Personal Conceptualization and Use of Mindfulness:

Developing an Emerging Model using a Grounded Theory Framework

by

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ABSTRACT

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) to examine the subjective experiences of mindfulness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 individuals who practice mindfulness on a regular basis. Data analysis revealed domains related to the experience, conditions, strategies and consequences related to the practice of mindfulness. The following main themes emerged: subjective experience, mechanism of practice, use of metaphors, contextual influences, and shift in perception. An emerging theoretical model related to the experience of mindfulness is also proposed. Implications, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicated this dissertation to my father, Ruben Dario Mejia and my mother, Maria Guadalupe Mejia. Also I dedicated this disseration to my sisters, Martiza and Lorena, who always took care of everything elese so that I can focus on my graduate progam. *¡Si Se Pudo!*

ACKNOWLEDMENT

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

Since 1982, the appearance of the word mindfulness in titles of scientific

publications has grown exponentially (Kabat-Zinn, 2008; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). This

growing phenomenon is supported by the widespread integration of mindfulness in

clinical and therapeutic approaches (Follette & Vijay, 2009; Greeson & Brantly, 2009;

Kocvski, Segal, & Battista, 2009; Pinto, 2009). Mindfulness is broadly described as a

practice that is focused on the moment-to-moment experience with an attitude of

acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). This description was initially introduced in mindfulness-

based stress reduction programs (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1982). Since the introduction of

MBSR, there has been a preponderance of research examining the processes and

outcomes involved in mindfulness. Many of these studies provide evidence for the

positive effects that mindfulness based approaches have on reducing a variety of physical

health problems (Baer, 2004) and increasing positive mental health (Bach & Hayes,

2002; Linehan, 1993; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). Additionally, the recent

publication of the *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness* (2009) reflects the growing interest

in mindfulness approaches in psychotherapy. This handbook serves as a testament to the

rapidity with which mindfulness is being integrated into mental health practices.

As mindfulness becomes a growing interest in psychology, the need to develop

tools to measure mindfulness has also emerged (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Baer, Smith &

Allen, 2003). Some of the current measurements include the Mindfulness Attention

Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan 2003), the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness

Scale (KIMS; Baer et al., 2003), the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS; Laue et al., 2006)

and the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007). While these measurements are rigorous tools that foster understanding of mindfulness, they also have some unique disadvantages with respect to conceptual coverage and generalizability (Creswell, 2007).

Problem Statement

There are many available descriptions to help define mindfulness; however, those explanations emphasize different aspects of mindfulness as being crucial to defining the construct. For instance, Bodhi (1991) proposed that mindfulness is focused on the non-judgment of experiences. Supporting Bodhi's description, one of the most cited definitions is by Kabat-Zinn (1994) who explains mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose in the present moment and non-judgment" (p. 5). A different description suggests that in order to understand mindfulness it is important to measure it in conjunction with other related constructs such acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004). Some researchers state that awareness is a crucial part of the process mindfulness (Gerner et al., 2005), while others argue that awareness is the result of the mindfulness practice (Carmody, 2009). Compassion has been noted also an important component of mindfulness (German & Salzberg, 2009), whereas Hayes and Shank (2004) argued that meditation is an important characteristic. In brief, awareness, attention to the present moment, acceptance, non-judgment, compassion, and meditation are just a few key constructs that have been applied to the concept of mindfulness. That these key constructs are used independently highlights the differing conceptualizations of mindfulness.

Mindfulness may be unusually difficult to define and conceptualize for two reasons. First, mindfulness is still a relatively new construct in the western paradigm

(Siegel, Germer, & Olendski, 2009). Consequently, the field of psychology is just beginning to translate the ancient Buddhist practice of mindfulness into more concrete terms (Baer, Walsh, & Lykins, 2009). Second, as researchers attempt to develop a coherent and concrete definition, disagreements have emerged (Shapiro, 2009). Mindfulness may be difficult to define in that many of the current methods examining mindfulness are primarily based on a top-down approach (Hayes & Plum, 2007). According to Hayes and Plum (2007), the frequent use of a deductive approach has resulted in one important consideration when defining mindfulness. In a top-down approach the researcher initially defines a construct to gain insight about a topic. Since there is no established definition about mindfulness, many of the research studies aiming to understand the concept have developed alternative descriptions. Consequently researchers have come up with various ways to describe mindfulness (i.e., acceptance, attention, awareness, non-judgment). Moreover, the current scientific method used to study mindfulness frequently includes the use of self-report instruments, which also has its own limitations.

Typically, self-report measures provide useful information; however, with respect to mindfulness, there are several concerns. First, it remains unclear whether the items on a scale are in accord with the perception of the participant or with the original meaning as derived by the researcher (Carmody, Baer, Lykins, & Olendzki, 2009; Carmody, Reed, Merriam, & Kristeller 2008; Grossman, 2008). Second, while self-report measures provide valuable information, the over-reliance on self-reports to assess mindfulness may limit the multidimensional nature of mindfulness (Baer, 2009, Bishop et al., 2004, Brown &Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2008). For these reasons, scholars often agree to include other

research methods in order to enhance the understanding in mindfulness (Baer, 2009; Bishop, 2004; Dunne, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Given that one of the most salient issues related to mindfulness is how operationally to define its meaning, several academics agree that other approaches will enhance the knowledge base of the construct (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006; Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006; Siegel et al., 2009). Some of those scientific methods include proxy reports, neurological data, behavioral observations, and narrative data (Bear et al., 2009; Shapiro, 2009). Shapiro (2009) specifically encouraged the use of qualitative research methods to capture the multidimensionality of mindfulness. In light of these suggestions, it is worth pursuing other methods of study (e.g., qualitative method) that attempt to embrace the rich construct of mindfulness.

Hayes and Plum (2007) advocated for the use of an inductive system of analysis in order to understand the subjective experiences of mindfulness. Given that mindfulness is still a new phenomenon in western psychology, the authors argued that one should start with "a simple behavioral phenomenon and [then] build to mindfulness" (p. 244) in order to gain insight into the construct. Yet, very few studies have examined mindfulness from a qualitative lens. A qualitative approach may be rarely used because it can be a challenge for mindfulness researchers to develop a method to construct a theoretical model and to link the results to delineate the processes and outcomes of mindfulness (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007). While no single method can provide a comprehensive picture when examining a construct, it is important to integrate various scientific approaches to increase the conceptual coverage.

Not only is it important to expand the type of study used (i.e., qualitative), the populations studied need to be expanded. Many of the popular measures used to assess mindfulness have sound psychometric qualities (Baer et al., 2004), but they are typically validated using primarily college students (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson & Laurenceau, 2007; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006), thus generalizations about mindfulness to other populations are tentative. More studies are beginning to expand investigations to include a wider range of populations such as clinical samples (Fulton, Didonna, 2009; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), different ethnic groups (Christopher, Charoensuk, Gilber, Neary, & Pearce, 2009), and even children, (Goodman & Greenland, 2009) to understand the effects of mindfulness practices. But the question remains: why not ask some of the mindfulness experts (i.e., master therapists or Buddhist monks)?

Given that mindfulness has its roots in the Buddhist culture (Bodhi, 1991; Thera, 1992; Kabat-Zinn, 2009), the mindfulness construct is embedded in this tradition. Since the recent pursuit of mindfulness, some researchers have encouraged the investigation of mindfulness from an expert perspective in hopes that it will enhance the understanding of the concept (Christopher et al., 2009; Shapiro, 2009). For this reason, it is important to understand mindfulness from a Buddhist tradition and from the experience of those who practice such tradition (e.g., Buddhist clergy).

Additionally, in light of the recent studies that support the efficacy of mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention (Linehan, 1993; Bach & Hayes, 2002; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), the pursuit of mindfulness in psychology is worthwhile for its important clinical implications. As the pioneer of mindfulness in western psychology, John Kabat-

Zinn (2003) reminds the scientific community that mindfulness has been construed in a manner to fit the western palate, which may prove to be distorted (2003). More recently, Kabat-Zinn (2009) noted that

> To mistake the concept of mindfulness… [can] deny both medicine and psychology the possibility of investigating on a much deeper level our understanding of human nature, the nature of mind itself, and the mind/body connection, with its potential practical implications for health and disease across the lifespan." (p. xxx).

It is imperative to explore the meaning of mindfulness by examining both Eastern philosophical roots and the scientific western perspective. To make mindfulness accessible to western psychology, it is important to define it within a western psychological context (Shapiro, 2009). However, it is equally important to understand the cultural context in which it originated (Christopher et al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Statement Purpose and Research Questions

The goal of this study was to explore the subjective experiences of mindfulness practitioners using a constructive grounded theory approach (i.e., qualitative study; Charmaz, 2006). Consistent with a grounded theory approach, the data gathered from the participants' experiences will contribute to the development of an emerging model that explains experiences with mindfulness. There were several reasons to pursue this project. First, as mindfulness is widely integrated in psychology, there is growing confusion about the term, which makes it difficult to measure (Bishop et al., 2004). Asking individuals about their experiences may provide useful information to guide our conceptualization of mindfulness. Second, the dependence on self-report instruments to study mindfulness

generates a measurement concern. Given that data may be subject to response bias and limit the scope of the construct, it is crucial to incorporate other assessment methods. Third, there are numerous studies that focus on the impacts of mindfulness-based interventions on different populations, but to date no single study has examined experts' perspectives. Thus, expanding the investigation to include mindfulness experts may reveal valuable information. Last, given that only a few studies have examined mindfulness or mindfulness-based programs from a qualitative approach (Hayes & Plumb, 2007), pursuing this method may unearth essential information that may not be available through the quantitative lens. Hence, for the purposes of this project a qualitative method using specifically grounded theory was used.

Grounded theory was being pursued in that this method enables the researcher to identify core patterns and to develop a theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). In contrast to developing specific research hypotheses initially, classical grounded theory strives to use research data without preconceived notions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, this study takes into account the importance of the researcher's subjective perception (Charmaz, 2006). Consequently, it is essential to contextualize the researcher's perspectives. Therefore, it will be helpful to disclose the researcher's viewpoint about mindfulness in a manner that allows for initial lines of inquiry to be exposed and to reveal any predispositions.

The researcher is humbled by the process of attempting to understand the experience and the various dimensions of mindfulness from an others' perspective. The researcher acknowledges the following assumption: Participants may describe mindfulness as a practice and philosophy that guides a way of life and that through

constant awareness and focus on the present moment insight is gained. Additionally, the

researcher wonders about the emphasis on non-judgment and self-compassion as being

important ingredients in the practice of mindfulness. However, the researcher also

suspects that experts from a collective perspective may depict mindfulness as a

multidimensional construct that is influenced specifically by several contextual factors.

Therefore some of the initial research questions include:

1) Are there core themes across participants' perspectives on mindfulness?

2) If so, how are these central themes reflected in everyday practice?

3) What are some possible similarities or differences among the core themes?

4) How do the similarities and differences enhance comprehension of
   mindfulness?

To gain a better sense of mindfulness and the relationship between its historical

roots and current clinical implications in psychology, it is important to review relevant

literature. Since the literature on mindfulness has grown exponentially in the last 25

years, this review will provide information about the history, theory, conceptualization,

and clinical implications of mindfulness.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is specifically divided into six general areas. The first area covers the historical roots of mindfulness. This is an important section as it may help address the need to bridge the gap between the eastern and western perspectives. Next, in order to understand the meaning behind the use of mindfulness in western psychology, the various definitions and conceptualizations that are available in the current literature are reviewed. Therefore, the second section of this chapter focuses on the various definitions and descriptions of mindfulness. The third section of this chapter serves as a discussion about current instruments used to measure mindfulness and measurement concerns. Given the reliance of self-report measures, this section explains the rationale for integrating other methods of assessment. The next section offers a basis for examining experts in mindfulness, specifically why mindfulness practitioners, such as Buddhist clergy, may be valuable. Last, the sixth section of the chapter consists of an overall summary to highlight the most relevant information.

A Brief Historical Description of Mindfulness

In order to understand mindfulness, it is important not only to experience it but also to examine its historical roots. The classical literature on mindfulness is vast, so the first section of this literature review provides a general summary of mindfulness with respect to the context in which it originated. The emergence of mindfulness and its meaning from a Buddhist perspective are briefly discussed. Additionally, a brief survey of the evolving concept of mindfulness in the western perspective, specifically in the field of psychology, and its current applications are addressed.

Historical Origins of Mindfulness. Mindfulness is based on the instructions of the Buddha (Bodhi, 1991). The cultivation of mindfulness can be traced back 2,500 years, approximately to when Guatama Buddha was born. According to Thera (1992), many of the Buddha's teachings spread from modern day India to other Eastern Asian countries (e.g., Tibet, Thailand, and China). Even mindfulness has been modified to fit different cultural perspectives, the main principals of mindfulness were maintained through several significant texts (Thera, 1992). These texts are indispensable for the development of insight and mindfulness, since they reflect the early teachings from the Buddha's perspective (Bodhi, 1991) and also discuss how mindfulness unfolds from the Buddha's personal experiences and insight.

According to classical literature, the Buddha experienced an epiphany that helped him understand the renderings of his own mind (Bodhi, 1991). This epiphany occurred during a 45 yearlong journey during which Buddha specifically observed that his mind and his body were influenced by the external material world. Noticing that his mind could be an agent to promote a special type of self-awareness, the Buddha practiced the cultivation of his own mind by paying close attention to his inner experiences. According to Bodhi (1991), the Buddha was actively engaged in a moment-to-moment experience of mental activity that led to insights. Consequently, this allowed him to make a link between a single mental event to another mental event, and this process help alleviate suffering (Bodhi, 1991). Through this practice, the Buddha experienced a psychological transformation that generated profound insights about the human mind. From this experience, several significant texts were created.

