

How Yoga Masters Experience Mindfulness

by

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ABSTRACT

This study addressed the questions: What is the experience of mindfulness by yoga masters? How can such experiences inform the counseling intervention of mindfulness? In a qualitative study, individuals who held the minimum credentials E-RYT 200 (i.e., Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher 200 Hour) were interviewed. The verbatim interviews were analyzed using the phenomenological approach. Two categories of themes emerged describing mindfulness as a state of being and a practice of awareness. The common themes describing mindfulness as a state of being include: conscious awareness, feeling bliss, the present moment, interconnectedness, and compassionate evolution. The common themes describing mindfulness as a practice of awareness include: waking the body, balanced practice, the power of pranayama, refining abilities, obstacles to awareness, a holistic practice, and external supports. The results of this study suggest that mindfulness is multifaceted and ephemeral; however, with regular practice it becomes more consistently maintained. As a practice of awareness, mindfulness develops through a hierarchy of techniques moving from the external to the internal including both self and other. Discussion focuses on how these experiences can be applied in counseling interventions.

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How Yoga Masters Experience Mindfulness

Introduction

Mindfulness is an ancient concept that has recently become popular in western counseling practice due largely to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005). Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as paying attention to the present moment without judgment. Mindfulness has been shown to mitigate the experience of maladaptive thoughts and emotions (Baer, 2003, Kabat-Zinn, 2005, Linehan, 1994). The most notable mindfulness-based interventions include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR, Kabat-Zinn, 2005), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, Hayes, 2004), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT, Linehan, 1994), which utilize a combination of mindfulness-based techniques in combination with Hatha yoga and other interventions.

Mindfulness, as an intervention, seeks an emotional balance or equanimity including acceptance, clarity and regulation of intrapersonal experiences. This is congruent with the goals of counseling which aim to reduce psychological suffering and improve well-being. Mindfulness is the foundation of yogic and Buddhist traditions and appears to be something that can be taught in therapy or learned through yoga practice (Adele & Feldman, 2004). The profession of counseling may have much to learn from yoga masters who have practiced mindfulness for years.

The purpose of this study is to interview Hatha yoga masters about the experience of mindfulness and how it develops through yoga practice. Insights

from the masters may provide valuable information about how mindfulness and yoga can be used in counseling interventions. In the following review I will discuss mindfulness as an ancient practice and mindfulness as a counseling intervention today. Then I will present an overview of yoga and how yoga masters understand mindfulness with particular attention to how this knowledge can be of value to counselors.

Mindfulness

An Ancient Practice

In the East, mindfulness has been practiced for 3000 years according to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Patanjali & Malhotra, 2001, Satchidananda, 1978, Worthington, 1982) and for approximately 2500 years according to the teachings of Siddharta Gautama, the historical Buddha (Harvey, 2001, Kalupahana, 1992). In yogic and Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is described as the cultivation of a particular type of awakened experience on the path toward enlightenment. Eastern contemplative traditions regard mindfulness as an experience of present-centered awareness of the body, feelings, thoughts and objects in the mind that when observed allow the individual to realize liberation, peace and joy in daily life (Hanh, 2006). When one is mindful, thoughts and feelings are observed as events in the mind, without over-identifying with them and reacting to them in a habitual pattern of reactivity, thus being mindful is thought to enable one to respond to situations more reflectively (Bishop et al., 2004). The practice of mindfulness brings an increased awareness of the self as an observer of

experiences and enhances one's ability to respond adroitly to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behavior.

Mindfulness is essentially about an experience elevated above cognition, and by this definition, a challenge to study (Grossman, 2008, Hahn, 2006). As it is understood in Buddhism and the Yoga Sutras, mindfulness transcends metacognition allowing for the experience of pure consciousness. Due to its abstract qualities, Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman (2006) state that the essence of mindfulness is lost when it is extracted from its historical roots.

According to Chambers, Gullone and Allen (2009):

Oversimplification severely limits the potential benefits of broadening our understanding of human consciousness that would be possible if the contributions of traditional Buddhist psychology to western psychology were fully explored, rather than purely the other way around. This is significant, as theories of mental health generally assume that an accurate view of reality is necessary for adaptive psychological adjustment. (pp. 567)

This quote, in my opinion, succinctly addresses the deficits found within the current body of research on mindfulness, (i.e., the tendency to over simplify mindfulness in order to make it more suited for empirical analysis thereby losing the essence of the experience). More qualitative research is needed to capture individuals' experiences with mindfulness and to identify how the phenomenon is related to cognition, affect and behavior (Grossman, 2008). Specifically, a deeper

understanding of the subjective experience of mindfulness by advanced yoga practitioners may inform current counseling interventions employing mindfulness.

