my personal and professional life, and questioning my assumptions about the ways I was hearing and interpreting the experiences of the practitioners I interviewed. Excerpts from my research journal appear in italics throughout this section. *Coming back to the experience – is how I experience the practice a shared sense? The quality of breathing, I read about this and hear about it from teachers and in the interviews. People describe the experience using similar words. Going back to these words to identify the themes, rather than being caught up in my own felt sense.*

The value I placed on mindfulness and my own experiences of the practice shaped my presence in the interviews, and I strove to cultivate a mindful presence with the practitioners I spoke with. I did not share my personal experiences of mindfulness, beyond acknowledging that I practiced yoga, and consciously worked to follow the experiences of practitioners in the moment. However I did feel a resonance with the experiences participants shared, and the interviews became their own type of shared experience. As the researcher situated at the centre of the research process, there was a delicate and necessary balancing of how much of my own thoughts and experiences to bring into the interviewing and analysis. *Not wanting to lead the interview by sharing*

how I resonate with the experience and what they are describing. Bringing the focus back to the individual sharing their story. Talking after the interview, though, it felt right to express gratitude and to share the sense of shared experience I felt in our interview.

Essentially, I decided that the important piece was to remain mindful of what experiences were coming up for me, and how I was processing the experiences of the research process. This was woven into the other aspects of the critical turns, particularly in remaining sensitive to how the communicative process was informed, and potentially enhanced, by my own practice of mindfulness. This commonality between researcher and participants provided a basis for equality. *It seemed that we were both aware of being mindful in the interview. Hearing her describe the feeling of being grounded, I also became more conscious of being grounded, being mindful in listening and following her experience, being truly present.*

Critical turns ask the researcher to link the inquiry “to the project of reducing suffering or increasing freedom, justice, or happiness in the world, either locally or globally or both” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p.47). I see this happening through increasing awareness of the benefits of mindfulness and the experiences of long-term practitioners, as mindfulness practice itself reduces suffering for individuals, those they interact with, and their environment. Conducting this Mindful Inquiry also meant engaging mindfully with participants, hopefully to increase happiness through some deepened awareness and appreciation of their own practices, a feeling that was voiced by practitioners in concluding our interviews.

Anandita’s comment about the deficiencies of the short term model of MBSR point to the limitations of some evidence-based Western therapeutic interventions. Some

Cognitive Behavioural techniques which research has found effective as short-term interventions share some of the characteristics of mindfulness and MBSR, such as conscious breathing, awareness of bodily tensions, and attitudes of acceptance versus rigidity (Cormier & Nurius, 2003). Unfortunately, clients who participate in these forms of therapy may find the lack of sustained support detracts from the effectiveness of the initial interventions.

Phenomenological Turns

Phenomenological turns invite the researcher to “pay attention to the nature of the phenomena being investigated by writing a deep phenomenological description of one’s own experience of it” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 48). This occurred in my research journal throughout the process, from conducting the review of the literature and crafting the proposal, to conducting interviews and transcribing and analyzing the data (Appendix A). Some of these reflections are included in the section on researcher’s experiences of mindfulness at the end of this chapter. I do not think that I could have conducted the interviews or worked with participants stories in a truly authentic, mindful way, without this experience, and the use of “imaginative variations” as suggested by the second phenomenological turn, has helped to elucidate this – how the inquiry would have been different if elements had changed.

For example, had I not been practicing mindfulness, and approaching the interviews with this intention, it is likely that the interviews would have been different. If I was not also engaged in a Research Methods course, during the analysis of data, my mindset as a researcher might have been different as I navigated multiple other roles. Having a more diverse sample of practitioners – males, youth, elderly, individuals who

were parenting young children, for example, would also have changed the research. My academic discipline, and the fact that I was actively engaged in counselling practice, influenced the final product, as a sociologist or historian would have very different perspectives from a counselling psychology student.

Phenomenological turns were particularly integral to this research, as the design was interpretive phenomenology. The turns which invite the researcher to gather descriptions from those involved was integral to the research, as was looking at the “interlocking web of typifications” through examining academic and practitioner literature along with descriptions of practitioners’ lifeworlds (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p.50). These typifications, and the different language used by practitioners and academics was at the forefront in the data coding process, as typifications had to be employed in the theming and clustering of elements of practitioners’ stories.