Two important scriptures in the Indian *Theravadin* tradition of Buddhism are *Abhidharma* (Analayo, 2008) and the *Maha Sati-pātthāna Sutta: The Discourse of Mindfulness* (Shulman, 2009). The *Abhidharma* functions as a manual that summarizes the practices of the *suttas* (e.g., the discourses). Olendski (2008) acknowledged the complexity of the *Abhidharma* by stating that it is a difficult text to translate into English since it is reflective of an ancient language (e.g., Pāli) that is technically precise in the description of the human inner experience. Despite the complexity of the text, the *Abhidharma* is recognized for addressing crucial aspects of the practice of mindfulness. One significant aspect is that mindfulness emerges from a set of "right conditions" that are established through a proper ethical component (Bodhi, 2000). To clarify, the ethical component does not refer to the moral sense of right or wrong, but rather is a set of principles that guide the practice of mindfulness. Therefore, there are other essential elements that are required for the practice of mindfulness. These factors are further articulated in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

The *Satipatthana Sutta*: *The Discourse of Mindfulness* contains the Buddha's doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, which are central to the practice of Buddhism (Bodhi, 2000). The Four Noble Truths establishes the basic principle that includes: 1) Life is a struggle; 2) Struggles arise from the attachments that are misunderstood, views from reality; 3) Suffering can be alleviated when the views are understood and one is detached from those views; and 4) Freedom from suffering is possible through the Eightfold Path (Bhikkhu, 2007). The Eightfold Path is a guiding principle intended to help achieve the Four Noble Truths (Bhikku, 2007; Bodhi, 1991; Kabat-Zinn, 2009).

The Eightfold Path consists of eight aspects: The right view, the right intention, the right speech, the right action, the right livelihood, the right effort, the right mindfulness, and the right concentration (Bhikku, 2007; Bodhi, 1991). These eight principles are vital to the practice of mindfulness, since they represent Buddha's answer to achieving the Four Noble Truths. Furthermore, they help ground the ethical behavior of mindfulness. Without the guide of Eightfold Path to the right view and intention, mindfulness could be misguided. In short, the Four Noble Truths can be best understood as a doctrine and the Eightfold Path is considered a discipline to help follow the doctrine. The integration of the Four Noble Truth and the Eightfold Path, the *dhamma-vinaya*, is where mindfulness unfolds (Bhikku, 2007; Bodhi, 1991, 2000; Kabat-Zinn, 2009).

In summary, the purpose of classical mindfulness is to eliminate needless suffering by cultivating insight in the mind or consciousness. Cultivation is achieved by following a set of guidelines that help understand the inner workings of the mind and the external nature of the world. Mindfulness also seems to serve as a function rather than goal to help uproot the mind from habits that can create suffering or unhappiness. However, the practice of mindfulness alone is insufficient since there are other factors that provide a solid foundation to facilitate the practice (Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2007). Through this conditioning of the consciousness, the mind can be purified to the extent that a deep sense of well-being can be achieved (Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Rapgaya & Bystrisky, 2007). According to many scholars, the Buddha's insights have profound implications for modern psychology as they reveal how the mind is constructed from the moment-by-moment experiences (Dunnes, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Siegal et al., 2009).

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Terminology

It may be helpful to revisit briefly some terms and their interpretations since they have significant implications to western psychology. Of particular importance is the word *sati-patthana*. The English translation of the word *sati-patthana* refers to the parallel practice of mindfulness that occurs in four different places: The body, the feelings or sensations, the mind, and the *dhammas*, which are also mental objectives (Bodhi, 1991). Some common interpretations of the word *pathanna* include "establishing", the "foundations" or the "applications" (Shulman, 2010). *Sati* consists of a more complex translation because of its dual meaning. In one sense, *sati* means "memory" but in another sense it also means "consciousness", "knowledge" or "awareness" (Shulman, 2010). With respect to Buddhist meditation, it means "mindfulness" but it is also part of an interrelated construct. *Sati* as "mindfulness" is best understood as a process of clear and focused attention, and this concept is of particular importance to Western psychology.

The Introduction of Mindfulness into Western Psychology

With the proliferation of mindfulness in Western psychology, *sati* (i.e., awareness, attention, and remembering) has become the most salient aspect of mindfulness that is incorporated into clinical practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2009; Siegal et al., 2009). In addition, the meaning of mindfulness has expanded to include other concept such as non-judgment, acceptance, and compassion (Siegal et al., 2009). Prior to being fully incorporated into Western psychology, the concept of mindfulness has gone through its own journey and transformations.

The word mindfulness seems to have first appeared in the English Oxford Dictionary as early as 1339 (Thanisarro, 2008). Several hundred years later, in 1530, the Oxford English Dictionary defined mindfulness as "the state or quality of being mindful; attention, memory (obs)". This early definitions suggest that mindfulness has been in the English language for centuries. According to Thanissaro (2008), the early definitions have a religious undertone, since they were first discovered in religious scriptures and songs. Following the translations from Caroline Davids, a prominent Pāli translator in 1883, the Monier-William Sanskrit English Dictionary introduced the notion of mindfulness as a meditative state of being fully aware of the moment (Thanissaro, 2008). Even though mindfulness has been in the English language for several centuries, it has only been since the 1900's that mindfulness was integrated in western psychology.

Several early psychologists incorporated many of the Buddhist principles in their philosophical work. For instance, Freud referenced aspects of mindfulness in his writings (Wilber, 2000). In 1948, Carl Jung wrote about Buddhist practices and their relationship to Western psychology, which is evident in his forward to the Daisetz Titus Suzuki in the *Introduction to Zen Buddhist Practices* (Suzuki, 1948). Eric Fromm, a prominent humanist psychologist, also addressed aspects of Buddhism in *The Assimilation of Buddhist Practices in Western Psychology* (Fromm, Suzuki, & deMartino, 1960; Fromm, 2000). Discussions on the influences of Buddhist practices on psychology by other prominent scholars started to deepen the dialogue; however, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982), with his introduction of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program, was an instrumental figure in applying mindfulness as a clinical intervention (Baer et al., 2009;

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Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Hayes, Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Linehan, 1993; Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002).

Significance of Mindfulness Stress Reduction (MSBR). The modern use of mindfulness in western psychology is credited to the studies by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982, 1994). Since the early publications of MBSR practices, it has become one of the most recognized clinical programs for improving physical and mental health issues. Initial studies suggested that mindfulness-based stress reduction programs led to a decrease in the perception of pain in chronically ill patients (Kabat-Zinn, 1984; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985). Subsequently, studies reported that an increase in well-being (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007), a reduction of psychological distress (Linehan, 1993; Teasdale et al., 2000), and improvement of the immune system (Davidson et al., 2003) were evident after participants completed a MBSR program. In addition to the lessening of ruminative thoughts (Jain et al., 2000), MBSR participants also reported a decrease in anxiety levels and less negative affect (Shapiro et al., 2007). Others substantiate its effectiveness in preventing the reoccurrences of depression (Teasdale et al., 2000), decreasing perceived stress and improving self-compassion (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005). A meta-analysis conducted by Grosmann, Niemann, and Stefan (2004) concluded that mindfulness-based stress reduction programs were effective in helping participants cope with heart disease, pain, cancer, depression and a range of other mental health and physical issues. These studies support the efficacy of a mindfulness stress-based reduction program in being able to reduce symptoms that are related to a variety of mental health concerns.

Summary

Recently Western psychology has become interested in the study of mindfulness, a practice that has roots in contemplative traditions and is central to Buddhism (Hanh, 1998). As mindfulness has been adopted in Western psychology, researchers have examined the effects of mindfulness. While there is empirical support demonstrating the utility of mindfulness in psychology, the conceptual definition continues to be revised and clarified. The next section of the literature review will address conceptual concerns.

Mindfulness Research and Theoretical Concerns

Many authors have noted that mindfulness is an elusive construct (Bishop, 2002; Block-Lerner, Salters-Pednault, & Tull, 2005; Brown & Ryan, 2004). Despite the challenge of defining mindfulness, researchers are finding better ways to conceptualize it. Since current literature includes a collection of definitions, descriptions, and instructions for mindfulness, the next section of the literature review presents an overview of the current descriptions in an attempt to provide a coherent representation of mindfulness in Western psychology. Additionally, a discussion of a few theoretical concerns is also addressed.

Definitions and Descriptions. In psychology, one of the most commonly cited descriptions is offered by Kabat-Zinn (1994) who stated that mindfulness "can be cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, non-judgmentally and openheartedly as possible" (p. 4). This description is closely related to his earlier definition that declared that mindfulness is, "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding experience moment to moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.

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145). Kabat-Zinn (2003) further explained that mindfulness is maintained through the cultivation of three components: 1) Clear intention for practicing; 2) Observation of moment-to-moment experience; and 3) Attending to ones' behavior, which is characterized by an attitude of acceptance, openness, kindness, compassion, curiosity, and non-judgment. Other scholars have also provided similar descriptions.

Lineman (1993), who developed dialectical behavior therapy for borderline personality, operationalized mindfulness as a set of three related skills. These skills include: observing the current experience, describing the experience, and participating in the experience. Similarly, Marlatt and Kristeller (1999) defined mindfulness as being able to "bring one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis" (p. 68). Furthermore, they suggested that mindfulness consists of experiencing an attitude of acceptance and kindness. Segal et al, (2002) provided a richer account by stating that "the focus of a person's attention is opened to admit whatever enters the experience, while at the same time, a stance of kindly curiosity allows the person to investigate whatever appears, without falling prey to automatic judgments or reactivity" (p. 322-323). Additionally, Brown and Ryan (2003) proposed that mindfulness is "the state of being attentive and aware of what is taking place in the present" (p. 822).

More recently, Shapiro and Carlson (2009) suggested that mindfulness is being able to remember and to pay attention to what is occurring in the present moment. Shapiro (2009) specifically defined mindfulness by stating the following: "The awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, accepting and discerning way, which involves both knowing and shaping the mind" (p. 556). Shapiro (2009) also highlighted that while re-perceiving is a principle effect of mindfulness, other crucial

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aspects include as self-regulation, values clarification, and cognitive and behavior flexibility. Although several authors have offered various descriptions of mindfulness, there is absence of an *operational* definition (Bishop, 2002; Black, 2009).

      Defining the Construct. In efforts to develop a consensus statement, a total of 11 prominent researchers in mindfulness met to develop a testable and systematic operational definition (Bishop et al., 2004). According to the researchers, mindfulness consists of two interrelated components: Self-regulation of attention and orientation to experience. The first component "involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate the experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment" (p. 232). The second component, orientation to experience, refers to adopting "a conscious decision to abandon one's agenda to have a different experience and active process of allowing current thoughts, feelings, and sensations" (p. 233). Based on this model, the authors also provided a testable prediction about mindfulness. Bishop and et al (2004) predicted that adopting a sense of curiosity and acceptance leads to a reduction of behavioral and cognitive strategies that will lessen the experience of distress. For instance, adopting a sense of curiosity allows one to condition the mind in a new way and consequently relate to distress differently. This may result in acceptance of unpleasant thoughts and feelings that could be measured by various existing assessments.

      Brown and Ryan (2003) scrutinized Bishop et al's (2004) systematic definition on the grounds that self-regulation requires focus that is in contradiction to being open for and curious about an experience. The authors also stated that focusing on the internal experience excludes a central component, external influences of the material world,

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during the awareness process. The authors support other descriptions of mindfulness such as Leary and Tate's (2007) five-component model consisting of: self-attention, decreased self-talk, nonjudgment, practice of beliefs, and following a particular set of philosophical beliefs that lead to living a mindful life. In addition to the several definitions, there is a debate among researchers whether mindfulness is a state versus a trait or a process versus an outcome.

Bishop et al (2004) view mindfulness as a state-like quality, because attention is intentionally being directed to thoughts, emotions, and sensations. While other researchers have suggested that mindfulness is a trait-like quality since it may require the tendency to be mindful in daily life (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In contrast, other researchers affirmed that mindfulness is actually a combination of both a trait and state (Langer & Bodner, 2000; Shapiro & Carlos, 2009). Moreover, the practice of mindfulness is considered to be a psychological process in that the subjective experience varies within each individual (Ryan & Brown, 2003). In addition, mindfulness is also an outcome (awareness) and process (practice). The debate of whether mindfulness is a state or trait compounds the difficulty of understanding the concept.

Regardless, the various definitions and descriptions suggest that mindfulness can be broadly defined as a type of awareness focused on the present moment to-moment experience with an attitude of acceptance. There is disagreement on the conceptualization as evidenced by the range of descriptions and the current debate with respect to mindfulness. This raises questions about the elements or characteristics of mindfulness. These different definitions may serve as a function of the nature of mindfulness, however mindfulness may be better conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that includes the

collection of the various definitions and descriptions (Baer et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2009; Leary & Tate, 2007; Shapiro, Carlson, Aston, & Freedman, 2006).

Theoretical Framework: Unresolved Concerns

There are two major theoretical concerns that remain unresolved. To summarize, the first concern is the need to clarify the components that make up mindfulness (Bear, et al, 2009; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2004). The qualities that are important to delineate mindfulness include acceptance, openness, non-judgmental, curiosity, and kindness. The second concern relates to measurement issues. A sound measure requires that the construct is well defined (Clark & Watson, 1999). Since mindfulness is not a clearly delineated construct, it is difficult to measure. Based on the current descriptions of mindfulness, some theoretical accounts highlight the importance of cognitive (i.e., thoughts), behavioral (i.e., practice), attitude (i.e., curiosity) and attention (i.e., focus) Components. Despite the challenges of operationalizing mindfulness, there is a concerted effort by researchers to continue exploring it in a more comprehensive manner to develop testable theories (Bishop et al., 2004; Leary & Teal, 2007).

Mindfulness Measures. Although the descriptions provided by several authors are useful in generating an awareness of mindfulness, recently the scientific community began to examine seriously ways to measure mindfulness (Black, 2009). In attempts to translate mindfulness into measureable terms, the scientific community has come to appreciate its complexity and vagueness. In 2003, a series of psychometric studies emerged that focused on the development of instruments to measure mindfulness. Some of the most common measures include: the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003); the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS;

Baer et al., 2004); the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (CAM-R; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, & Laurenceau, 2007); and the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Kopkins, Krietemeyer & Toney, 2006). Each of these instruments has contributed to the study of mindfulness.