A Contemporary Counseling Intervention

Within the past 30 years, mindfulness-based interventions have gained increasing popularity due largely to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. Studies with the strongest empirical support for mindfulness include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR, Kabat-Zinn, 2005), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT, Segal, Teasdale & Williams, 2004), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, Hayes, 2004), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT, Linehan, 1994), which combine mindfulness-based techniques with yoga and other treatment interventions. The current literature on mindfulness (Baer, 2003, Chambers, Gullone & Allen, 2009, Roemer & Orsillo, 2003) discusses a variety of experimental and quasi-experimental studies with an array of clinical problems (e.g., major depression, anxiety, psychosis, body-image, substance abuse, trauma, exhibitionism, eating disorders, nicotine dependence, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, psychological distress and neuroticism). Additionally, there are a variety of observable outcomes associated with mindfulness-based interventions (e.g., lowered intensity and frequency of negative affect, reduced anxiety, more adaptive responding to stress, improved romantic relationships, decreased negative self-focused attention, increased levels of cancer-preventing melatonin, improved attentional and working memory function, decreased ego-defensive reactivity under threat, and improved well-being) (Baer, 2003,

Chambers, Gullone & Allen, 2009, Roemer & Orsillo, 2003). This body of research supports the use of mindfulness-based interventions in the reduction of numerous maladaptive behaviors and disorders. The research further indicates that emotion regulation is a specific outcome of mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, Linehan, 1994, Roemer & Orsillo, 2003).

The primary goal of mindfulness-based interventions is improved emotion regulation (Chambers, Gullone & Allen, 2009). Linehan's (1994) research indicates that mindfulness improves distress tolerance, and Kabat-Zinn (2005) suggests that mindfulness provides a way to cultivate emotional balance and revise habitual patterns that tend to distort the reality of experience. Because theory suggests that emotion regulation is an outcome of mindfulness, it is important to determine whether in fact mindfulness training does change one's relationship to thoughts and feelings (Roemer & Orsillo, 2003). This emphasizes the need for a clear understanding of the relationship between these two processes. Rottenberg & Gross (2007) state that evidence regarding how interventions improve emotional regulatory strategies is sparse. Additionally, in the research conducted to date, mindfulness is utilized in combination with other treatment interventions that makes it difficult to identify what specifically is contributing to increased emotion regulation. Is it mindfulness or other components? Are there interactive effects?

Given that emotional dysfunction is a core component of psychological disorders (Dziegielewski, 2010), there may be promising benefits of incorporating

mindfulness into western mental health treatment modalities. However, although the evidence supporting mindfulness is promising, empirical research clearly defining the construct of mindfulness and how it develops is currently insufficient for making strong scientific claims. There is disagreement in the literature about how to define mindfulness, about what specific qualities to include as part of the construct of mindfulness, and how to best assess the experience of mindfulness (Baer, 2003, Bishop et al., 2004, Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007, Grossman, 2008, Romer & Orsillo, 2003, Shapiro, Carlson, Astin & Freedman, 2006). Scholars addressing the problematic issues of definition and instrumentation (Bishop et al., 2004, Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007, Grossman, 2008), argue that there is a need for basic research investigating fundamental issues concerning the conceptual and operational aspects of mindfulness in order to create better measurement instruments. Current instruments that purport to measure aspects of mindfulness include: the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS, Brown & Ryan, 2003), the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS, Baer, Smith & Allen, 2004), the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI, Walach, Buchheld, Büttenmüller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006), and the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R, Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Gresson, & Laurenceau, 2007). Although various authors may claim to capture the essence of mindfulness, several also acknowledge discrepancies between assessments and report the need for more research to increase understanding of the phenomena being assessed.

Due to the difficulty quantifying the experience of mindfulness and lack of understanding regarding how mindfulness develops, qualitative studies eliciting personal experiences with mindfulness may be beneficial (Grossman, 2008). According to the Yoga Sutras (Patanjali & Bharati, 1986), yoga is a specific mindfulness-based practice; therefore, subjective reports of advanced yogis' experiences of mindfulness may provide useful clarification of the phenomena including a deeper understanding of how it develops.