Hermeneutic Turns

Hermeneutic turns ask the researcher draw on the many pre-existing texts in the understanding and interpretation of current research by considering the elements of texts “as texts.” Pre-existing interpretations of mindfulness practices, particularly the academic/practitioner divide, were essential to explore in defining and separating elements of practitioners’ experiences. *Going back to the practitioner literature and the sutras – what are the themes here? Examining them as spiritual texts, the origins of hermeneutic inquiry. What is here that is also in the “texts” of the interviews? Work with the connections.*

The second hermeneutic turn was also particularly relevant, as I was forced to put my research agenda aside and “allow the movements of understanding to happen in their

own time”(Bentz & Shapiro, 1998 p. 51). This was challenging at times, as I put pressure on myself to get on with the project of completing the thesis, and at times when I felt discouraged due to lack of time or energy. *I almost resent the practice, or hearing about how wonderful it is in the interviews... Juggling everything, there just isn't enough time to go to a class, and yet I know that if I did I would feel so much better. I need to make some time to practice at home, to reconnect with that felt sense and just to release some of the tensions.* Ultimately, this turn was comforting and affirming as I was reminded of the importance of allowing time for understanding to develop, rather than risk imposing meaning that did not develop organically through immersion with the data.

The challenges I experienced in the analysis process were also affirmed in the final hermeneutic turn, which asks the researcher to make a space “for new ‘beings’ to emerge” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 51). I struggled with separating themes into clusters and categories, afraid that I would dilute the power of practitioners’ stories. In setting aside the analysis for a while, talking with people about this struggle, and making a space for new meaning to emerge, my conception of the interconnectedness evolved, and the metatheme of *integrity* was formed. This felt like an appropriate way to embrace the integral nature of mindfulness, and the sense of honesty and authenticity that was present in practitioners’ stories. *What is it? There is the wholeness and also this sense of wanting to be understood and taken seriously, which I definitely resonate with – appreciating the integrity of these traditional practices. What are the meanings of integrity – check out OED [Oxford English Dictionary online].*

Buddhist Turns

Buddhist turns ask the researcher to become aware of “addictions” with regards to the research, which could create illusions and suffering (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 52). Reminding myself to question assumptions and to engage mindfully, to step back from the project, and to be aware of my identifications with aspects of the experiences of practitioners was important, as was letting go of initial ideas about how the data should be organized. *This relationship quality – is this just me, because I am so focussed on relationships in counselling practice? But we are beings in relation...* Awareness of how I was situating myself in relation to the individuals I interviewed is also part of the Buddhist turns, as it is essential to be aware of how one defines and constructs the “other” of the research as other. *Need to balance – the sense of connection and resonance with the practitioners, especially now that I’ve read them so many times, their words are so ingrained in me. I have said some of these things myself, have felt these things myself, the benefits, how much it helps, and how holistic it feels. Acknowledging the connection and interbeing and still seeing the unique individuals within their life contexts. “Unique, just like everyone else.”* This awareness, and the letting go of attachment or illusions of ego as separate, was actually fostered through this research project. Participants reminded me of the interconnective nature of existence through their descriptions of mindfulness, as I listened to and read their stories. Bentz and Shapiro point to the importance of meditation in this process, and the link to phenomenological reflection in the bracketing of ego. Meditation and mindful yoga was an essential part of conducting this research, in relation to these Buddhist turns, and also in terms of simply engaging mindfully with the research process, as I strive to do throughout my life.

The practice of compassion and attention to the suffering of all sentient beings, along with a questioning of how this research helps to reduce suffering, is the third Buddhist turn of the mindful inquiry model. For me, the possibility of bringing greater awareness and understanding of mindfulness practices through this research involves a potential for reducing suffering. This turn also affirms my personal role in reducing suffering and a sense of appreciation for the role of mindfulness practitioners everywhere. This turn linked back to the first Buddhist turn as it brought to mind my ‘attachment’ to ethical veganism. Although vegetarianism is often linked to the quality of ahimsa, or non-violence, that is integral in Buddhism and yoga, a majority of modern practitioners do not feel it is imperative to be vegetarian. The issue did not come up in the interviews at all, and so I needed to release any attachment to this idea.