The development of the MAAS was considered a landmark, since it was one of the first instruments with sound psychometric properties (Brown & Ryan, 2003). A 15-item self-report measure, the MAAS examines the general tendency to be attentive to and aware of the present experience in daily life. The items describe tendencies to be on automatic pilot, inattentiveness and preoccupation. After reverse coding, higher scores represent higher levels of mindfulness and are associated with an increase in well-being (Beitel, Ferrer, & Cecero, 2005) and a decrease in stress symptoms (Carlson & Brown, 2005). The MAAS was empirically validated using undergraduate students (MacKillop & Anderson, 2007) and cancer patients (Carlson & Brown, 2005). In a more recent study, Zen Buddhist practitioners scored significantly higher on the MASS than did non-practitioners (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Another instrument used to measure mindfulness is the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS), which is based on the Dialectical Behavioral Therapy conceptualization of mindfulness skills (Baer et al., 2004). It includes 39 items that measure four components of mindfulness: Observing, describing, acting with awareness, and striving for nonjudgmental acceptance. Unlike the MAAS, the KIMS do not assess for meditation experience but rather assesses the tendency to just be mindful. An example of an observation item includes, "I notice when my mood begins to change." Acting with awareness item is "When I do things, my mind wanders and I am easily distracted." An

exploratory and confirmatory analysis supported the four-factor structure for undergraduates (Baer et al., 2004).

Another common instrument is the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R; Feldman et al., 2007). A brief 12 item self-report measure focuses on cognitive and affective domains of mindfulness. Specifically the scale measures: Attention, present focus, acceptance of thoughts and feelings, and daily awareness. Sample items include: "It is easy for me to concentrate on what I am doing" and "I am able to accept the thoughts and feelings I have." The four dimensions are consistent with prior descriptions of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004). The scale was positively correlated with the MAAS and well-being (Feldman et al., 2007) and negatively associated with worry, distress, ruminative thoughts, and avoidance (Feldman et al., 2007). This study has been validated with primarily college students.

Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, and Toney (2006) developed the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). It consists of five subscales that measure: Observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience and non-reactively to inner experience. "Observing" refers to the ability to notice and attend to external and internal experiences. The "describing" component includes labeling the observed behavior. "Acting with awareness" includes present moment activities. Non-judging of inner experience refers to taking a non-evaluative stand on one's thoughts and actions. Last, non-reactivity to the inner experience addresses the tendencies to allow thoughts and feelings to flow freely. Preliminary evidence suggests that the FFMQ measures specific skills that are cultivated through mindfulness. Evidence also suggests an increase in mindfulness is associated with other psychological functions (i.e.,

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cognitive flexibility) to help promote well-being (Baer et al., 2006). According to Bear et al, (2006) the aim of this scale was to combine the responses to all the questionnaires described earlier in order to examined mindfulness in a systematic manner. This scale was validated using college students.

Limitations to Self-Report Measures. These measures offer some advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages include that they are easy to administer, are simple to use, and are based on the subjective experience of the participant (Heppner et al., 1999). However, recent critiques have pointed out some problems with respect to generalizability (Creswell et al., 2007), item content (Shapiro et al., 2009), and conceptual coverage of mindfulness components (Bear et al., 2006).

Despite the strong psychometric properties, the instruments have been validated primarily using White college students (Bear et al., 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2004; Christopher et al., 2009; Feldman et al., 2007). Studies have validated some of these measurements using Zen practitioners and cancer patients (Brown & Ryan, 2004), but assessments beyond the college population are limited (Jain et al., 2007). According to Christopher et al., (2009) there is a need to explain the evaluation of the assessment with other populations. As mindfulness is being incorporated into psychotherapies to treat a variety of psychiatric disorders, it will be imperative to assess accurately the principle of mindfulness and its relation to the symptoms.

Some authors have noted that it remains unclear as to whether the operational definition of mindfulness actually responds to the items on the scale (Carmody et al., 2008). In addition, Grossman (2008) stated that participant's understanding of an item in a measure might not be in accord with the original meaning of the term mindfulness.

Last, several mindfulness measures have been scrutinized for being inconsistent with proposed mindfulness definitions (Christopher et al., 2009; Shapiro, 2009). For instance, the MAAS is a one-dimensional instrument that only measures attention focus, yet mindfulness descriptions also include other components (i.e., non-judgment, acceptance). Scales that have attempted to measure mindfulness as a multifaceted construct have looked at different components of mindfulness. For example, the KIMS assess two components: self regulation and open to experience, whereas the FFMQ examines five factors that include observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judgment of the inner experience, and non-reactivity. Each of the mindfulness scales is measuring different aspects leading to a variety of responses partly because the definitions in the literature may not be well suited for analysis (Baer, 2003). Consequently, this raises some questions with respect to the conceptual coverage of mindfulness.

Some scholars argue that many of these scales do not measure mindfulness in accord with how it has been operationalized in Western psychology or from a Buddhist perspective (Bear, Rosch, 2007; Shapiro, 2009; Wallace, 2007). Additionally, Rosch (2007) encouraged the scientific community to consider seriously mindfulness as an interdependent construct. She noted that in trying to delineate mindfulness, investigators are isolating and manipulating single factors and thus obscuring the multidimensional nature of mindfulness. Rosch's argument is aligned with Buddhist texts that define *sati* (e.g., awareness) as an interconnected construct (Leary & Tate, 2007). Since mindfulness measurements were generated within in the context of psychopathology and classical mindfulness was developed within the context of Buddhism, there may be a cultural challenge in understanding mindfulness (Christopher et al., 2009).

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the historical context of mindfulness, its introduction and uses in western psychology, and outlined the current problems in providing a unified theoretical framework. In order to access the effects of mindfulness in clinical interventions, various measures have been developed, however each of these measures accessed different components of the construct of mindfulness. By accessing different aspect of mindfulness, the scientific community struggles to understand what aspects of mindfulness are helpful in clinical interventions.

Study Rationale

Many of the mindfulness techniques and therapies stem from the success of the MBSR (Hayes et al, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Linehan, 1993; Segal et al., 2001). Throughout the years, mindfulness has been modified to fit a more general concept (i.e., attention to the present moment experience). Although MBSR is rooted in the Buddhist tradition (Kabat-Zinn, 2009), current techniques of mindfulness are reflective of a Western psychological framework (Christopher et al., 2009). Richard Davidson, a prominent neuroscientist, recognized that Buddhism cannot be minimized just as an ancient practice (Davidson, 2003). On the contrary, Buddhism may provide a systematic and structured perspective that can facilitate the study of mindfulness and elucidate information about the construct (Davidson, 2003; Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2009; Wallace, 2007).

In adopting versions of mindfulness from MBSR, no effort has been made to understand the underling meaning of mindfulness in a Buddhist text such as the *Abhidharma* (Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2009). As mentioned earlier in the literature review,

Buddhist tradition considers mindfulness as part of an embedded system that includes the guidance of the Eightfold Path in order to alleviate suffering. Some scholars argue that when mindfulness is removed from the context in which it originated, the impacts of mindfulness may be limited, misunderstood, or potentially misguided (Rosch, 2007; Segal et al., 2009; Shapiro et al., 2009; Wallace, 2009).

Given that one of the most salient issues in mindfulness research is how to define operationally the meaning, this study will explore mindfulness by exploring the experiences of those who practice and the differing philosophical considerations (e.g., Buddhist mindfulness practices). Considering the limitations of self-report measures and the encouragement to integrate other scientific methods to study mindfulness, a qualitative approach has been chosen.

Hypothesis. A constructivist grounded theory methodology serves as a framework to guide the researcher's investigations. Unlike a quantitative approach that attempts to support or not support *apriori* hypotheses, in grounded theory, the researcher continually forms hypotheses based on the incoming data. Additionally, from a grounded theory perspective one begins with the interest in the field of study rather than forming a formal hypothesis. Therefore, in a qualitative study, it is important for the researchers to demonstrate transparency and share their predispositions (Morrow, 2005).

Formulation of the Study. What is mindfulness?" became a personal and complicated question. Personal because I wondered for myself, what do I need to do to develop happiness, a sense of well-being and a sense of feeling centered in life?. As a graduate student, I began to notice that many of my colleagues, including myself, did not practice self-care activities, and I began to wonder why, in a field of self-care, could we

not take better care of ourselves?. As a counseling intern, I experienced the expectation to delivery mental health care services in a fast-paced environment, where brief solution-focus therapies seemed better suited. These were some questions and wonderments that gave impetus to my exploring well-being and how I initially came across to the concept of mindfulness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Mindfulness is a rich and a complex phenomenon that cannot be easily extracted (Baer et al., 2004, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1988; Carmody, et al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Leavy & Tate, 2007; Rosch, 2007; Shapiro, 2006). Yet quantitative research methods, which extract variables to establish cause and effect and make predictions, are commonly used to understand mindfulness (Shapiro, 2009). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative inquiry can help address questions about the human experience, uncover how individuals assign meaning to their experience and discover how individuals experience life events (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative studies are designed to facilitate the understanding of a phenomenon from a participant's point of view rather than the researcher's point of view (Denzel & Lincoln, 2005). For these reasons, a qualitative research method is particularly suited for this study because it helps to increase the understanding of a complex phenomenon. Given that the purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of how individuals perceive their experience of mindfulness, a qualitative method was deemed as an appropriate design for this study.

In choosing among the five main approaches to inquiry in qualitative research (e.g., narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic and case studies), grounded theory methodologies were determined to be the most appropriate qualitative research technique for this project. Phenomenology was considered for this study as this type of inquiry is used to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by several individuals (Maustakas, 1994; Morse & Field van Manen, 1990). Although phenomenology describes the essence of a lived phenomenon, a grounded theory approach to data analysis seemed more suited as this method moves beyond a descriptive analysis and attempts to generate a theory that might help explain a process or provide a framework for further research (Creswell, 1997).

According to Creswell (1997), a grounded theory approach is encouraged when little is known about a phenomenon or a population. While there are many studies about mindfulness, there is little research that looks into the experiences and insights of those who actively practice mindfulness in the modern western culture. Siegel et al., (2010) stated that the mindfulness experience is a deeply personal journey of discovery. A grounded theory method lends itself to understanding the process of a personal human experience.

Grounded Theory Framework. Grounded theory is the study of a concept, a concept that is an action or process (Strauss, 2010). The investigator is involved in developing a theory and not testing a theory. From a grounded theory framework, the investigator develops an explanation of a process that is informed by the view of several participants (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). This approach specifically assists with clarifying individuals' understanding of their own experiences through the development of codes, categories and themes that are "grounded" in the data rather than using preconceived labels on the data. From these codes and themes an emerging hypothesis develops and assertions can be made about a process of the human experience. A core tenant in grounded theory methodology is that a hypothesis cannot be made before the start of the study but rather after the data have been collected. Data collection ends once new codes are no longer generated from the data or saturation has been reached. In grounded theory, the investigator serves as the main instrumentation as the investigator is deeply involved with the data collection and data analysis process.

Different analytical methods applied to grounded theory have been growing in popularity among qualitative researchers because the methods provide clear strategies for

data analysis (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Morse et al., 2009). There are three variants of data analysis strategies that are typically employed when using a grounded theory framework: classical grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), systematic grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and constructive grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). In a classical (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) and systematic approach to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the methods are detailed, thorough, and rigid (Morse et al., 2009). Contrary to grounded theory and systematic grounded theory, Charmaz (2006) proposed guidelines for conducting data analysis that are flexible yet systematic for the constructive grounded theory approach.

  A constructivist rendering of grounded theory is that a theory is not discovered, but rather is interpreted by the researcher's interactive process with the data (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike classical and systematic grounded theories, Charmaz (2006) views grounded theory as a set of principles and practices that can be used as flexible guidelines, and not major requirements, for conducting research. For instance, in classical grounded theory, the investigator assumes to have no biases or assumptions and follows a set of more rigid procedures to ensure that biases do not affect the data. However, Charmaz (2006) assumed "that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world that we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practice" (p. 10). Charmaz (2006) believed that the researcher's subjectivity plays a significant role in the method and coupled with the participants' meanings of their experience, grounded theories are constructions of reality. Following Charmaz (2009) protocols for data analysis, a constructivist grounded theory

approach was used in this study because of its flexible guidelines and acknowledgment of the researcher's biases. As described below, constructive grounded theory was used to guide all aspects of the study including the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Qualitative Interviewing

According to Creswell (2007), new forms of data collection for qualitative studies continue to emerge in the social sciences. He classified the different forms of data collection into four categories: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. Maxwell (2008) advocated for intensive interviewing as it enables the investigator to collect "rich" data through verbatim transcripts of the interview. While constructive grounded theory procedures for data collection are flexible, a single method of an intensive interview format was selected for this study.

Polkinghorne (1995) believed that personal stories, which are obtained from interviewing strategies, uniquely describe the human experience. Qualitative researchers advocate for the use of qualitative interview techniques because people have the natural tendency to explain their lives through stories, and interview techniques can elicit these stories (Creswell, 2007). Interviewing is flexible and yet an emergent technique that facilitates the natural flow of ideas and issues that are important to the individual. For example, during an interview the investigator can immediately pursue a lead, which allows the flexibility that is needed for an in-depth interview to take place. In order to gather rich data, Charmaz (2009) encouraged the use of both ethnographic and interviewing protocols for conducting qualitative interviews. Following Charmaz (2009) recommendations, both of these protocols were employed in this study.

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Interview Structure and Questions. To obtain rich and meaningful information from the informant, the formulation and structure of the interview questions were carefully considered in this study. The interview questions were initially guided through the researcher's review of mindfulness literature. Afterwards, questions were revised in consultation with key informants (i.e., committee members) and through pilot testing. Questions were also reviewed and modified in consultation with a qualitative research expert. Consistent with a constructivist approach to grounded theory, the interview questions were minimally structured to elicit the participant's discussion of their own experiences with mindfulness.

This study used a semi-structured interview because it provided guidance while simultaneously allowing for unexpected information to arise during the interview. Consistent with constructive grounded theory methodology, Gubrium and Holstein (2001) argued that a semi-structured interview has an advantage over a structured interview because it does not force data that have been gathered from the interviews into preconceived categories. The semi-structured interview was developed using ethnographic techniques and Charmaz' (2009) guidelines.

Following ethnographic protocols for interviews, descriptive, structural, and contrast questions were devised. The protocols for an ethnographic interview were used because they create an emphasis on the informant's knowledge and personal experience with the phenomenon of interest (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005; Spradley, 1979;). For instance, Suzuki (2007) noted that qualitative interviews tend to start with descriptive questions, because they are useful in initiating an informal and friendly conversation and yet they provide structure to the interview format.