An Overview of the Practice of Yoga

The origins of yoga date back approximately 3000 years (Patanjali & Malhotra, 2001, Satchidananda, 1978, Worthington, 1982). Yoga was systemized and coded by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras documenting the entire philosophy of yoga science (Patanjali & Bharati, 1986, Patanjali & Malhotra, 2001). The word yoga derives from the Sanskrit root *yuj* roughly meaning, "to unite". Yoga was originally developed as a means to facilitate enlightenment in its practitioners through the unification of mind and body. The principles of yoga are referred to as *sutras*, or "threads", and are instructions for practicing yoga. The Yoga Sutras are regarded as a philosophical foundation on which to approach and experience life and are a guide for the practitioner. The eight Yoga Sutras are as follows: *yama* (moral behaviors including non-injury, truthfulness, non-theft, non-greed, spiritual conduct), *niyama* (healthy habits including purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, dedication), *asana* (physical postures and movement), *pranayama* (breathing techniques), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses from external stimuli),

dharana (steadying of the mind through concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (higher consciousness or bliss which defies description) (Patanjali & Bharati, 1986). Yoga, as Patanjali originally described it, was meant to be a holistic practice including each of the eight limbs in order to facilitate enlightenment.

Hatha yoga, which is the most commonly practiced form of yoga in the United States, includes three of the eight sutras (i.e., asana, pranayama, and dhyana) (Worthington, 1982). The word *hatha* is derived from two Sanskrit words, *ha*, meaning the sun, and *tha*, meaning the moon. Hatha yoga was established as a practice by Nath yogis in the 10th to 12th centuries, documented by Svatomarama Swami in the 15th century, and is most known for the inclusion of mindfulness (Riley, 2004, Worthington, 1982). Despite its reductionist approach in the west, the teachings of the Yoga Sutras remain essential elements of the practice of Hatha yoga which when combined are thought to create power and balance in the individual, producing beneficial effects on the mind and body (Anderson & Sovik, 2000, Patanjali & Bharati, 1986, Riley, 2004). The primary benefit of yoga is control over the fluctuations of the mind and the ability to regulate these fluctuations, namely thoughts and emotions (Kalupahana, 1992, Patanjali & Bharati, 1986, Patanjali & Malhotra, 2001 Worthington, 1982).

Hatha yoga is recognized by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), a division of the National Institute of Health (NIH) as a valid mind-body intervention or complimentary alternative medicine

(CAM). Some of the dominant forms or stylistic variations of Hatha yoga in the United States include Ananda, Anusara, Ashtanga, Bikram, Iyengar, Kripalu, Kundalini, and Viniyoga (NCCAM, 2011), which emphasize different techniques from the Yoga Sutras. The 2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) assessed the use of CAM modalities by Americans and found yoga is one of the top ten utilized CAM modalities. Roughly 13 million adults and 1.5 million children practiced yoga in 2006, and between the years of 2002 and 2007, use of yoga among adults increased by 1 percent (or approximately 3 million people) (NCCAM, 2010).

The NCCAM (2010) is engaged in yoga research regarding blood pressure, chronic low-back pain, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, diabetes risk, HIV, immune function, inflammatory arthritis and knee osteoarthritis, insomnia, multiple sclerosis and smoking cessation. The NIH (2010) reports that yoga can enhance stress-coping mechanisms and mind-body awareness, and recommends further research to identify what specific changes occur in the body due to yoga practice.

Given the increasing utilization of yoga for a variety of mental and physical conditions, it is important to determine how yoga contributes to overall health and well-being. Shevlov (2008) reported that yoga, in particular, may lead to enhanced physical and emotional health with particular regard to affect regulation, mediated by mindfulness. Clancy (2010) found that participants in her study reported that Hatha yoga increased their ability to manage stress by

increasing their awareness of emotions and sensations while teaching them acceptance, patience, non-judgment of self. In this study, an experimental design was used to compare women who were practicing yoga for 10 weeks to a control group of women who were not practicing. There was also a qualitative component in the study. Clancy (2010) stated that the inclusion of qualitative data added depth and meaning to the phenomenological experience of yoga experience.

Dunn (2009) suggested that hatha yoga holds promise in increasing well-being in women. Hirsch (2009) conducted a qualitative study analyzing the effectiveness of a Hatha yoga program as part of professional self-care, identifying several themes that are consistent with conceptions of mindfulness including: enhanced awareness or consciousness, equilibrium or balance, a deeper understanding of self, greater connection to love, as well as compassion and connectedness to mind-body-spirit. Hirsch (2009) suggested that current research would be enhanced by qualitative studies exploring the benefits of yoga practice including mindfulness and reactivity. Wolf (2011) also points to the need for qualitative research describing the subjective nature of experience in order to better understand the quality of yoga practice and to study how the quality of practice develops over time. None of the aforementioned studies specifically explored the connection between mindfulness and advanced yoga practice.