The Eightfold Path of Buddhism – the final Buddhist turn, refers to the eight imperatives which include right thought and action. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) point to the increase of the researchers’ ability to experience happiness through the research process, as this can become self-transformative through the process of being taken out of oneself. Engagement with the experiences of other practitioners has brought personal learning about myself and my practice. A significant amount of the satisfaction I have felt regarding this study has to do with the transformative nature of engaging in research and entering into the lifeworlds of the practitioners who share their stories.

Limitations

Specific demographic features have influenced the overall results. The current study is specific to the lived experiences of six females between the ages of 26 and 45 years. As the researcher was unable to recruit males who met the research criteria, the

results of the study may have some transferability only to females of this age range. All but one of the participants identified as Caucasian, limiting the transferability of results to other ethnic groups.

Participants also self-selected for the research by responding to the opportunity to describe their experiences of mindfulness practices. All of the individuals have developed a personal, long-term relationship with the practice. Additionally, four of the practitioners have sought training as yoga teachers, demonstrating a level of advanced practice and a desire to deepen their practice through the teacher training, which included study of philosophy and history of yoga as well as asanas, pranayama, and meditation, from the eight-limbed system. The practitioners whose mindfulness journeys were shared in this research may therefore not be representative of other individuals who practice mindfulness.

Implications for Counselling Practice

Main contributions of this research include a greater understanding of practitioners' experiences of the practice of mindfulness disciplines, and particularly how these practices influence conceptions of self and relationships. Especially significant perhaps are the rich descriptions of the benefits of mindfulness in nurturing self-acceptance and compassion, and for cultivating non-violence in relationships.

These benefits would be advantageous to counsellors in increasing self-awareness and skill in being present with clients, as noted by McCartney (2004), as well as reducing compassion-fatigue and burnout due to stress and overwork. Mindful living provides a sense of balance for practitioners that would be beneficial for counsellors, as well as their clients, through direct use as interventions, as well as the benefits of working with a

counsellor who is practicing mindfulness in their practice of counselling. This would increase the ethical nature of counselling work as well, as counsellors would move beyond an intention of non-harming to an integral sense of mindful ethics.

Findings in the area of group experience, and in several of the participants' descriptions of the importance of continued support and community on one's mindfulness journey, suggest the value of more sustainable mindfulness-based interventions, or some sort of follow-up option for participants in interventions such as MBSR. As Anandita described "It's like they light a fire under you and then just leave you to burn." The lack of continued support represents a limitation of this and other short-term therapy modalities. For individuals who have integrated the practice into their lives, the importance of a sustained connection of some sort is something perceived as desirable and beneficial.

Future Directions for Research

Although the participants represent a homogenous group in that all have adopted a mindfulness practice into their lives, mindfulness practices from different traditions represent distinct cultures, and it would be useful to examine the cultural differences inherent in the practices and in the backgrounds of practitioners. For example, community is a very important part of Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness, and group practice is integral to this tradition (Hanh, 1991). Focusing on more specific sub-groups may yield different themes.

Additionally, the long-term relationship with mindfulness needs to be further explored, as most existing studies focus on the effects of a short-term intervention. Practitioners who have been practicing for years have developed a much more complex

and integral relationship with the practice, as it is woven into different aspects of their lives, and perhaps changed in its expression over that time. Further understanding of nature of long-term mindfulness practices has implications for enhancing well-being in society, and might provide greater interest in supporting mindfulness-based programs by provincial and extended-health benefits programs.

Imaginative variations also raised the question of how having male participants would have changed the findings of the study. Women do represent the majority of yoga practitioners, but as mindfulness practices become more mainstream, more males are being drawn to yoga and mindfulness. Hearing from long-term male practitioners about what attracts them to the practice and what led to a long-term relationship might help to attract more men to this beneficial practice. As participants also cited the effects of mindfulness in their interactions and relationships with others, future research might examine more specifically the effects of mindfulness practices or mindfulness-based interventions for couples and families.