Additionally, descriptive questions also help reduce apprehension by the informant and facilitate rapport building between the informant and the investigator. Descriptive questions are also consistent with Charmaz (2009) guidelines for developing initial broad open-ended questions for an interview in order to invite a detailed discussion about the topic. Non-judgmental, open-ended, and descriptive questions can also elicit an unanticipated response about the participant's experience during the interview. Hence, descriptive questions were created to encourage the informant to discuss freely his or her experience with mindfulness. (See Appendix B).

A specific type of descriptive question is a grand tour question, which provides a "grand tour" or general description about the topic of interest (Spradely, 1979). Examples of a ground tour questions include, "Could you describe how you initially became interested in mindfulness?" or "Could you describe a typical experience with mindfulness?" Mini-tour questions, along with appropriate probing, were also used to expand on and/or gain further clarification. In addition to descriptive questions, structural questions were created to understand how the informant organized their knowledge around mindfulness. An example of a structural question is, "What do you think are some of the central aspects to mindfulness?" Repeated structural questions were also included in the semi-structured interview to expand on the domain such as "What would you tell others is the most important thing to know about mindfulness?" Last, in order to uncover similarities or differences in participants' meaning and experience of mindfulness, contrast questions were also developed. An example of a contrast question is, "Do you feel others experience mindfulness similarly or different from you?" usually followed by the probing question, "How so?" While interviews facilitate the exploration of the topic,

the investigator guided the interview by asking participants to focus on their experiences

with the practice of mindfulness. These stories were later analyzed for themes that could

describe the phenomenon of interest: experience with mindfulness. A copy of the

interview questions is in Appendix A.

Procedures

Participant Recruitment and Interview Information

After approval from the university Institutional Review Board, participants for

the study were recruited from sites known to incorporate the practice of mindfulness:

Mindfulness Stress Reduction (MBSR) training centers, meditation centers, universities

and Buddhist centers. Many of the centers were also identified through public directories.

During the first wave of recruitment, a script requesting their participation in the study

was e-mailed to center representatives. When this method proved non-productive, a

phone call directly to the center was made. When phone calls did not elicit any

responses, then personal contacts were pursued.

Once the first potential participant was identified, the nature of the research was

explained in a written informed consent (see Appendix C) and that was e-mailed to the

participants. The consent was also explained verbally when the investigator and

participants met for the interview. Participants were specifically informed of the

following: the purpose of the study, the estimated time commitment, the data collecting

methods (semi-structured interviews with digital audiotape), the right to discontinue

participation at any time, and information on confidentiality. The interviews were

conducted at a university in a private office, at the participant's work office, or by phone.

Phone interviews were recorded using a special recording devise. Limits to

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confidentiality (e.g. the Patriot Act) were reviewed prior to conducting the phone interview. After the first couple of interviews, the investigator inquired about possible referrals. Referrals that were requested were specifically for individuals who considered experienced in the practice of mindfulness. Thus snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) was used to recruit additional participants.

Participants

  Participant Selection. The quality and richness of the data are considered significant components in qualitative studies (Hill et al., 1997). For this reason, the data collection process involved a series of interrelated activities that are different from quantitative research. Those research activities included: purposefully sampling, gaining access and making rapport, and recording the information. Specific to constructive grounded theory, determining the participant selection and sample size was an important step in this study.

  Unlike sampling techniques that are used in quantitative research, where a probability sample is preferred, strategies for gaining a purposeful sample were employed in this study. In purposefully sampling, the investigator selects the study's participants based on their ability to inform the understanding of the central phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990; Maxwell, 2008). Since the intent of a qualitative study is not to generalize the findings to other populations, but instead to help clarify information about the phenomenon, the selection criteria and the sample size for this study were not determined based on generalizability to others. Rather, the investigator chose individuals who had experienced the phenomena and could also articulate their lived experience. Thus, participants for this study were selected based on their experience

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with the practice of mindfulness and for their ability to provide purposeful information on their experience. This is an important consideration because the information provided by the participants is what helped inform the themes that begin to form through the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006).

In order to gain a purposeful sample, a snowball sampling strategy was employed in this study. A snowball sampling strategy is a non-probability sampling technique where the initial informant is asked to identify other potential participants that could contribute purposeful information to the study (Atkinson & Flint, 2008; Morgan, 2008). Hence, the sample pool in this study was not predetermined but rather developed through participants' referrals.

Study Participants. A total of 11 participants were recruited from two western large cities to participate in this study. For this study, 10 interviews were transcribed and analyzed. One interview was discarded due to a technical malfunction and thus not included in the study. The participants' age ranged from 21 years old to 70 years old ($M =$ 41.44). A total of two participants identified as White, four identified as Latina/o, and four identified as Asian-American (e.g., Chinese-American, Japanese-American). All participants reported that they actively practice mindfulness. The time of practice ranged from 10 months to 25 years of experience. Participants also indicated that they practice mindfulness on a daily basis, in addition to other forms of meditation practices on a weekly basis. Other forms of meditations included: love and kindness, deep breathing, yoga, and compassion. One participant identified as a college student, one identified as a psychologist, one identified as an Astrophysicist and Zen Master, one identified a MBSR trainer for a well-recognized training center, one identified as a social worker, one

identified as a graduate student in a Counseling Psychology program, one identified as a professor in Kinesiology and two did not state their occupational background. A total of four identified as Buddhist, three identified as a Catholic upbringing but recently engaging in more Buddhist practices, three stated that they did not prescribed to any specific spiritual or religious background.

Researcher

The researcher of this dissertation is a Mexican-American female and a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology who is developing an area of specialization in multicultural counseling and positive psychology. The investigator interacted with the participants, conducted the interviews, and analyzed the data. Prior to the interview, some of the participants became interested in the author's interest in mindfulness, and when prompted, the researcher would engage in a conversation with the participants about the topic.

Before starting the research study and throughout the research process, the investigator identified several personal biases and assumptions. The investigator has been immersed in the literature review regarding mindfulness as described through the lens of western psychology. Consequently, the investigator came to this study with assumptions of what is mindfulness as framed through the western literature in the field of psychology. The investigator also assumed that mindfulness is a concept that was being translated to fit a western paradigm and thus distilling the concept of mindfulness from its traditional cultural context. Although these biases were acknowledged and identified when starting the research process, an attempt was made to be conscious of the biases when analyzing the data in order to recognize whether the assumptions and biases were

affecting the coding process. For example, respondent validation was conducted by requesting feedback from the participants during and after the interviews to minimize the possibility of misinterpretation (Hammering & Atkinson 1995).

Instrumentation

The primary instruments used for this study were the researcher's subjectivity and the verbatim transcripts from the semi-structured interview. The researcher was involved in conducting the interviews, transcribing the interviews, the initial coding of the data, developing initial categories, conceptualizing the categories and comparing them with existing data, integrating the concepts, and writing a theoretical draft. Consisted with a constructivist grounded theory methodology, the interviews were structured minimally to allow participants to share their views and experiences based on what was the most significant to them (Charmaz, 2006; Glasser & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher used Charmaz' guidelines (2006) and ethnographic (Creswell, 2007) interview protocols as a model for interviewing by devising a few broad and open-ended questions related to the mindfulness experience. The interviewer asked six main questions and additional probing questions were also asked when further clarification was needed. The questions asked included: (a) Could you describe what mindfulness is to you? (Probes: What are some of the central aspect of mindfulness? Who would you consider to be an expert in the practice of mindfulness? How is mindfulness expressed in your day-to-day life?); (b) How did you become interested in your mindfulness practice?; (c) Could you describe a typical experience for you when you practice mindfulness? (Probes: How do you feel when you have a typical experience? How do you feel during your practice and after your practice? Have you tried other mindfulness practice and, if

so, what brought you closer to choose this practice as the right practice for you? Have you ever had an atypical experience during your practice? If so, could you describe that experience?); (d) Do you think others may experience mindfulness similarly or differently from you? (Probe: If so, could you elaborate or describe the differences?); (e) What is your future plans with the practice of mindfulness? (Probes: Do you anticipate that your practice will change? If so, how? Has your practiced changed since starting to practice mindfulness? If so, how?); (f) Is there anything I should know about the practice that we have discussed? (Probe: Is there anything else that you would like to share?).

Prior to the interview, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire that asked about the frequency in engaging in the mindfulness practice, the length of practicing mindfulness, types of meditations activities that are practiced and indicated the number of hours that they engaged in mindfulness practices or other meditation activities (see Appendix A).

Interviews were kept informal and conversational to avoid interrogation and to facilitate the exploration of the participant's subjective experience with mindfulness. Consistent with counseling techniques, the investigator also followed Charmaz' (2006) guidelines when conducting an interview: address the comfort level of the participant; pay close attention to appropriate probing; try to understand the experience from the participant's view; and ask questions that lean toward a positive response to bring the interview to a positive closure.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using analytical methodologies encouraged by a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), in order to explore how individuals made meaning of their experiences with the practice of mindfulness. In summary, analysis of interviews consisted of transcribing the interview, reading the transcribed interview several times in order to become immersed in the details, and then coding each individual interview. The coding process can be categorized into three major stages: line-by-line coding, focus coding, and theoretical coding. One interview was professional transcribed using a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. The investigator transcribed the remaining interviews. Data analysis started after the first four interviews were completed in order to begin looking for themes.

The initial stage of coding involved an open coding procedure. In short, the goal of open coding is to remain open to what the materials suggest (Charmaz, 2006). There are different analytical strategies for open coding: word-by-word coding; line-by-line coding; sentence-by sentence coding; paragraph-by paragraph coding; and a whole document coding (Charmaz 2006;Creswell, 2007). Charmaz (2006) recommended that the first step in coding is line-by-ling coding, where participants' words are coded into smaller units of data. Charmaz stated that line-by-line coding can seem an arbitrary exercise because not every line contains a complete sentence so some of the information may not be useful; however, the benefit of using this method is that it facilitates the process of generating ideas that can have been easily overlooked when reading the data to discover general themes.

Charmaz (2006) specifically recommended starting the line-by-line coding process by parceling out statements. This strategy involves keeping the coding short, simple, active, and analytic. Since it is through coding that the investigators begin to define what is occurring in the data, having smaller units of data assist with data analysis. By breaking down the data into smaller parts (e.g., line-by-line), the investigator is able to look for assumptions, clarify meanings, compare data, help crystallize the significant points in the data and identify gaps in the data (pg. 50). When conducting the line-by-line coding, the investigator looked for gerunds, or words that reflect actions, in each segment of data in order detect the processes that took place in the data. Additionally, and more importantly, gerunds were used to help minimize the tendency to make quick assumptions about the conceptual meaning of the data (Charmaz, 2006). This is a particular helpful approach in coding.

For example, during the initial coding process, Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend moving away from simply describing the data and encourage the investigator to thinking about a more analytical stance to the code. However, when moving away from a description and into a more analytical process, the investigator begins to interpret the participant's motivation and intentions and risks moving away from being open to what the data suggest. Charmaz' (2006) procedures in line-by-line coding was useful as it helped the researcher remain close to the data but yet encouraged the researcher to apply an analytical method to coding. For this reason, a line-by-line coding was used as an analytical strategy for initial coding.

The second stage of the analysis included focused coding. Focused coding was conducted after initial coding to identify potential central categories. For example, two or

three codes were placed under the umbrella of one code. This process heavily relied on the constant comparison of the data. In constant comparison, data with coding from earlier interviews were compared to later interviews to help establish higher order categories. Generally, this is a process where the investigator made comparisons in different levels of analysis: comparing different quotations assigned to the same codes; comparing different codes; and comparing codes with categories and eventually comparing the data to the emerging theory (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

The third stage of the data analysis consisted of theoretical coding where the goal was to integrate the codes that were selected during focused coding to show how the codes relate to each other and consequently begin to form assertions. Through each stage of coding, a memo was maintained to help the investigator reflect on and clarify the emerging codes. Writing memos is an important method in constructive grounded theory, because it helped the investigator analyze the data early in the research process, thus facilitating the process of reflecting on emerging codes (Charmaz, 2006). Last, member-checking was conducted by re-contacting participants and discussing the emerging themes and model.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter the findings from the study are shared. The purpose of this study was to understand the participants' unique experience with the practice of mindfulness. Constructive grounded theory methods were used to analyze qualitative data. In this study, each person interviewed shared his or her unique story and experience with the practice of mindfulness. Anything was that was recognized as a common experience was seen with at least three quarters (N = 6) of the participants in the study. While each participant shared his/her individual experience with practice, several central domains were identified as prominent across the interviews.

To understand the participants' view of their experience, the results would be shared in an aggregate format and organized into three categories and several themes. Their experience would also be organized into an emerging model conceptualizing their processing of their experiences with mindfulness. While the experiences are unique, there were significant shared experiences to their practice. Different aspects of the study participants' narratives were chosen to represent a theme because they reveal the subjective experience of most of the participants in some manner. Given that the goal of this study was to understand participant's experiences with mindfulness, their general experiences with the practice will be shared first.

The Mindfulness Experience

When discussing their subjective experience, participants described mindfulness in a variety of ways (e.g., a subjective narrative, technical aspects of mindfulness and through the use of metaphors). A core theme that transpired through the analysis was

related to the way in which participants experience mindfulness. Some participants provided a technical response while others provided a personal and abstract narrative of their experience.

The Subjective Experience. Some participants shared their subjective experience as feeling "awake" and being aware of their surroundings and aware of others. When sharing a typical experience with the practice, Participant 1 (P1) initially disclosed struggling with her ability to focus to "quiet her mind " by feeling very distracted by her thoughts. Participant 5 (P5) admitted that she initially found her practice boring. While these participants disclosed struggles with their initial experience, they both noticed that with time it became easier to develop their practice.

Experience with focusing and keeping the mind from being distracted helped developed a routine at bedtime for P1. As she developed her routine she found her mindfulness experience to mean:

Being aware of myself, to begin with, and it extends outwards to being
aware of my surroundings. Being aware of what is going on, it's kind of
like a form of being very considerate of what is going on. It's breathing
and feeling the air and kind of coming in and leaving specifically in
meditation and even throughout the day. Stopping for a few seconds to
just kind of take the moment and allowing to sit there, it just wakes me up
and puts me back together."