Mindfulness has been taught for approximately 3000 years according to eastern tradition, and within the past 30 years, it has gained popularity in contemporary counseling interventions. However, there remains ambiguity about

its precise nature as it can be described as a state of mind, a trait of mind, a particular type of mental process, or the method for cultivating any or all of the latter (Grossman, 2008). It seems that Hatha yoga may be a vehicle for the cultivation of mindfulness, but how this occurs has yet to be fully understood. By analyzing the report of mindfulness and how it develops according to advanced yogi practitioners, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon may be elucidated. This knowledge may be important for the counseling profession in order to enhance current psychological interventions.

Purpose of Current Study

People have engaged in the practice of mindfulness for thousands of years as documented in the Yoga Sutras and eastern philosophical traditions. Recently, mindfulness-based interventions have gained popularity in contemporary counseling practices due to the significant effects mindfulness appears to have on positive well-being. Given that the outcomes of mindfulness and yoga appear to be analogous with the goals of counseling (i.e., improving well-being and overall psychological functioning), the purpose of this study is to solicit a richer understanding of the experience of mindfulness and how it develops within advanced Hatha yoga practitioners. Examining the experiences of advanced yogis may yield a deeper understanding of both Hatha yoga and mindfulness. Because few studies have explored the experience of yoga practitioners regarding mindfulness, this study will use a qualitative method. The information discovered

through this qualitative study may provide greater insight for counselors interested in incorporating mindfulness into current counseling practice.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The criteria for eligibility to participate in the study included being an adult over 18 years and possessing the characteristics of the advanced yogi. According to Yoga Alliance (2010), a national education and support organization created to maintain minimum standards for yoga teachers, those credentials include the criteria listed below. The attempt was made to find the most advanced yoga practitioners (i.e., E-RYT 500) who hold at minimum the following credentials.

Specifically, this includes a yoga teacher with the credential Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher (i.e., E-RYT 200, E-RYT 200, RYT 500, or E-RYT 500). A person with the E-RYT 200 credential has taught a minimum of two years and 1,000 hours since graduating from a 200-Hour Registered Yoga School (RYS), who can provide continuing education documentation, and who can be a Director and/or Primary Instructor of a 200-Hour teacher-training program. A person with the E-RYT 200, RYT 500 credential has taught a minimum of two years and 1,000 hours since graduating from a 200-Hour RYS, who can provide continuing education documentation, and who can be a Director and/or Primary Instructor of a 200-Hour teacher-training program. A person with the E-RYT 500 credential has taught a minimum of

four years and 1,500 hours since graduating from a 200-Hour RYS and has taught 500 hours since graduating from a 500-Hour RYS, who can provide continuing education documentation, and who can be a Director and/or Primary Instructor of a 200 and/or 500-Hour teacher training program).

Volunteers were recruited through flyers and word of mouth. I distributed flyers at local yoga studios in the Phoenix metropolitan area, and utilized my personal network in the yoga community to connect with potential participants. Twenty-five potential participants were recruited who were pre-screened to verify that they met the eligibility requirements of the study. Of those participants recruited, ten participants were eligible to participate. For eligible participants, an appointment for an in-person interview was made. Interviews took approximately thirty minutes though there was no specific time limit.

Prior to asking participants the main questions, I collected basic demographic information (See Appendix A) and reviewed an informed consent document regarding participation in the study (See Appendix B). Demographic information included age, gender, racial/ethnic identity, and details about yoga experience. After collecting basic demographic information and informed consent from the participant, I asked the participant the main research questions.

A total of ten participants were recruited for this study, which included six females and four males. The average age of the participants was 43.4. Nine of the ten participants identified as Caucasian and one participant identified as Multi-Ethnic. Seven of the participants have E-RYT 500 certifications and three have E-

RYT 200 certifications. The average years of yoga practice amongst participants was 16.1 and the average years of yoga teaching experience was 13.2. Six of the participants reported practicing ashtanga yoga, two reported Anusara &/or yin, one reported vinyasa flow and another reported a self-styled yoga practice.

The Interview

The following questions were asked during the interview. Given the nature of the semi-structured interview, prompts and follow-up questions were used as needed.

1. The concept of mindfulness is popular in contemporary psychological practices and is also discussed in ancient yogic and Buddhist literature, how do you define mindfulness?
 - a. How do (or would) you explain mindfulness to your students?
 - b. How do you experience mindfulness?
2. What yogic practices are most effective at developing mindfulness?
 - a. How does mindfulness develop through these yoga practices?
 - b. How do you achieve or attain mindfulness?
3. I think my profession of counseling can learn much from the ancient practices of yoga and mindfulness. What are the essential teachings of yoga that counselors could incorporate into counseling practice?

Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they had any further information to share after the interview ended. The researcher met with participants at a location where they felt most comfortable and was flexible in

scheduling interviews so as not to inconvenience participants. Participants were not compensated for their participation in this study.