Researcher's Experiences of Mindfulness Practices

In conducting this research, a central concern has been to remain mindful of the value base from which the researcher is working. This is in accordance with the feminist belief that it is impossible to practice a value-free counselling, and that it is therefore necessary to continually examine the beliefs that one holds, and to be transparent in these values and beliefs (Enns, 1997). By extension, as a researcher in the discipline of Counselling Psychology, it is necessary to examine one's epistemological and ontological beliefs in undertaking research, in order to proceed with transparency about one's interest

and investment in the topic under investigation. Further discussion of these beliefs in conducting research was included in the methodology section.

My interest in this topic stems from my own experiences as a practitioner of Hatha yoga and mindfulness meditation. I first began to practice yoga asanas several years ago, and over the past two years experienced ebb and flow with relation to my practice. Before entering the Masters program, I had developed a daily practice that included meditation, yoga asanas and pranayama, and group practice several times per week. I have noticed the effects of mindfulness in terms of managing emotions, enhancing feelings of calm, and increasing my ability to manage stress. During the year prior to conducting this research, I was practicing yoga asanas and meditation regularly. This was first winter in which I did not experience symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder since arriving in Victoria five years ago, a benefit of yoga practice which has been noted by Weintraub (2004).

In both Buddhist and Yoga traditions, *ahimsa*, or non-violence, is a guiding philosophy. Called “the heart of yoga practice,” *ahimsa* refers to the cultivation of attitudes of kindness towards oneself and others (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.217). *Ahimsa* resonates with my values regarding ethical veganism, and in my ethical practices as a counsellor, to nurture well-being and do no harm. Practicing mindfulness, holding attitudes of non-violence and loving-kindness towards others and myself, has been transformative in terms of my well-being, relationships, and practice as a counsellor. Incorporating mindfulness-based interventions in my work with clients has proved beneficial, as clients have reported greater resiliency to stress, reduced anxiety, and

increased ability to manage difficult emotions while practicing conscious breathing and observing thought patterns.

Over the past year and a half, I experienced the further deepening of my personal practice as I completed yoga teacher training, conducted a review of the literature, and completed the proposal for this research. I have also experienced times of stress where time restrictions limited my ability to practice asanas regularly. I greatly missed my practice, and at times when I have been unable to practice, I have noticed, as other practitioners have described, how *not* practicing has an equally profound effect – namely reduced feeling of centred-ness, calm and energy (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Weintraub, 2004). Along with this came the struggle of reducing attachment to my ideas about formal practice time, and capturing moments throughout my days to practice pranayama, mudras meditation, and mindful walking, releasing attachment to what my practice ‘should’ be. Cultivating compassion for myself in the midst of the challenge of balancing life as a student, practicum counsellor, crisis line trainer, family member, and researcher, was essential. I have noticed increased comfort and a feeling of coming home as I recommitted to a formal practice.

I have found my practice an important touchstone and resource in centering and grounding myself and helping to integrate the many layers of learning as a student, counsellor, practitioner, researcher, and teacher, as well as providing physical balance for my body among the many hours spent sitting in ‘study posture.’ I feel a deep resonance between my practice of mindfulness and my practice of counselling, and have observed how bringing mindful awareness into sessions with clients has enhanced my ability to be present, non-judgemental, and empathic. Mindful pauses for breathing and centering

between meetings with clients has also been helpful in cultivating a fresh present-focus in order to truly be with individuals. Mindfulness has helped me to attune better to clients, having awareness of when I was feeling ungrounded in sessions, and being better able to notice when my felt sense was due to the emotions I was picking up from the client. Since first beginning to help as a crisis line volunteer, I have become much more aware of my own present-moment experiences in helping. This has enhanced my ability to hold a space for clients, through cultivating a genuine mindful presence, and approaching the session with openness, curiosity, and a focus on the present moment. Using the tools of mindfulness to slow down, and help clients to become more calm and grounded in session has also enhanced the counselling relationship and facilitated work with clients.

In conducting this research as a Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), the process of research has also constituted a mindfulness practice. This mindful inquiry would be termed Jnana yoga, in the yogic tradition. An intellectual practice, jnana yoga is often called the yoga of wisdom or knowledge, and involves contemplation and the study of yoga texts (Feuerstein, 2003). An intention in approaching the research as a mindfulness practice was to enhance researcher presence during the interview process, as well as analysis. Attitudes of non-attachment and right discernment, important qualities of mindfulness practice, served to enhance the process of Mindful Inquiry.