Similarly, Participant 4 (P4) also described that mindfulness implied being "awake all the time" and "meeting myself with compassion every moment" in addition to "practicing listening to my own," which allows her to be kinder to

herself and others. P4's immediate response, however, when describing what mindfulness means to her was: "Looking at my dog and seeing that she is beautiful and seeing her expression." She further expanded her explanation by sharing that it was also an opportunity to "smile at the voices and inner habits" and other conditions that created judgment towards herself and others. P4's practice with mindfulness reflected a self-actualization process in which she felt that mindfulness was a self-improvement program that created greater self-acceptance.

Another participant, P5, reported feeling awake and discussed her experience of mindfulness by referring to it as a tool for self-discovery and for developing self-acceptance. She initially defined mindfulness as "meaning that I'm aware of what I do, what I think, my presence. Yeah, I'm awake." P5 referred to mindfulness as a tool for self-discovery, because it provided her with the chance to increase her self-awareness and consequently awareness of others. Interestingly, P5 also discussed concepts of self-acceptance:

> One thing that I think would be helpful for people to know what
> mindfulness practice is about is that we become okay with who we are.
> Meaning, that we're not really becoming a perfect person, but we become
> okay with our own imperfect self.

P5 felt that her experience with mindfulness allows her to develop sensitivity that improved her interactions with others. She specifically stated:

> I see that whenever I react to other people with overtness, I can be more kind of
> okay. Or I can protect myself and not to respond in a way that I would regret later

sometimes. I catch that kind of moment. I catch that tendency, "Oh, this is the

kind of condition when I used to say certain things." But with that awareness, that

mindfulness practice, I don't really do that.

While these participants shared their experience of feeling "awake" and discussed the

consequences of their practice (i.e., self-acceptance), other participants responded by

providing different details about their experiences during the moment of their practice

with mindfulness.

A Technical Description. In sharing what mindfulness means to them, four

participants provided a description of the mechanics behind mindfulness. For example, a

brief and concise definition of mindfulness was provided by Participant 3 (P3), who had

25 years of practice with mindfulness. He is also considered to be an important teacher in

his devotional practice. He simply responded and shared his view about mindfulness as:

Well, it is just watching the thought stream and that involves emotions,

how we react, how we see things, we hear things and how we react to it.

Just watching all those things coming and going and so it becomes very

helpful because when you recognize a specific emotion you know that is

the time to stop or to go on.

By knowing when it is "time to stop or to go on", P3 further explained that he is able to

recognize his emotions and decipher his emotions to determine what could be a helpful

and appropriate way of reacting to certain situations. For him, being able to "put a stop or

time out for a few seconds" implies taking the time to practice the act of recognition,

reflecting, managing his emotions, and determining a decision that could change his

behavior and consequently develop a positive attitude. In comparison, P4 explained his

experience of mindfulness by describing it as a process that requires a discipline to re-orientate his mind.

> It's a way of directing the mind towards what you were doing. I say
> discipline because I don't think the mind, at least mine doesn't, and it
> doesn't naturally do that. My mind does not naturally stay in the present
> and being aware. I don't think what I would call it a natural state and so
> that's why there is a discipline in terms of being aware of it…of where my
> mind, where my focus is and directing it towards the present.

Discipline, determination, willingness and setting aside time to practice mindfulness was considered important by all of the participants. For some, mindfulness was an opportunity to practice gaining a specific quality of concentration skill. This quality of attention allowed one specific participant to focus internally on his experience without judgment. Specifically, Participant 7 (P7) discussed the phenomenon of mindfulness as way to directly observe his experiences without labeling his feelings or projecting judgments on to them. In defining mindfulness, P7 stated:

> One word comes straight to my head. Non-judgmental. I think that is the
> biggest part of it. Just being able to directly have any experience of
> something without coating it with something else.

For P7, "coating with something else" implies making associations of his direct lived experience and then reacting to those associations. He summarized what being nonjudgmental means to him,

> You [see] pass your bias or your doubts or your emotions and [to] able to
> observe it as clearly as possible. So you are seeing things as they really are

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as opposed to imposing your own baggage on it, your own fears, your own

doubts and saying, "That this is good or this is bad. I don't like this and

this really freaks me out." So just being able to observe something without

putting a label on it.

P7 emphasized that practice enabled him to have the experience where he can observe as "clearly as possible."

By not putting a label on his experience, it became a form of distancing for a different participant. Participant 8 (P8) alluded to separating himself from certain emotions so that he is able to detect "what is happening in the moment" and "staying present." For example, P8, felt that in order to stay "in touch with what is happening in the moment" of his direct experience, he used different techniques to help him notice what his mind was doing and to observe that activity from a distance. To P8, observing the activity in mind from a distance translated to:

Sometimes [I am] lost in thoughts, worry, preoccupations about what is

going to happen and it's kind of cool being able to notice that activity, that

mental activity and getting grounded in terms of contacting with some

physical sensations, like the breath or the touch of my feet on the floor, or

maybe the temperature or maybe the sound. And being able to notice the

difference between that direct experiences versus what my mind is doing,

you know. Which is not really here, all this relating, associating, framing,

you know. So that moment for me is mindfulness. When I am able to get

out of that cloud thought.

Being able to observe his direct experience from a distance influenced how P8 directly related to his other experiences.

In initially discussing their experience with mindfulness some participants defined mindfulness from a general, abstract and experiential perspective while other participants begin to provide a description of the mechanism behind their experience with mindfulness. Regardless of their approach towards explaining mindfulness, many of the participants struggle with explaining it and used metaphors as a way to further expand on their experience. Several participants initially articulated a difficulty with describing what mindfulness means to them and in describing their typical experience of it. However, it appeared that the use of metaphors was helpful in capturing an abstract experience.

Use of Metaphors. When discussing their experience, participants used metaphors to convey their perception of their experience. For example, P7 explicitly highlighted the importance of experiencing mindfulness in order to understand the concept fully. The participant shared his belief that words limits the lived experience of the phenomenon and specifically emphasized the use of metaphors:

> You can't talk about mindfulness; you have to experience mindfulness.
>
> The minute that we start using words, we are projecting and we start to get
>
> ourselves tangled. And the closest that we can use is metaphors.

Later, P7 used metaphors to comment on his experience to explain how often he incorporates and practices mindfulness:

> I see it like this. It is like getting gas for your car. When I meditate it's like
>
> getting fuel. So I am fueling up with mindfulness so that I can go
>
> throughout the entire day to be mindful. But what is more important? Is it

like when moving your car or getting gas? And both are just as important.

But they are just different aspects of it.

In this particular response, the participant is comparing filling up his car with fuel to setting aside a formal time to practice mindfulness and using the fuel throughout the day as an analogy to infusing mindfulness in day-to-day activities. His description was in reference to making a distinction between formally practicing mindfulness and infusing mindfulness throughout the day. As he grappled with explaining the difference, he resorted to using a metaphor, as the participant believes the metaphors are helpful.

Where as P7 explicitly stated the important use of metaphors to capture the subjective experience specific to mindfulness, other participants implicitly used metaphors as they shared. Participant 8 (P8) compared a typical experience of his practice like being in a train station. An extended quotation from P8 serves as an example of how he uses a metaphor to illustrate his personal process with mindfulness:

> There is very, very nice metaphor for it. It's like you are in the train
>
> station. The train going out of the station are the thoughts. And sometimes
>
> we get on the train and we go out with the train. It's like we are lost in
>
> thought. So our job in the mindfulness thought meditation is to be able to
>
> notice the train when they are about to leave the station and let them go.
>
> And if you get on a particular train, being able to notice that and being
>
> able to get off the train and get back to the station and repeat that again
>
> and again.

While discussing different meditation mindfulness techniques, P8 enthusiastically referred to the train metaphor again:

When you notice that you are in thought, then you can get off the train and

it's like "Oh, check this out!" Then you go back to the station and you

focus really, really well. You really pay attention on how is that thought is

formed and there is a tiny little space where there is no thought at all. It is

like black –only darkness, and that is beautiful. Only darkness. You are

waiting, expecting attentively and suddenly you are in a train. "Wow!

How did I get here?" And then you get off and go back, darkness [the train

station]. And then all of a sudden you are in the train again!

In discussing a typical experience and central aspects of mindfulness, P5

identified it as a tool for self-discovery and used the metaphor of an alphabet to convey

her point.

It's a way to get to know who you are; who I am. And, I believe everyone

has this kind of question, no matter who you are. And, if we want to find

out that kind of essence, then [use] mindfulness practice, it doesn't

necessarily mean like religious practice, but then just being aware of who

you are and your presence. I think that's very fundamental a thing. It's like

in order to read a book you need to know the alphabet. It's like knowing

the alphabet so then you can read.

For this particular participant, the alphabet was the practice of mindfulness, whereas the

ability to read was her ability to becoming aware of her self.

While some participant used different metaphors to convey their experience,

participants P4, P5, and P9 approached their experience by using the weather as a

metaphor. To further elaborate on what they do in the process of practicing mindfulness,

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these three participants referred to "checking-in" with themselves. When asked to explain

what this meant for them, the three participants referred to using a "weather forecast" to

gauge their experience. P2 specifically remarked:

> I start my practice of mindfulness by first checking in with myself, doing a
>
> weather check. Is it rainy, cloudy, or sunny inside? How do I feel today?
>
> And allowing that to inform where I go next with my practice and what I
>
> need from my practice.

While reflecting on her mindfulness experience, P5 compared her process to noticing the

seasons changing:

> Pretty much I do things in a more habitual way, meaning that I found out
>
> that certain conditions like – let's say – when season changes, became the
>
> winter to the spring and spring to the summer – there's a slight season
>
> changing time that I become a little more sensitive. So, if I'm aware of
>
> that, "Well, maybe this is the time that I'm a little bit more sensitive," then
>
> I see that whenever I react to other people with overtness.

P9 also commented on the use of "weather changes" as a metaphor when teaching

others how he feels during the practice of mindfulness:

> There is an analogy that I would use quite often like comparing feelings to
>
> the weather and we know for example that when it is raining outside that it
>
> is not going to rain forever. Right? At some point the weather will shift as
>
> it does or it will change as it frequently does and the clouds will go away
>
> and the sun will come out so we use that metaphor as a way of teaching.

Another participant, P1, compared her experience with mindfulness as shedding walls. Using this figure of speech to highlight the consequence of shedding walls, P1 stated:

> The fact that meditating to me made me feel very, very connected. It was like it took some walls away from me. You know because we walk around like with these walls to protect yourself and shield and to me it just took some of that away.

By figuratively sharing her experience of mindfulness, she was able to elaborate on her subjective experiences.

Initial data analysis revealed that participants preferred to use metaphors to describe the experiential component of their practice, as metaphors appear to be helpful in describing an abstract concept such as mindfulness. The participants in this study not only had a preference for describing their experience with mindfulness through the use of metaphors but also vary in conveying their experiences. As previously shared, some participants described what mindfulness experience in abstract terms while other participants focused on the technical aspect of their experience. The mindfulness experiences from the participants' perspective entailed certain elements which included: the feelings of being "awake; awareness of self and others; a way of directing the mind to watch the stream of thoughts in a discerning way; a tool for self-discovery and personal transformation.

As data continued to be analyzed three additional separate but interrelated aspects of their experience with mindfulness emerged: 1) the conditions in which mindfulness occurred; 2) the strategies for practicing mindfulness; 3) and the consequences of the

practice. Under each of these main domains salient themes and sub-themes also materialized (See Table 1). The first aspect of that emerged was the conditions for practicing mindfulness. Data analysis produced a theme related to the types of practices that a participant engaged during mindfulness. The second aspect that emerged from the data analysis is related to the strategies for practicing mindfulness. Under this category participants endorsed two general themes. Those themes are related to the philosophy of practice and the elements needed to practice. The last aspect that transpired from the data analysis is associated to the consequences of the practice. This category contains two themes. The themes are classified as connections and interpersonal development and heighten senses.

Conditions

The conditions domain refers to the situations in which the practices of mindfulness take place. Data analysis revealed one main theme that contained three sub-themes. The main theme is related to when the participants engaged in mindfulness. Three sub-themes also emerged from the data: setting aside time, infusing throughout the day, and coping with a struggle. Each of these themes will be discussed.

Formal and Informal Practices. One overarching theme that emerged from the data was related to the participants' involvement in both a formal and informal practice of mindfulness. All participants specifically discussed incorporating mindfulness for both formally and informally. By formal practices participants referred to a deliberate, planned, and structured time set aside to practice mindfulness on a regular basis. While informal practice referred to actively infusing mindfulness throughout the day.

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Formal practice: Setting aside time. Participants were able to identify how often they engaged in the formal practice of mindfulness (e.g., daily, weekly). They shared having a structured set time during the day for practice. Setting aside time ranged from 20 minutes to 60 minutes of practice during the day and/or evening. For example, participants indicated:

P3:
Very seriously, about an hour a day, especially in the evening, but [for] mindfulness, [I] practice as much as I can. [That] means that as I walk, as I am walking, I do that…as I am driving… I do that.

P4:
I get up in the morning, early, and I have a little area in the house where I go. I have a little bench and I sit down and I go for about 20 minutes and that is about it.

P5:
My practice is really simple. I do have a regular schedule for my own practice in the mornings and evenings.

In addition to intentionally setting aside a time to practice on a regular basis, all of the participants had a dedicated space to formally practice mindfulness. All, but one of the participants, attended a center to formally practice. For some participants, a formal practice entailed attending a center that dedicated the practice to a devotional tradition (e.g., Buddhist center, meditation center, etc.). While other participants discussed practicing in a secular environment (e.g., MBSR training center at a university or a professional workshop). All participants were able to gauge their formal practice, yet

participants struggled with answering the question of "how much time do you spend practicing mindfulness?"

Informal practice: Infused throughout the day. P9 clearly captured his struggle by stating, "this is a very difficult question for me to answer. It is hard to measure because mindfulness practice is infused throughout the day.*"* Participants discussed their informal times of incorporating mindfulness throughout the day. For instance P7, specifically shared the following:

> I know it is not 24 hours a day. I would love it to be mindful 24 hours a
>
> day. I mean I do like sit-down meditation for 30 minutes in the morning
>
> and 30 minutes at night and that is about an hour a day. But I often find
>
> myself using the mindfulness techniques in therapy. So you know, 8 hours
>
> a day. Then practice as much mindfulness as you can: mindfulness when
>
> you are walking when you are driving, while you are eating; as often as I
>
> can. So I mean, yeah, there is a difference between the formal kind of let's
>
> sit down type of meditation and then the more informal day to day activity
>
> that I am being mindful of. Being mindful of eating, being mindful as a
>
> therapist, being mindful of cooking. Those are different types of
>
> conations.