The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on a 29-year-old Caucasian female who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The participant was interviewed and then asked to critique the interview questions. Based on my observations and her feedback, the interview questions were confirmed to be clear and effective at eliciting responses. The participant had positive comments about the interview and did not have suggestions regarding the revision of the interview questions nor the structure of the interview.

Analysis

I used the phenomenological method to examine the transcribed interviews for meaning. Following the suggestions from Creswell (2007), Giorgi (1997), Moustakas (1994), and Polkinghorne (1984) the following procedures were implemented. An illustration of the procedures is provided in Appendix G.

1. Participants were identified through criterion sampling. According to Polkinghorne as cited in Creswell (2007), 5-25 participants were a desirable number to reach saturation.
2. Through the bracketing process or epoche, I disclosed personal experiences with the phenomenon under study to set aside personal views and focus on those views reported by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

3. I conducted a one-on-one interview in a setting that was conducive to interviewing and in which the participant felt comfortable.
4. I took field notes during the interviews and also audiotaped the interviews.
5. The audio files were transcribed by a third party transcription service (i.e., Word Magic, LLC.) No identifying information was exchanged, and the third party destroyed the files after they were transcribed.
6. Through the process of horizontalization, I read the verbatim interview transcripts to develop a list of significant statements regarding the advanced yogis experience of mindfulness and created a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Creswell, 2007.) These significant statements, labeled as invariant constituents, are provided in Appendix D so the reader can identify the range of perspectives regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
7. I examined the significant statements, and then clustered the statements into themes or meaning units. These clustered, labeled, and validated constituents are the core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). A sample audit trail is provided in Appendix E illustrating this step of the analysis.
8. From the thematic analysis, I provided a textural-structural description of the participants' experience of mindfulness and how it developed. The individual textural-structural descriptions are provided in Appendix F. The textural-structural description describes essential structures of the

phenomenon as experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

9. The textural and structural descriptions of the experiences of mindfulness were synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon. This description is the essence of mindfulness that captures the meaning ascribed to the experience.

Several methods were incorporated to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. First, purposive recruitment ensured that all participants had experienced the phenomenon. Secondly, member checking was incorporated to garner an accurate reflection of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994). I sought clarification and verification on the major experiences expressed by participants to ensure that I understood the meaning of the experience for each participant. Third, before data collection, I participated in epoche. Epoche is the process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, and biases in order to allow the phenomenon to disclose itself so that is experienced in a naïve and completely open manner (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, I practiced asana, pranayama, and meditation prior to each interview, letting preconceptions and prejudgments enter my consciousness and leave freely until I experienced an internal sense of receptivity and openness. I took field notes during and after each interview and throughout data analysis to bracket, or set aside notions that emerged. Fourth, I consulted with a qualitative researcher and held regular meetings with a qualitative research group of doctoral students to verify the interview protocol,

interviewing technique, horizontalization, and meaning units throughout the progress of this project.

Results

Two categories and 12 major common themes emerged from the descriptions of participants' experience of mindfulness through advanced yoga practice. Being and Doing emerged as the two overarching categories. Under the category of Being, five themes emerged that were related to mindfulness as a state of being: conscious awareness, feeling bliss, the present moment, interconnectedness, and compassionate evolution. Under the category of Doing, seven themes emerged that were related to how the participants actively engage in the practice of awareness, or how mindfulness develops through advanced yoga practice. These themes include: waking the body, balanced practice, the power of pranayama, refining abilities, obstacles to awareness, a holistic approach, and external supports. All of these categories and themes are discussed in more detail in the following pages.

Being

Theme 1: Conscious awareness. This theme refers to a particular state of awareness that requires conscious participation. In all of the participants' descriptions, the terms "awareness" and "being aware" emerged as significant experiences of mindfulness. This theme emerged generally from the interview question "How would you define mindfulness?" Participants described this experience as a particular "state of consciousness" that is an "awareness of self

and others” and includes being “aware physically, emotionally and spiritually.” This state of awareness involved “conscious participation” indicating intentionality on behalf of the participant. For all participants, conscious awareness was essential to the experience of mindfulness as a state of being.

Theme 2: Feeling Bliss. This theme addresses the quality of conscious awareness that is experienced as a type of happiness that defies definition. All participants described the quality of conscious awareness using a variety of positive expressions though each participant experienced this in different ways. Participants used phrases like, “the feeling of bliss,” “let life flow through me,” “joy can come through,” “peaceful contentment and happiness,” an “immaterial sense of ‘I am,’” “subtle happiness on the inside,” and “timeless, it’s peaceful to exist within.” Participant 2 provided the most succinct expression of this theme as she stated:

I get the feeling of bliss. ... Bliss can be experienced in so many ways. It can be an expression of joy. It can be a moment of happiness. This morning it was my dog just making sounds in the kitchen earlier than usual. Or being out, going on a walk, seeing green in that time of year. You know, for me, it's so many little things where I get reminded or I remind myself that this is this very moment.