In accordance with my values as a counsellor and individual, as well as the aims of Mindful Inquiry, I approached this research process with sensitivity to diversity, and a sincere desire to honour these traditional health practices, being mindful of their cultural roots. Acknowledging these cultural roots also means acknowledging the existential and spiritual dimensions of mindfulness practices, which may or may not apply for modern

practitioners. Honouring the essence and expression of practice, as the individual has taken it up, was a central concern in this research.

Final Summary

This thesis began with an introduction to the concept of mindfulness and mindfulness practices including meditation and yoga, and some historical background. Purpose and rationale for conducting the proposed qualitative study were introduced.

A review of the literature began by sketching the historical background of yoga and mindfulness meditation practices. Mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual benefits of mindfulness were discussed, and the lack of qualitative research on these practices was noted. A brief discussion of Eastern systems of psychology as they related to mindfulness practices was also included, and implications for counselling were discussed.

The methodology for the study was outlined (process of inquiry, selection of co-researchers, data collection, and analysis procedures), with Mindful Inquiry as the overarching philosophy (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Ethical considerations are noted.

Research findings were outlined, with descriptions of the categories, clusters, and themes that emerged from the data analysis procedures. The category of Relationship with Practice included clusters of themes describing practitioners' mindfulness journeys, experiences of practice, and experiences of mindfulness practice with groups. The category of Self in Relation included clusters of themes describing the experience of mindfulness in relationship with oneself, with others, and with the natural/global world. The overarching metatheme of Integrity was presented, which comprises practitioners' sense of the integral nature of mindfulness, as well as the intention and experience of authenticity in relation to their practice.

Links between this research and existing research literature on mindfulness was discussed, along with the researcher's experiences of mindfulness practices and the process of conducting this Mindful Inquiry.

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Appendix A

First Phenomenological Turn: Researcher's Phenomenological Descriptions of Mindfulness (excerpts)

A sense of balance and warmth and energy in moving through the poses, really dropping into the moment, into the body. Imagining the breath throughout the body, and feeling the postures, aware of the movement. Then in savasana [final relaxation pose], though, my mind was racing as usual. It's 'easier' to be present and mindful in the moment in the flowing sequences of postures when I am feeling stressed like this, that is where the reprieve comes. But you need to rest to integrate. Focussing for meditation is challenging right now.

Feeling inflexible and weak during asanas today, but realizing that this is a judgement, an inflexibility of the mind, feeling that the body should be the same everyday, rather than accepting and being in the movement and in the body as it is right now.

Working with the theme of heart opening, being aware of the heart centre in moving through these postures, breathing into the heart centre, feeling an opening, expansion. Some emotions coming up here – noticing, and releasing, not attaching or going off with that thought. [...] Leaving class, a sense of warmth and compassion, a renewed patience for myself, and the environment – letting the noise and jostle of the city flow by.

Each breath an opportunity - to go deeper, to come back to the connection to the body, being the body and letting the breath breathe itself. Not needing to be effortful.

Appendix B

Do you practice

Mindfulness Meditation

and/or

Yoga



for wellness benefits?

A researcher at the University of Victoria is conducting a study entitled: **The Lived Experience of Mindfulness Practitioners: A Mindful Inquiry** approach to understanding the essence of Mindfulness Practices for Enhancing Wellness.

I am looking for people who have practiced mindfulness meditation and/or yoga regularly (average three times per week) for at least one year.

If you are interested in participating, please contact:

Rebecca Hudson Breen - (250) 858-5757

rehbreen@uvic.ca

All inquiries will be kept confidential.

Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Participant Consent Form

The Lived Experience of Mindfulness Practitioners: A Mindful Inquiry approach to understanding the essence of Mindfulness Practices for Enhancing Wellness

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled 'The Lived Experience of Mindfulness Practitioners' that is being conducted by Rebecca Hudson Breen; an MA Counselling Psychology candidate in the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions by telephone at (250) 881-7442 or by email: rehbreen@uvic.ca. Correspondence can also be mailed to Rebecca Hudson Breen, care-of The University of Victoria, Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies Dept., PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Blythe Shepard. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 721-7772 or by email: blythes@uvic.ca.