In deciphering how often he engages in the practice of mindfulness P9 stated:

> It's so hard like to put it together the minutes, you know. I meditate
>
> anywhere between 5 – 15 minutes that is easier because that is like
>
> quantifiable and I can quantify that and the other times…there is a mindful
>
> practice that I do in my office…and then during running is just kind of like

5 minutes here, 10 minutes there. You know that sort of thing so it is just

these sorts of chunks of time. I deliberately will walk mindfully in

between patients because that is one of the practices that I set aside on a

day to day. On the daily. Throughout the workday.

Infusing mindfulness throughout their day-to-day activities implied not planning

when the practice would take place. As participants disclosed more about their informal

practice, the data revealed a pattern with regards to the conditions of when the informal

practice would occur. Infusing mindfulness throughout the day consistently occurred

when participants shared an experience with a struggle or affliction.

Coping with a struggle. As the interviews progressed, participants began to

provide more details about what infusing mindfulness throughout the day means for

them. Participants disclosed different occasions. For example: "when I am running I start

becoming aware of my body sensations and it is usually when I am having a difficult

run"; "I notice when I am sitting in the freeway and there is a lot of traffic"; "when I am

feeling anxious and tense"; "I am having self-doubt"; and "when it is hectic, stressful and

chaotic day."

One participant, P4, coaches athletes and considers himself athletic. He finds that

when he struggles to meet his potential he infused his mindfulness practice. P4 initially

shared that his experience with mindfulness has been validating in his professional and

personal life and thus reinforces his practice. In elaborating how his experience has been

validating for him after practicing for 25 years, P4 alludes to the concept of struggle:

Probably my commitment and my belief in it [mindfulness] is it continues

to be greater because as I have gone through the years, I think many things

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have validated how helpful this has been for me in what's happen to in the

last 25 years. My whole life, I have always been athletic and I have done

alot of coaching with athletes. So, a lot of the validation comes from the

experiences I had competing and seeing have been in the states of present

awareness and mindfulness, how these states have been associated with

playing at my potential. In terms of like major life experiences, I have

gone through tough times, like everyone has, and you know, I went

through some medical things, you know, and I used the mindfulness

breathing quite a bit and it felt like it was helpful through that.

In providing a specific detail of how he infuses mindfulness, P4 choses to elaborated on

an experience by sharing a specific instance where he struggled with his athletic

performance:

I was on an exercise bicycle and I was going to do kind of a harder

exercise**.** So I was going to go for an hour and every 15 minutes I was

going to increase the amount of tension. So the last 15 minutes is tough. I

mean there is a lot of discomfort so what I was noticing was that I was

really struggling with that and my mind was starting to say like "well, just

go 15 minutes and that is enough," kind of rationalizing it which is

normal.

In noticing that he was struggling, P4 decided to infuse mindfulness by

"checking-in" with himself to become aware of his body and thoughts. Shifting

for him looked like:

"Okay I am going to shift," so every 10 seconds I am going to tap into

what I feel in my body in particularly the sensations in my legs so I am

going to rated it from 1 to 10 and 10 being excruciating and 1 being no

pain at all. So every 10 seconds, I would check-in and say okay that was

like a 6 and I became like more mindful of the sensations that I was

having and that was great. That was another great reminder of how

powerful that was because it just got my mind connected with what my

body was doing and my mind was connected with all these other things

instead of just this dialogue that was going on.

While P4's responses was used to highlight the concept of coping with

struggle, all participants shared specific experiences of infusing mindfulness

throughout the day when encountering a difficult or distressing situation.

Strategies

Another domain that emerged from the data analysis is related to the factors that

contextual factors that influenced the practice of mindfulness. This component includes

themes related to the philosophy of mindfulness practice (i.e., contemplative,

concentration, devotional) and the elements needed to practice.

Philosophy of Practice. The majority of the participants described their

experience with mindfulness by mentioning that their practice contains aspects of

concentration, contemplative, devotional and training practices. P2 defined concentration

as, "the ability to develop a quality of concentration by focusing on one point of reference

or being focused on an object, usually starting with the breath." P2 further noted that to

prevent his thoughts from going astray, it was helpful to concentrate on one object.

Consequently, concentration skill development is needed for mindfulness in order to focus and keep the mind from being distracted. P2 also incorporates a devotional practice such as chanting or reciting sutras. He believed that it was important to integrate other spiritual practices in order to develop a deeper practice with mindfulness.

While P2 made a distinction between concentration and devotional practices during his mindfulness practice, P3 regarded concentration and devotional practice as having some similarities. He shared that any difference actually relies on the person and their preference. Regardless of the ideology, concentration and contemplative skills are needed in order to cultivate mindfulness.

> You cannot do mindfulness without absorption, means concentration, and if you do concentration and you have the background of concentration then it is easier to do mindfulness. But for certain people, concentrate on something it can be difficult…it depends on the personality and may be easier for those kind of person to start from this mindfulness, by walking, by watching breathing, and since we need to breathe often times we don't even notice that we are breathing to survive so that can be one way.

P3 explained that regardless of the person's ideological or training background, the ability to concentrate is important in the development of mindfulness as it helps train the mind to become aware. He shared that a concentration technique can be cultivated in many different ways: concentration (e.g., a focusing skill), contemplative (e.g., meditations) and devotional practices (e.g. spiritual). For example, while some prefer to focus on the breath or to perform a walking meditation, others may find chanting, a devotional related practice, more helpful.

And for some people, say more devotional, they are people like Jesus and

Virgin Mary, Pope or the Buddha, and for them it is easier. It's kind of

changing the mantra or changing the sutra or text and that is a kind of

concentration… and for certain people who are devotional orientated use

images to help them to focus.

Interestingly, P4 also shared that his practice with mindfulness has an additional

dimensional aspect because of his devotional practice. For example when asked

what was a typical experience with mindfulness, P4's immediate response was

Okay, let me see…it can vary but it depends on what you are looking for.

It is on the spiritual level, I mean earlier I was talking about the behavioral

and emotional aspect, I don't know what you are looking for?

When encouraged to describe his own typical experience, P4 shared his

experience as it related to his devotional practice and the development of a "sixth

sense." He stated that in his school of thought his training involves a healing

dimension, which is encouraged by his devotional practice.

I seem to be able to be aware of other things and for us, in our practice and

one of our applications is to help to heal other people or the self. And what

we do is. . .there is someone close by or in a remote area if they need help

getting energy or if they have discomfort and they need to receive

treatment.

Another participant also mentioned that her devotional practice has influenced her

mindfulness experience. While P3 believes that the mechanics of mindfulness can be

cultivated in a secular environment, her practice is cultivated through mindfulness

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teachings from her Buddhist teacher. Hence the intention of her practice is beyond the ability to focus to gain self-awareness but also is to understand others.

> I think that's really great for me to see who I am. But, this awareness also can apply to other people. I start to see maybe my friend, the way she responds. Maybe then, "Oh, she is in this kind of mood." So, I become more kind of understanding where she comes from…that's part of Buddhist practice. By looking at who you are and then you can also understand other people and how things are outside. So, I see the kind of connection to be helpful.

Other participants referred to their experiences as they relate to concentration development. For instance P8 shared that he became initially interested in mindfulness because he wanted specifically to refine his concentration and relaxations skills.

> Yeah, it was mysterious and I wanted to cultivate special skills, mental skills, you know. I was not very sure about what those skills were about, you know. But I was interested in doing it anyways. I think I have always been like a spiritual person or being into the mystery of life ever since I was a little kid.

Although he alluded that his interest was related to being a spiritual person and being existential, in re-counting his experience with mindfulness he shared that central aspects pertain to the ability to regulate his attention.

> Doing the basic exercises, the mindfulness breathing, the thoughts, the body sensations, the body scans, and walking meditation. I think all of those are really important in order to cultivate these skills. Because you could practice mindfulness and doing anything, you know, doing the

formal exercises I think really helps improve the quality of attention and

this ability to notice what the mind is doing.

Similarly, P9's approach involved the development of a focusing ability. For P9, a body

scan helps him concentrate on his awareness of thoughts and physical sensations to

become engaged in mindfulness. P9 commented,

By focusing and being deliberate about your awareness and then it sounds

like you that as well by doing a quick scan of yourself and noticing that

you become very physically attuned with yourself and that process and not

only the physical sensations but also check-in with your thoughts.

Interestingly, the two participants, P8 and P9, who received training through a

Mindfulness Stress Reduction Program (MBSR), discussed their subjective experience

with mindfulness from the perspective of being able to concentrate. Another participant,

P2, who had experience with teaching MBSR classes, indicated that students who had

been introduce to mindfulness through an MBSR Program tend to focus in the beginning,

on their ability to concentrate and shared that with more practice the experience changes

over time.

Elements Needed for Practice. In discussing the central aspects of their practice

with mindfulness and what others should know about mindfulness, participants

unanimously shared the importance of practicing on a regular basis and finding a guide to

further develop their practice. Additionally, participants shared the natural consequences

of engaging in a regular practice of mindfulness, which include: a shift in perspective

about self, others and life and a deeper understanding of the practice. These experiences

also serve as reinforcement to continue to practice.

P3's story about his experience in teaching mindfulness conveys the theme that emerged from the data. P3 talked explicitly about the process, expectations, and dedication required for a mindfulness practice:

I think people expect too much. Many students that come into practice and often time they leave soon as they walk in because they have certain perceptions about what the meditation should be or what mindfulness should be. Especially, now in days, the younger ones that do not seem to have the patience to, you know, [expect] to see the self change in six months or in one year. They probably come in once or twice and they expect to have some effect or something to happen.

P3 referred to his experience with teaching others mindfulness. He believes students have the expectation that one should feel different in a very short time frame. He further elaborated on what he thinks is needed with regards to guidance and practice. In addition to referring to his own personal journey with the practice of mindfulness, P3 also noted the struggles with maintaining the practice of mindfulness.

The practice goes back to history. Often time a great master always sticks with his master at least 10 to 20 years. It means working closely with a master, learning everything, and [the student] becomes the next generation master. Often it is not what you expect; only it will be 3 days or 3 sessions often times they don't ask themselves how much are they practicing and if you don't put in effort how can you expect results. But they expect results without asking "what did I do?" And I think that is difficult.

P3 emphasized the importance of dedicating time and having someone with extensive experience to guide the practice. P3 also discussed the importance of shifting expectations with regards to the extent of time that is involved because he believes that those who are serious about the practice would make a lifestyle change as mindfulness takes years to develop.

> It is a process that needs time. I find out that people are more interested in the class itself but not as much as interested in practice and when [they] get into a regular routine process, that is where the number drops. But that is how, that is how it started. Right? And it is easy to go to school and go to class, but once we get out of class we need to start into the homework and prepare. Somehow this part does not seem to be able to sink in to whoever comes in and who wants to practice. It becomes more and more difficult with time and they come and go.

P3 further elaborated on his expectation that practice requires a lifestyle change and involves dedication, determination, and the willingness to set aside time on a daily basis. Other participants also agreed with regards to dedicating time to the practice. For instance, P5 agreed that mindfulness practice is a lifestyle change and consequently it is helpful to have support and guidance:

> Especially when we think about this practice – it's not like a one time thing. It's not something that you can finish in one time, like you can graduate. It's more of a lifelong process. Then when we see this life long process, we have these ups and downs. Maybe for a certain amount of time we are very diligent. We really dedicate our life to the practice. But,

then at certain times, we're not that in the mood. Then having good

friends and teachers are really helpful.

Throughout the interview P5 referred to the guidance of her Buddhist priest since the

priest would guide and provide the support she needed to continue with her practice. The

reason as to why practicing mindfulness on a regular basis and having a teacher is

important because becoming aware of one' self and the present moment is seen as a skill

development. Some participants discussed that it requires training in concentration in

order to develop mindfulness and that training demands time. For instance, P4 remarked

on his experience about what is mindfulness and why it entails practice:

It's a way of directing the mind towards what you were doing. I say

discipline because I don't think the mind, at least mine doesn't, it doesn't

naturally do that. My mind does not naturally stay in the present and being

aware. I don't think I would call a natural state and so that's why there is a

discipline in terms of being aware of it; of where my mind is, where my

focus is and directing it towards the present.

For him finding meaning and dedicating time to his practice were essential components:

I think one of the most important things is that I find that it's valuable, that

I acknowledged how valuable it is more me to do that and it has great

meaning for me, for the way that I kind of want to live my life, that is

probably the most important thing, is that. And then, then taking it a step

further is dedicating the time to do it.

Finding value in his practice reinforced his willingness and desire to continue to practice. Similarly, P9 finds that practicing allows him gain a deeper understanding of mindfulness.

> The more that I came to understand what mindfulness was and the more
> that I practice it, I began understanding it more through the practice, I was
> like "Wow, this is something that I can buy into." Right? I believe it and
> my experience is reinforcing what they are teaching. Let me continue to
> explore this, let me continue to practice this.

Another participant, P10 emphasized the skill development of mindfulness, which also matures over time. He stated in a concise and brief way what he thinks others should know about mindfulness:

> People should know that this is very simple. It is not magic or esoteric. It
> is something really simple. It is a skill that all human beings have and a
> skill that all could develop through much practice. It is very useful.

While the reasons for emphasizing the importance of practicing were different for each individual, the common theme of maintaining a practice on a regular basis suggests that one cannot benefit from a single practice session. The participants also discussed the implications of their practice as they noticed that it became easier with remaining present and having their practice become more habitual.

Consequences

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis is related to the consequences of the practice with mindfulness. In discussing the consequences of the practice, participants shared experiencing a shift in their perception about reality and their

relationship to others. This shift can be understood under the themes of connection with self and others in addition to heighten senses.

Connection. Many of the participants spoke of the consequence of developing a connection through their practice of mindfulness. Thus, connection with self, others, and the universe became another theme that emerged from the data. Some participants made several references to connecting with the present moment while other participants discussed a connection in reference to themselves and their surrounding environment. For those participants who shared that mindfulness had been helpful in connecting with others, they felt it also helped increased their sense of empathy and compassion, which ultimately lead to further acceptance of self and others. To illustrate, in exploring the meaning of mindfulness, P9 articulated its significance to him and shared the following:

So I guess mindfulness to me is an opportunity to connect with the present moment. Both externally and internally. So externally would be my physical environment, like what is happening outside of me, and internally would be my thoughts, my emotions, and the physical sensations that are going on within my body. And just really, and pay attention and pay attention to all of that.