For all participants, the state of conscious awareness is experienced as a significantly positive. Though the language varied somewhat between all

participants, the overall theme of feeling bliss most accurately captures to positive essence of their experience.

Theme 3: The Present Moment. All participants described the experience of mindfulness as occurring in the present moment. Expressions included, “staying in the present,” “living in the present moment,” “being aware in the present moment,” and “fully present in the moment without attachment.” Participant 8 stated that conscious awareness involves “embracing the present moment not just with the mind but with the body.”

Theme 4: Interconnectedness. This theme includes the recognition of the interrelatedness between internal & external aspects of self (i.e., mind, body, spirit; and thoughts, emotions and behaviors), between self & other, and between self & universe. All of the participants expressed a greater recognition of the sense of connection not only within themselves, but also in their relationships with others and in their relationship to the natural world. Participant 9 most succinctly expressed this sense of interconnectedness as she stated, “[Awareness] impacts... how you relate to yourself and how you relate to other people and to the world.” Participant 1 said, “There has to be a deeper connection... to know that the same stuff that I’m made up of so are you. The same stuff that I’m made up of so is that tree. To see the interconnectedness of everything.” other expressions like “there’s bliss everywhere around us,” “it’s beautiful because ... we’re on a planet in the middle of the stars in a galaxy,” and “underlying any

confusion I may have experienced while incarnate, there is sublime beautiful underlying force” illustrate the strong sense of interrelation.

Theme 5: Compassionate Evolution. This theme implies a developmental process that is both gradual and hierarchical requiring compassion and kindness, time, maturity and commitment. The process evolves from the material to the immaterial, and from ordinary to divine. Participant 7 succinctly described it as, “This process of evolution, the process of refinement from the gross to the subtle, from the external to the internal.” Terms like “a journey inside,” “a lifelong process,” “path,” and “evolution” were salient in each interview. Five of the participants indicated this evolution is a “spiritual practice” that leads to the divine.

An important aspect of this process is the compassion required in order to evolve. Participant 9 explained the need “to be patient and gentle with yourself” in order to compassionately evolve. Other participants stated it requires, “time,” “commitment,” “maturity” and “life experiences” in order to evolve. Participants described how the “level of awareness, your consciousness, reaches a different understanding,” “It [awareness] grow and grows... then you’ll see the world around you... it might still be the same world but your eyes are now new.” This shifting perspective expands first from the individual and then moves to encompass all external elements. Participants also described that “small changes” in regard to self and other are benchmarks of the compassionate evolution.

Doing

Theme 1: Waking the Body. This theme is related to the first step in practicing conscious awareness by creating the foundation for more advanced practices. All the participants expressed that engaging the body is fundamentally necessary because it is the most accessible tool for shifting attention inward. Participant 7 stated, “Asana can really lead to mindfulness” because “the most accessible means [to awareness] tend to be external.” Participants described how “asana inherently wakes us up ... starting from the material and going towards the immaterial,” “we have to move our bodies ... in order to get to the place where we can meditate,” and “asana is a wonderful way to pull you out of habit.” Participant 6 stated, “Most people go to yoga for the physical [and] eventually it turns into something deeper.” Participants described how “some people are not in tune with the body at all so first getting in tune with the body [*sic*].” Participant 1 succinctly explained:

Asana is kind of the gateway to knowing themselves better. First they get to know their physical body better, like where my right hand is, where my left hand is, what is my breath doing in this pose? So that can be a start to the mindfulness, but then eventually we hope people might want to take that deeper.

Participants reported that a foundational awareness of the body is essential in order to develop conscious awareness. It is through this connection to the body

that “the physical practice starts to transform” creating the foundation for the more subtle practices.

Theme 2: Balance in Practice. This theme implies there must be equilibrium in both the external and internal practices in order to advance the practice of awareness to the next level. All the participants described the importance of a balance in regard to body and mind techniques. Addressing the physical, Participant 2 stated, “The quieter practices are as important as having a rigorous physical practice. Whatever it is it has to be balanced.” Participant 1 stated, “There’s an ebb and flow. The moving postures create this heat... and then the still poses, you’re grounded... That balance perhaps is what creates such an opening.” Participants also described the importance of a balance between “repetition” and “improv,” between “vinyasa” and “yin/restorative,” and between “moving” and “still” in the physical practice in order to effectively practice conscious awareness.