The purpose of this research project is to explore, through mindful qualitative inquiry, how mindfulness practices such as mindfulness meditation and yoga (including physical postures and breathing exercises) enhance the well-being of those who practice. Conducting a study of this nature will help provide the academic community and the community at large with greater insight into the benefits of these practices.

Although there is currently a range of research on the benefits of mindfulness practices, research of this specific type is important because very few studies have focused on the lived experience of mindfulness practitioners. Scientific research has demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in increasing scores on well-being indexes, and decreasing states such as depression and anxiety, but it is unclear how the practice is experienced and integrated into the lives of those who choose to practice regularly, and what role, if any, group practice plays in the experience of mindfulness practices.

You are being considered to participate in this study because you are an individual who has an ongoing practice yoga and/or mindfulness meditation. You have had a mindfulness practice for at least eight weeks prior to participation in the research study, and you practice an average of three times per week.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a single 1-2 hour audio-taped interview, conducted with me, the primary researcher, Rebecca Hudson Breen. The interview will occur in a quiet location of mutual convenience. Options may include your home, in a private room at the local university or college, or in a public library study room. You will be asked questions regarding how you came to mindfulness practice, what meaning you make of your mindfulness practice, how you experience mindfulness as influencing your day-to-day life, and what role, if any, group practice plays in your experience of mindfulness. After your

interview has been completed, transcribed and analyzed, you will be asked to review the initial data themes for accuracy. Approximately one hour will be required for your transcript data analysis review.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time commitments necessary for the interview (between 1-2 hours in length) and a review of initial analysis of your transcript (approximately 1 hour). In scheduling these times, I will work around your schedule and time commitments, and will reschedule the interview at your request to a more suitable time if the need arises. I will also make myself available for the discussion of any concerns or questions that may come up from your participation.

Due to the personal content that you may disclose during the interview, a potential risk by participating in this research study includes possible emotional upset. Procedures in preventing or dealing with this risk include temporarily or permanently ending the interview, collaboratively producing a list of debriefing contacts, and/or referring you to a community counselling agency within your area if you should require.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to reflect on your personal attitudes, beliefs and values as well as the opportunity to share your understanding, thoughts, and personal meanings about being a mindfulness practitioner. You will also have this opportunity as a means of helping others in society to better understand the experience of mindfulness practice. And finally, your participation is an opportunity to contribute to new learning's for the academic community and to possibly help generate future research studies on the subject matter of mindfulness practices.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the analysis. Your audiotape will be erased and your transcript destroyed.

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will, prior to the interview commencing, review orally the informed consent process with you.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, only partial anonymity can be maintained. This is due to the 'snowballing' (word of mouth) recruitment process that makes it possible for participants to know each other. For those individuals who were not involved in 'word of mouth' sampling (i.e. those individuals who responded to advertisement posters and did not refer any other participants), your anonymity will be completely protected. Efforts to maintain participant anonymity, regardless of the recruitment measure, will include replacing your name on the data by identification numbers and by using a pseudonym in place of your real name in final written reports. Your name will not appear on the data, thesis, published articles, or any other material used in presentations for others. And finally, your signed consent form will be kept separately from any recorded data.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by placing all research data (i.e. questionnaire results, signed consent form, audiotapes, written transcriptions, and any additional paperwork, etc.) within a locked filing cabinet located within my personal residence. Please note that I will be the only person with access to any identifying data (i.e. signed consent forms).

Signed consent forms, interview audiotapes, transcribed data and any additional notes or drafts will be destroyed within 3 years from the date of completing your interview. Audiotapes will be erased at Computer Services, written transcripts, notes, and drafts will be shredded through the University of Victoria confidential shredding, and all computer files will be deleted and back-up disks will be destroyed through Computer Services at the University of Victoria.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: (1) a copy of the research report will be made available to you, the participant, if interested (2) the results of the study will contribute to a Masters of Arts thesis, (3) the results of the study will potentially contribute to a published article, and (4) the results of this study may possibly be presented at a professional and/or scholarly conference.

In addition to being able to contact me and/or my supervisor Dr. Blythe Shepard at the phone numbers provided (refer to 'researcher and supervisor contact information' sheet), you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you give permission for your interview to be audiotaped.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
----------------------------	------------------	-------------

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

1. To begin, can you please tell me about your practice?

Prompts: Could you say more about _____?