Similarly, P4 reported a comparable type of connection. In discussing what happens when he experiences mindfulness, P4 saw his mindfulness practice as an opportunity to reconnect:

I am trying to figure out what that was going to look like…making a conscious effort…in trying to figure out what that was going to look like

and I was looking for a way to…to feel connected with myself, my

environment and with others.

P4 was the only participant who made a distinct reference with connection to the

universe. In describing a typical experience of his practice, he shared:

What I do, I start out, I sit down and I get kind of centered. One of the

things that I read a long time ago and I still do, is I kind of affirm that as I

am sitting, and I am…I am allowing my mind to just be with what ever is

happening and I am connecting with everything in the universe. There is a

connecting there. So that is kind of how I start my meditation and it also

helps to affirm that I am not just doing it for myself but I am doing part of

the universe.

 P4 illustrates his practice of moving beyond his physical experience and using

mindfulness to gain access to another dimension. While P4 discussed his sensitivity to

being part of a greater universe, another participant, P1 also discussed the impact to her

level of sensitivity towards others.

In sharing how she became interested in the practice of mindfulness, P1 discussed

the immediate changes that she notice as she began to practice. She shared that initially

she started the practice to address some personal struggles with a relationship; however,

she did not expect the consequence of an increased sense of connection to other beings,

especially animals, which resulted in her becoming a vegetarian. P1 described her

experience as follows:

So I was watching this documentary about dolphins and how they were

basically captured…the dolphins that would not get sold would get

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slaughtered and that just impacted me so much that I was not even able to

sleep. In my dreams I would see cows and [I] know that they were being

slaughtered and chickens, you know. So I just cold turkey stopped eating

meat. And the master cleanse is away for awareness that mind, body and

soul are connected are all one…in order for me to be really centered in

essence those three need to be balanced.

Through her practice of mindfulness, P1 affirmed that she felt more connected. She

shared that she experienced a shift in perspective with regards to other living creatures

that also shifted her relationship with her body.

With regards to creating empathy towards others, P4 highlighted the consequence

of her experience with mindfulness by sharing how being aware of herself allows her to

be more understanding of others. In sharing her personal experience with the practice, P4

noted that her ability to connect with herself more authentically allowed her to develop a

greater acceptance of others. In the following excerpt, P4 discussed that connecting with

herself through mindfulness created a greater self-awareness and thus also an awareness

of others.

I think that's really great for me to see who I am. But, this awareness also

can apply to other people. I start to see maybe my friend, the way he has

certain response. Maybe then, "Oh, she is in this kind of mood." So, I

become more kind of understanding where she comes from.

She repeated experiencing this consequence several times throughout the interview. The

frequency in which she shared this experience highlights the importance for her. P4

identified with Buddhism and stated that part of her Buddhist practice was to cultivate

self understand. She felt that if you are able to understand "who you are and then you can also understand other people and how things are outside." She found that connection to be helpful in living a more authentic life. Again, the participant later mentioned the benefit of her practice as it relates to connecting with herself and others and thus alluded to having less judgment towards others:

From my point of view, I start to see people in different ways, as well.

Yes. I used to have a kind of a short temper whenever I see certain people.

"Oh, she's not supposed to do certain things." But, now I at least try to see

how where 'she' comes from, why 'she' does certain things. So, I've

become more generous to others.

The concept of connection seemed to be an important consequence of the practice with mindfulness for these participants. While it was not the only consequence of the practice, the theme of connection emerged as by several of the participants made references to it, which indicated that it was meaningful to them.

Heighten Senses. As participants described different aspects of their experience with mindfulness, all participants emphasized their experience with sensitivity to energy and other sensations, in particular a sense of warmth and movement. The participants who experienced mindfulness from a devotional practice (e.g., P1, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7) talked about an experience with a broader spectrum of awareness that included physical and energetic levels of awareness. For instance, P3 clearly disclosed his personal experiences with having a sixth sense. As P3 elaborated on his experience, he revealed his ability to experience remote healing, in addition to his ability to see clear images of those whom he heals. Specifically, P3 shared his experience about his work with a person

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located in a different country.

So it was very interesting because that was my first experience in doing

the healings. And somehow, as I do that, a message shows up and I see the

person and…I felt his energy and what was wrong with him. So after 20

minutes with more healing meditation, I wrote him what happened and

how I felt about his energy and what was wrong with him. He immediately

replied and said, "Oh, that is almost correct!" Means a lot of it correct.

As P3 elaborated further on his personal experience of mindfulness, he indicated having a
sense of a sixth sense.

Well, it can be separated into different categories but the thing is the

calmness and you really, you really watch and knowing what thoughts

come in and where the thoughts are going. And often times you can call

this a sixth sense.

As P3 continued to elaborate on his personal experience of a sixth sense, P3 described his
experience:

It starts to…some message comes in and it just… or maybe just thoughts,

but the thoughts may have certain meanings and if you don't pay attention

to it, fine it is just a thought. But sometimes when you pay attention to it,

and this coincidence it may happen and may not happen. But the

coincidence becomes more frequently…and gradually that kind of instinct

answer will appear to you. That's, is an aspect of that…sometimes by the

way of the image. Most of the time to me it's just the thought. By that time

it was an image.

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Another participant, P1, elaborated on her experience with the physical

sensations. She shared that she feels a higher elevation of frequency in which she reaches

a state of calmness. P1 specifically stated:

> [I am] trying to always remain in this stable level of being calm . . . I guess
>
> you can just feel it. There is an elevation of frequency and everything feels
>
> extremely calm. It is almost like time stops. Time continues to pass . . .
>
> and you know that is happening, but is like you are so calm that time is not
>
> really passing for me…yeah.

In continuing to describe the experience of frequency, P1 stated:

> Just you know…the levels…the frequency of the energy around me feels
>
> more intense…specifically around my hands. It is like warmth…like a
>
> magnetic. It is just around the entire hands. Recently, very recently, I have
>
> been feeling like I am moving…through space per say, but I know that I
>
> am sitting still, but it just feels like I am moving; it just obviously going
>
> through me.

While the participants discussed various experiences of unusual sensations, elevated

energy frequency, and the ability to heal remotely, other participants also discussed their

somatic experience. Similarly to P2, other participants described a feeling of a warm

sensation; however, the sensation was felt in their hearts. For example, Participant P7

indicated an element of surprise in discovering that others experience a warm feeling:

> I was talking to one of my dharma sisters. She actually came up to me.
>
> She was like, " I was doing this meditation and I started getting this warm
>
> glowing in my heart and I don't know." And I just started giggling and I

was like, "Oh my god I have it too!" So I started to look it up online and a

lot of people actually have experienced it. It's not something that is unique

to me. It happens to a lot of people so I am like okay, all right this is

suppose to happen.

Similarly, Participant 9 also expressed surprise as he disclosed that his experience with

mindfulness, "It feels warm . . . it just feel like, my chest just feels open." For P9, he

admitted finding that the practice of mindfulness changed his relationship with this body

by being more attuned to it. He shared:

I know that what has changed for me significantly is my relationship to

my body and sensations that I experience in my body so the relationship

that I have to that. That is one way that is changes and I am very, very,

very much very attuned or much.

Although, there were several participants that discussed their experience with

mindfulness in relation to experiencing physical sensations and tapping into other

dimensions, there were a couple of participants who did share experiences related to

heighten senses. In brief, participants described the outcomes of their practice with

mindfulness. Some of the emerging themes that were endorsed by participants were with

regards to connection. The theme of connection referred to the ability to connect

internally and externally. By connecting internally participants reported connecting with

their thoughts and body. With regards to externally, participants shared that they were

able to connect to other people resulting in a greater sense of acceptance of self and

others. Some participants also discussed the ability to connect with another dimension

that allowed them to unconsciously connect with others too. Last, participants shared

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experiences related to heighten senses by being sensitive to the physical body sensations and in-tuned with a higher energy frequency.

Personal Conceptualization of Mindfulness: An Emerging Model

Based on the themes that transpired from conducting a constructive grounded theory analysis, an emerging model is being proposed. The emerging model will be discussed in three different components. In the first component, a conditional matrix is suggested as framework for contextualizing the experience of mindfulness. The second component will describe the internal experiences of the participants. The third component is an integration of a contextual factors and the personal process of the participants with their experience.

To understand the personal experience and conceptualization of mindfulness a conditional matrix is proposed (see Table2). The conditional matrix contains three dimensions: Conditions, Strategies and Consequences. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest using a conditional matrix to assist with the development of an emerging model which they define as "an analytical device to help the analyst keep track of the interplay of conditions/consequences and subsequent actions/interactions and to trace their paths of connectivity" (pg. 199). Using this model as a guide, the researcher: identified the central phenomenon (i.e., mindfulness experience); explored the casual conditions (i.e., formal and formal practices) that gave rise to the experience of mindfulness; classified the strategies (i.e., philosophy of practice) that influence the experience; and identified the consequences (i.e., heighten senses) of the practice.

 The first dimension of the matrix provides an explanation for the conditions necessary to practice of mindfulness, which are related to the type of practice used. Data

analysis emerged a theme related to a formal practice that involves regularly setting aside a time and a location, regardless of ideological orientation (i.e., spiritual or secular). The second type of practice is an informal practice where participants infused mindfulness in their day-to-day activities. The condition that influence the incorporation of mindfulness in everyday activities was when the participant remembered to use mindfulness to cope with a distress, struggle or affliction that was internally (e.g., "self-doubt") or externally driven (e.g., "chaotic and hectic day).

The second dimension related to the experience of mindfulness is associated to the strategies that influence that practice. Data analysis revealed that two components influenced the experience of mindfulness. The first aspect was the philosophy of practice. Participants in this study indicated an orientation towards a devotional practice (e.g., use of prayer) and a secular practice (e.g., use of concentration skills). The second aspect that influences the experience with mindfulness is related to the length of time with practice. As one participant indicated, at the start of her practice it was difficult and boring. Other participants noted that at the beginning of their practice it was important to develop a concentration technique to facilitate their experience of staying present in the moment. The length of practice and the philosophical orientation definitely influence that experience of one participant in this study as it enabled him to heal remotely. Last, all participants underscored the need for a teacher with significant knowledge and experience with mindfulness. These components influenced the outcomes of the practice.

The third dimension, consequences of the practice, suggests that there were two common consequences for the participants in this study. The two consequences identified are connection and heighten senses. The consequences were influenced by the strategies

employed by the participants during their practice with mindfulness. For example, one participant shared that her Buddhist teacher emphasized that a goal of mindfulness is to understand others. Consequently, the guidance that she received from her teacher assisted with the development of the participant's practice in feeling connected with herself and others thus creating a sense of acceptances towards herself and others. The second consequence was classified as heighten senses. Participants shared different experiences with physical sensations during their practice. As previously illustrated, one participant was able to validate his subjective experience with the feeling of a "warm glow in my heart" by confirming through his personal research that others shared a similar experience.

Since this study aimed to understand the subjective experiences of those who practice mindfulness, another component of the model addresses the internal processes of the experience. This emerging component accounts specifically for the cognitive experience of engaging in mindfulness. Data analysis revealed an additional theme associated with the internal process of the experience. Participant underwent a process that involved aspects of observing, examining, acknowledging, adjusting and reperceiving (see Figure 1).

Distal and Proximal Process. As mentioned earlier, there are two types of practices that were identified by the participants; these were categorized as formal and informal practices. As a reminder, formal practices where defined as practices were participants set aside a time to practice on a regular basis. Informal practices referred to practicing mindfulness as it was infused throughout the day, which appear to take place

during a time of struggle. Regardless of the type of practice, the mechanical aspects appeared similar for the participants.

Distal process was used to describe the process that participants reported took place during their experience with mindfulness. Participants shared an experience of "coming and going" during the initial interviews. Several participants also highlighted the importance of developing a certain quality of mind concentration and distancing themselves or creating space from their emotions and lived experience. To create the distance, the participant appeared to first act as an observer of her or his mind. In noticing the present moment, participants used words such as "observing", "looking", "listening" "watching", "noticing" and "seeing" which implies a distal experience from their feelings and thought. Many of the participants described this initial part as "looking inside" and "observing what is happening" and "taking in the moment." Proximal process refers to engaging with their emotions more closely. Participants described " taking inventory," "weather checking" and "examining their thoughts, feelings, and body sensations."

Data analysis suggests that participants experienced a process that was understand first by taking a distal stance on their subjective experience to observe what is happening. After observing internally what was happening, participants would take a following step and begin to actively "look inside" to "start to take inventory" of their thoughts, feelings associated with the thoughts, and body sensations. Through the process of observing and taking an internal inventory, participants would be more proximal with their experience by acknowledging their thoughts and feelings associated with those

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thoughts. Consequently, they would begin to examine them. One participant labeled this as "not coating" the experience. The outcome of taking the time to observe, take inventory, acknowledge, and examine their thoughts was to readjust their automatic responses accordingly resulting in reperceiving their lived experiences. Figure 1 illustrates the process.

An integration of the conditional matrix component and the internal process component of the model is an attempt to explain the multidimensional subjective experience of mindfulness (see Figure 2). The *Personal Conceptualization of Mindfulness Model*, illustrates the integration of the internal subjective experience, the contextual factors that influence the experience, and the consequence of the experience with mindfulness.

Summary

In this chapter the findings from the study were shared. The purpose of this study was to understand the personal experiences of mindfulness. Consequently a core theme that emerged is related to perception of the participants' experience with the practice of mindfulness. Through the data analysis several themes emerged (see Table 1) that were related to behavioral (i.e., routine practice), emotional (i.e., joy), spiritual (i.e., devotional practice), psychological (i.e., self-acceptance) and physical aspects (i.e., warm sensations) of the participants' experiences. Several participants discussed these aspects through the use of metaphors and provided subjective and technical summaries of their experiential descriptions to further illuminate their process.