Finding balance in the internal practices of breath work, concentration, and meditation is also essential for cultivating awareness. When the practice is balanced, participants stated the outcome was equanimity, feeling “centered,” in their emotional and mental states. Participant 7 stated, “to have this balance between practice and detachment, that’s what brings us happiness.” Participant 9 expressed how “when I started doing yoga... there was not a balance. There was no subtlety, no calmness” and through yoga practice, she was able to achieve equanimity. Participant 11 explained, “We have the mind vacillating from

extreme to extreme... We actually want to go for the Tao, right down the center.” Participant 10 cautioned, “without consideration and respect to breath, it makes you more powerfully unbalanced.” Therefore, finding balance in both the external and internal practices is essential for the development of conscious awareness.

Theme 3: The Power of Pranayama. This theme refers to the importance of breathing practices as an essential aspect of developing conscious awareness. All the participants expressed benefits including “breathing awakens the body,” “to feel your breath moving though, to feel the stress melting away,” “[my] mental, emotional, physical state of being seems to raise,” “pranayama can reveal the self... and another hidden benefit in the pranayama is increased intuition.” Participants described how “breath [positively] affects emotional state,” and that “develop[ing] a lot of different techniques for how to breath... has a corresponding affect... on the mental activity.”

Participants all expressed a calming of the mind due to pranayama: “stabilizes the mind,” “calming the stream of the mind,” “my breath is deep, my mind is quiet,” and “focus on the breathing... until I am subtle.” Pranayama also connected the participants to the present moment, “to become aware of your breath is to become aware of the present moment,” and “tune into the breath... to be here in the present.” Finally, the “breath is the segue” to deeper practices, “when you can really focus on your breath... it has that ability to take you deeper.” Pranayama is an essential element of the experience of mindfulness for all participants and is a necessary step for more advanced practices.

Theme 4: Refinement of Ability. This theme addresses subtle internal practices that are essential to the development of conscious awareness including introspection, attention, concentration, renunciation, and meditation. The effectiveness of the latter internal practices is contingent on the balanced foundation of asana and pranayama. Participants reported, “a desire to look within you and who you are,” “the number one thing is introspection,” “mindfulness is keeping your attention present as much as possible in whatever you’re doing,” “attention is the key,” “when we see our attention wander... we can gently bring it back.” Participant 7 succinctly stated:

Without the ability to pay attention we are going to be dragged away by the senses. ... The first step is attention, to let your attention rest on whatever it is that is the subject at hand and the second step is concentration... Then the third step is renunciation which is to say... do your actions with the best of intention, with all of your energy, but without being attached to the results... We don't even get the opportunity to practice renunciation that much because we have a hard time with the attention and the concentration.

Regarding concentration and meditation, Participant 4 explains, “When you meditate on something, its contemplation. But true meditation is when you’re not contemplating anything.” These finer abilities are essential to the development of conscious awareness because as Participant 10 stated, “Meditation is the most

powerful in developing mindfulness.” All participants confirmed the importance of the hierarchical development of mindfulness in that it is not possible to effectively begin with meditation if the abilities to introspect and pay attention are not refined.

Theme 5: Obstacles to Awareness. This theme addresses challenges encountered in the development of conscious awareness. All the participants reported experiencing obstacles and stated they are an unavoidable and essential element of compassionate evolution because if the obstacle is overcome it is then a marker progress. Participants reported, “the ego makes awareness and mindfulness almost impossible,” “ego is the selfish preservation of self,” “the number one eraser of mindfulness is the ego and the number two eraser is anger,” “you have to consider what enhances the ego... because the ego gets very upset,” and “if you don’t have the big ego... it’s easier to get inside.”

Participants also reported experiences of attachment and reaction, “in the beginning I had a lot of attachment,” and “you realize you have this attachment it, or this reaction to it.” They described attachment as being “consumed with this thought” or “identified with all the thoughts happening in your head,” and as “a consciousness that doesn’t know what it is so... you identify with all these things other than what you really are.” Participant 11 explained, “You create this wonderful little psychic loop that you’re stuck in and you’re doomed to repeat until you become a little more mindful and instead of reacting, which is mechanical, you act in a conscious way.” Participants reported how “things pull

at the senses and attempt to distract us,” and “if attention is going to external concepts then mindfulness is nearly impossible.”