What meaning do you make of that?

How do you experience that?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about that?

2. I am also curious about the idea of shared experience, and I wonder how you experience group practice, and what your experiences of group practice have been?

Prompts: Could you say more about _____?

What meaning do you make of that?

How do you experience that?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about that?

Appendix E

Excerpt from Reflexive Journal – Data Analysis Process/Memos

Grounding – their word, what is this a descriptor for? What is the essence of being grounded? Go back to the concrete.

Practice is very individual – people are describing similar feelings from diverse practices. Is grounding for Sarah the same as what Lola is describing? What else is there?

Yearning – is this just my agenda? What are they saying that conveys this?

Relationship with practice – is relationship the right word, am I describing this or capturing it correctly?

~~Relaxing~~ it's not just that. Grounding → calm, centred, renewed, connected. awake, energy

Being present/aware - witnessing

Practicing/not – what to call this? Ebb and flow? It's natural, and common. I've experienced this too – what is it about?

Awareness/insights – things that come up in the practice that they carry into the rest of life – again, where does this go? Nothing is really just about the physical resistance.

Authentic – is this just in the practice though – they are describing a valuing of the practice, but it's not just the formal aspects. What is this?

P: Well when I don't abandon myself, I feel more grounded, right, so, yeah.

present → grounded

I: Can you tell me more about what you mean by being grounded?

P: Yeah, well right now I feel quite grounded, I can actually feel my feet, can...feel a sensation in my feet. Being grounded for me is...a felt sense of being in my body, as opposed to just my head, or even somewhat out of my entire body, um, ... it's a certain kind of strength that comes with that too, that, like I'm there with myself, so I have what I need, to, deal with what ever I'm met with. Whereas if I'm not grounded, I'm not really all there. It's about presence really, it's about becoming more present to myself. And therefore I can be in life in a more present effective way.

sensation of being
"grounded"
→ in body

* vs. not grounded
present → effective

I: Tell me more about that...

P: Um hmm. I'm feeling like woah, I'm trying to describe things that are quite challenging to describe, but it's kind of fun to describe it too. OK, so, what that feels like. Well, I feel like when I'm in that state I can be more calm, in my relations with others, which helps me to behave in a less reactive way. Which benefits my relations, cause I'm just kind of more in myself, which is a resource really, to be with myself, it's a resource, right, I kind of need myself, with myself, in order to live in this world, right ☺ So, I've got that then, when I'm relating with somebody...to, um, inform me, to protect me, to connect with as well, I guess...

* challenge of putting
into words

calm
non-reactive

* being with self

→ in relation, connection

I: So noticing that in your everyday life...

P: Yes! Definitely, yeah, and enhances my connection with others in a way that I can then experience more um happiness and depthfulness, healing beauty, with people sometimes, and it also enhances my mindful connection with myself, um, and then how that connects with others, also it gives me the ability sometimes to be able to disengage, if it's not really working for me, oh, I notice I'm overwhelmed, oh, I notice that this conversation is hmm, not really sitting well with me... I think the mindfulness practice helped me there not to be like oh my god, be too overwhelmed and then not be present, and if I wasn't being present with myself, I wouldn't have that ability as much, or, I'd have it but I wouldn't be living it, you know, it would be there but I wouldn't be in contact with it, so it's kind of about making contact more deeply with the self, and then with my experience.

enhancing connection
with others

connection with
self
awareness
↳ disengage

awareness

present

Appendix G



University
of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
University of Victoria
Room A240 University Centre
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Human Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Rebecca Hudson Breen Graduate Student <u>Co-Investigator(s):</u>	<u>Department/School</u> EPLS	<u>Supervisor</u> Dr. Blythe Shepard	
<u>Project Title:</u> Lived Experience of Mindfulness Practioners: A Mindful Inquiry Approach to Understanding the Essence of Mindfulness Practices for Enhancing Wellness			
<u>Protocol No.</u> 05-184	<u>Approval Date</u> 27-Jul-05	<u>Start Date</u> 27-Jul-05	<u>End Date</u> 26-Jul-06

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

Dr. Richard Keeler
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions or minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of a "Research Status" form.

05-184 Hudson Breen, Rebecca