Based on the participants' narratives, an emerging model of the experience of mindfulness is being proposed. The model, *Personal Conceptualization of Mindfulness*,

includes a conditional matrix that addresses the contextual factors that influence the practice with mindfulness. The second component is an attempt to explain the internal cognitive experience of the practice with mindfulness. The last component of the model is an integration of the two components.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the subjective experiences of those

who practice mindfulness. This study also sought to investigate the following questions:

1) Are there core themes across participants' perspectives on mindfulness?; 2) If so, how

are these central themes reflected in everyday practice?; 3) What are some possible

similarities or differences among the core themes?; 4) How do the similarities and

differences enhance comprehension of mindfulness? To address these questions, data

from the discussions related to the subjective experiences with mindfulness was analyzed

using a constructive grounded theory method. While the stories that were shared by the

participants are unique, salient features were also identified. Several themes were

endorsed by the participants (see Table 1) and used to construct an emerging model.

In making sense of the emerging themes, findings elucidate information with

regards the dimensions of mindfulness by looking at the conditions in which these

individual practice mindfulness unfolds (i.e., types of practices), the strategies used to

practice mindfulness (i.e., philosophy of practice) and the consequences of the practice

(i.e., heighten senses). An emerging model was creating using the dimensions of

mindfulness experiences and the mechanical descriptions provided the participants.

The personal conceptualization model of mindfulness was derived from

individuals who varied in terms of experience from10 months to 25 years and in terms of

types of practices, from MBSR training to Buddhist devotional practices. Part of their

conceptualization included an ability to train the mind to develop concentration skills.

From this perspective, models and definitions have been proposed to conceptualize

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mindfulness in a Western, scientific, paradigm fit. For example, Bishop et al (2004) provided a model based on self-regulation that includes two components: 1) self-regulation of attention to allow recognition of the experience of mental events and 2) maintaining an attitude of curiosity to accept one's experience. This model predicts that mindfulness will lead to a reduction of emotional distress through cognitive restructuring. Other leading scholars (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin & Freedman, 2006) have developed a theoretical model on the mechanisms of mindfulness to consisted of three core elements: 1) Intention of practice; 2) Attention to the mind; and 3) Attitude. Based on these core elements, attending to the experience in an open and discerning way one can have reperceiving or shifting of experience.

The above models support a conceptualizing of attention training and acceptance of an internal experience. This perspective is aligned with a practical Western paradigm and also shared by those participants who were formally trained in the MBSR program. While these models are congruent with the personal conceptualization of the participants in this study, they only focus on the cognitive and internal experience of mindfulness. Several participants in this study, those who also included a devotional component to their practice and/or stated having infinity towards existentialism, also discussed other dimensions that were considered central to their conceptualization of their experience.

Participants referred to their experience by discussing the outcomes of their practice. Additionally, participants discussed their experience in relation to their immediate surroundings and their interactions with the external environment. The outcomes of their practice focused on positive emotions but also included an intrapersonal aspect to their experience. For example, one participant discussed that

through her devotional practices a goal was to increase self-awareness in order to assist with understanding others. Hence, the context of her practice also influenced her experience with mindfulness.

To highlight contextual factors further, P3 emphasized the devotional practice and made a clear distinction between the devotional/spiritual and emotional aspects of mindfulness. He disclosed that through his school of thought and devotional practice, his goal comprised of healing and spiritual dimensions. While P3 did not specify his spiritual beliefs, he did highlight that a typical experience for him included the development of healing energy and the development of a collective unconsciousness to heal others. Another participant explicitly discussed incorporating Buddhist contemplative practices and explained how these practices change the meaning of mindfulness for him. Concepts of karma, emptiness, and wisdom were integral to his experience of mindfulness.

Another contextual factor that influenced the experience of mindfulness was articulated by 9 out of the 10 participants. This additional component was related to having a mentor or teacher to guide their experiences with their practice. The majority of the participants felt that this an important aspect of their practice as it assisted with making meaning of their experience and also with maintaining the practice on a regular basis.

In addition to having a teacher, participants also unanimously agreed that practicing over time influenced their subjective experience and consequently they developed a deeper state and appreciation for mindfulness. All participants planned to develop their practice and anticipated that their practice would change and consequently

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their experience with the practice would change. Yet, they did not know what those changes would be and reported an acceptance and a welcoming of not knowing.

Last, a theme of particular interest was related to infusing mindfulness throughout the day. Data analysis revealed that coping with a struggle or affliction was the condition that gave rise to remembering when to use mindfulness. This experience is consisted with Rapgaya and Bystrisky's (2007) explanation of the purpose of mindfulness. According to Rapgaya and Bystrisky's (2007) classical mindfulness functions as a way to eliminate needless suffering by nurturing insight. Furthermore, the researchers state that nurturing the mind involves following a set of instructions that helps understand the inner workings of the mind and the external nature of the world. However, the practice of mindfulness alone is insufficient since there are other factors that provide a solid foundation to facilitate the practice (Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2007).

Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

There are several limitations to the study. The first limitation is that saturation and theoretical sampling for this study remains to be reached. While purposeful sampling was conducted, further inquiry to examine mindfulness could be performed. For example, this study yield new lines of inquiry and they could have been used to focus on the next round of data collection. The first line of inquiry was related to asking additional questions to the participants. Towards the end of the data collection, one participant suggested to specifically inquire about how participants think mindfulness works. By asking this question, further information would have been obtained and additional insight about the mechanical process of mindfulness could have contributed to the data analysis. Furthermore, examining the instructions that participants followed to practice

mindfulness could have also yielded new information. Having asked these questions could have led to further data saturation.

The second line of inquiry was related to recruitment of additional participants in order test the emerging model. According to Charmaz (2009), a difference between initial sampling in grounded theory and theoretical sampling is that theoretical sampling directs you where to go next with the study and thus it establishes another sampling criteria for people, cases and situations. For instance, data analysis revealed that the emerging themes and the model could have been tested with mindfulness teachers, as they seem an essential component to the practice of mindfulness. This study did include interviews from two mindfulness instructors, one instructor from a devotional practice and another instructor from a secular practice. Yet, interviewing and reviewing the emerging model with additional mindfulness instructors, who have extensive experiential experiences with teaching mindfulness, could have increased the trustworthiness of the themes and the emerging model.

While interviewing additional people could have contributed to the saturation and reaching theoretical sampling, recruitment of participants proved to be difficult for this study. Thus, another limitation lies in the recruitment of participants that have experience with mindfulness. Incentives were not offered to participants and as a result the participants in this study volunteered their time. The researcher contacted two participants through personal connections. These two participants may have not shared completely their stories resulting in possible social desirability.

Another limitation to the study is the trustworthiness of the data. Consistent with Constructive Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006), this study focused on the meaning that

can be created from the data. The interaction between the researcher and the participants give rise to the meaning generated from the data. Therefore, there is an assumption that the researcher and the participants are co-producers of the meaning. For this reason, this study does not assume to be completely objective since the meaning derived from the data is influenced by the researchers biases. While efforts were made to address the biases of the single researcher in this study, a collaborative effort between the participants and multiple researchers could account for the researcher's biases and increase the trustworthiness of the data (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Maxwell, 2008).

The limitations found in this study also contribute to the direction for future studies. A specific recommendation for a future study is to use triangulation methods by having multiple sources to confirm data themes. For example, different authors could code the interviews individually and meet to discuss the codes until a consensus was reached. Another possible recommendation is a follow-up to this study by interviewing mindfulness experts, as defined by the participants in this study. According to the participants, the criteria for mindfulness experts are teachers who have extensive experiential experience with teaching and practicing mindfulness from a Buddhist and therapeutic contexts. Confirming the themes that were generated from this analysis with mindfulness teachers could serve as a focus for a new collection of data.

Implications to Research and Counseling

This study has two major implications for research and counseling. With regards to the implications for research, this study support existing research that suggests that mindfulness is both a state and trait (Shapiro & Carlos, 2009). supports the notation that the experience of mindfulness is both a state and a trait. Participants discussed their

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experience of being in a state of mindfulness when engaged in a formal practice. Additionally, participants shared developing their practice in an informal fashion with a goal of continuing to develop their practices in a more habitual manner. Participants also noted that engaging in mindfulness formally made it easier to be more mindfulness informally.

Another implication of this study is related to the counseling field. While this study did not focus on the use of mindfulness as a clinical intervention, inferences to using mindfulness as a clinical intervention cannot be made. However the participants in this study did voice positive effects of their experience with their practice. Negative cases were also not explored in this study so that could have possibly influenced the data analysis.

Regardless, the participants of this study underscored the importance of practicing regularly and for a significant length of time. As one participant pointed out in this study, he believes that adjusting expectations was instrumental in keeping students engaged with the practice of mindfulness in his school. As another participant stated "a few sessions is not enough." Their experience may have some implications for those clients that may drop out of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. While there is evidence for the effectives of MBSR programs (Shapiro, 2009), studies examining clients' dropouts have been difficult to conduct (Kabat-Zinn, 2000). Although there can be several factors that contribute to participants' commitment to an MBSR group, one possible explanation is related to the expectations about the immediate effects of the

practice. It may be helpful to remind clients about the developmental process of mindfulness to assist with expectation.

Concluding Thoughts

This study explored the subjective experiences with mindfulness of 10 individuals. For many of the participants clearing the mind of thoughts that where connected to certain feelings and decisions about their behavior, was the first aspect of their practice with mindfulness. This practice eventually led to an expansion of their human experience by widening their perspectives about life. While the participants voluntarily shared their experiences with their practice, all of them emphasized the experiential component in order to capture the essence, which was difficult to capture when translating the experience to language. Heidegger (1962) agreed with this perspective as he shared, "the phenomenon gets it's meaning from our experiential knowledge of it; we know it because of our interaction with it, our shared experiences" (page 98).

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Table 1

Categories and Themes

Categories	Themes	Sub-themes
Experience	Subjective Experience	
	Mechanism	
	Use of Metaphors	
Conditions	Type of Practice	
	Formal	Setting aside time
	Informal	Infused in the day
		Coping with Struggle
Strategies	Contextual Influences	Philosophy of Practice
		Elements needed for practice
Consequences	Shift in Perception	Connection
		Heighten Senses

Table 2

Conditional Matrix

Conditions	Strategies	Consequences
Formal Practice	Philosophy of Practice	Connection
Informal Practice	Practice	Heighten Senses
	Guidance	

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Interview Date:
ID:

1. Sex:　　Male　　　Female

2. Age: _____

3. Ethnic　　　　African　　　　　　　　White American
background:　American/Black　　　　　Multiethnic
　　　　　　　Asian　　　　　　　　　International student
　　　　　　　American/Pacific　　　　Other, specify:
　　　　　　　Islander

4. Do you engage in mindfulness practice?　　Yes　　　No

5. Do you intentionally cultivate mindfulness skills?　　Yes　　　No

6. If yes, how long have you been practicing mindfulness?　　_____

7. Do you practice other forms of meditation activities?　　Yes　　　No

8. If so, briefly describe what type of meditation activities do you practice?

_____

9. Please indicate the number of hours that engage in mindfulness practice or other meditation
activities on average on a weekly basis?

	1 (0 – 5 hrs)	2 (6 – 10 hrs)	3 (11– 15)	4 (15-20hrs)	5 (20+ hrs)
Mindfulness:	1	2	3	4	5
Meditation activities:	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you describe what is mindfulness to you?

   a. How do you experience mindfulness?

2. What are some central aspects to the practice of mindfulness?

3. Who would you consider to be an expert in the practice of mindfulness?

4. Could you describe a typical experience when you practice mindfulness.

   a. How do you feel when you have a typical experience?

5. What do you think people should know about the practice?

6. Do you think others may experience mindfulness differently from you?

   a. If so, could you describe the differences?

7. Is there anything I should know about the practice that we have not discussed?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

9. How did you become interested in your mindfulness practice?

10. Have you tried other mindfulness practices and, if so, what brought you to choose this practice as the right practice for you?

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION LETTER

STUDY TITLE: Mindfulness and the Expert Experience: Using a Grounded Theory Framework

Dear Participant:

My name is Araceli Mejia and a Doctoral Candidate in Counseling and Counseling Psychology in the School of Letters & Science at Arizona State University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my doctoral dissertation research, which seeks to examine the personal experiences of those who practice mindfulness.

You must be 18 or older to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will be asked to complete a short demographic sheet and participate in an initial interview that will last for approximately 20-30 minutes. I would like to audiotape this interview, however the interview will not be recorded without your permission. You can skip any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty. Participants will also maybe asked to participate in a follow-up interview lasting between 15-20 minutes. The first interview will last between one and two hours.

There are no direct benefits for participating in the study. However your participation will provide valuable information that may assist the clinical application of mindfulness in the field of mental health. Also, you may experience the indirect benefit or satisfaction of sharing your personal experiences with a listener. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, only in the aggregative form, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, a pseudonym will be used. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a secured and locked location. Only the principal investigator will have access to the data. All identifying information will be coded to protect confidentiality.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me at (608) 852-4444 or araceli.mejia@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Please contact by e-mail at araceli.mejia@asu.edu or call at (608) 852-4444 if you are interesting in participating. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Araceli Mejia, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling & Counseling Psychology
School of Letters & Science
1000 S. Forest Mall
Tempe, AZ 85287-0611

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

To:	Guillermo Arciniega
	EDB
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair
	Soc Beh IRB
Date:	05/22/2012
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	05/22/2012
IRB Protocol #:	1203007643
Study Title:	Mindfulness and The Expert Experience

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

FIGURE 1

MINDFULNESS INTERNAL PROCESS

Observe

Take Inventory
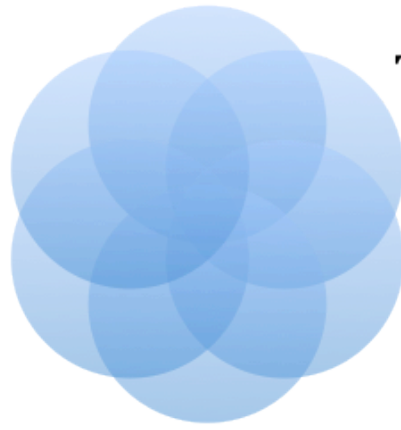
Reperceive

Ackowledge

Adjustment

Examine

FIGURE 2

PERSONAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MINDFULNESS MODEL

Consequences

Connection

Heigten Sense

Contextual Factors

Condtions

Strategies

Distal and Proximal Process

| Observing | Taking Inventory | Acknowledging | Examining | Adjusting | Reperceiving |