The participants reported that paying attention to these obstacles and “noticing what makes you upset” is the first step in overcoming the obstacle. Once they were able to recognize the obstacle then the challenge was to “embrace it.” Participant 4 stated:

So if you're put in the right situation you can become very reactive. So you may think you're all zenned out, you may think you're all enlightened, and just put yourself in that right situation that brings up all your stuff. And the thing is, it has to happen sometime. It has to. You're never going to evolve or grow, so you might as well just go throw yourself into that situation and strive to make peace with it.

All the participants reported having moments of confrontation with self: “It's very confrontational,” “you have to go within... to confront yourself and do this kind of hard work,” “It's not leaving, like committing to the practice and... not running from it when it gets hard,” and “some of the hardest things that you practice in yoga are the best ones to help you create that mindfulness.” It is the critical moment of confrontation with self and the “coming back... when something is maybe a little raw” that transforms the obstacle into a marker of progress. Participant 1 explained:

It's that moment of desperation where we either get pissed and decide to surrender or we ... just get more pissed and angry and closed. So with in the moment, whether we breathe and we open and we surrender, or we just get more solid. So that's gonna be ... the breaking point.

Though these obstacles can hinder progress, the recognition that challenges will occur and the belief that they can be overcome is indicative of the individual's level of conscious awareness.

Theme 6: A Holistic Approach. This theme emphasizes the importance of practicing conscious awareness in all aspects of life in order for it to more effectively evolve. It includes a holistic approach to yoga, "yoga was truly meant to be asana, pranayama, mediation, [etc.]" as well as a holistic approach to daily life. Participants described it as "taking my yoga with me" and "outside the mat." Participant 5 stated, "the yoga practices that I do right now are hardly any that I do in a room by myself." They explained how the holistic practice of awareness includes, "when you're walking down the aisle of a grocery store, when you're folding clothes, when you're cleaning" and "then you make wiser choices about what you eat and who you hang out with and what TV shows and movies you watch and maybe there's less violence." Participant 2 succinctly stated:

Being mindful includes what I put into my body, what I'm surrounding myself with, who I'm surrounding myself with, how I speak, how I will be received by others, so being aware that my

actions will have a results on others or with others. So I'm trying to look at it from an overall holistic approach.

Participant 10 explained the benefit of taking a holistic approach, “If yoga is serving you then it’s moving out into your life. It’s making you a little more of a productive, happy, thriving person.” In this way, the participants all reported that their yoga practice is intended to positively influence all aspects of their lives.

Theme 7: External Supports. This theme is related to elements outside of self that contribute to the development of conscious awareness. Five participants discussed the use of language regarding mindfulness stating that “mindfulness” can “freak people out” or “overwhelm” depending on the individual’s level of awareness and words like “meditation” can “throw up barriers” because “so often we get hung up in the semantics.” Participant 5 stated, “you can get so easily tangled in it [mindfulness], like in talking about it I can feel myself getting entangled in what I’m saying.” Participant 7 stated:

‘Mindfulness’: it’s a bit like the word ‘enlightenment’ If you have not had the experience of enlightenment then how can that possibly mean anything? ... So to find language that people can relate to on a personal level is probably one of the best things, techniques for teaching mindfulness and developing mindfulness.

Another external support that three participants described was the environment including social support. Participant 6 stated, “I’m very particular about the teachers I go to and the environment around me.” others stated the

importance of “putting yourself in an environment where you’re surrounded by like-minded people,” “that the environment has to be safe,” and that it is essential to have “the support group, the spiritual support.” The environment and social supports are particularly important when obstacles are encountered because both operate as protective factors in the development of conscious awareness.

Finally, eight participants described the role of the healer in practicing awareness. They discussed the importance of having a “master teacher” or “somebody that guides,” “someone there to support you and probably someone who is a little more elevated than you” to assist with the practice because “I needed people to teach me some the those techniques. I would never come to them on my own.” They also reported the importance of “lead[ing] by example.” Participant 5 explained, “Whatever it is you’re expecting the people to attain, they’re not going to attain it unless you have it too.” Participant 7 stated, “This is the greatest lesson I think from Patanjali is that you have to do the thing. You can’t just read about the thing, you can’t just think about the thing, you can’t just watch the thing on YouTube. You have to do the thing.” For the participants, it was imperative that they be engaged in their own compassionate evolution in order to help others embark on the same “journey.”

Some Concluding Observations

In response to the final interview question, “What are the essential teachings of yoga that counselors could incorporate into counseling practice?” participants reported it was essential for the counselor to be actively engaged in a

mindfulness practice in order to effectively help the client. Though the response to this question is largely captured in the preceding theme, the participants emphasized the importance of the counselor leading by example. For example, they reported that in order to effectively teach yoga, they must also be practicing what they teach. Therefore, in order for counselors to be effective in their work with clients, they must also be attending to their own mental health. Participants reported that the client would be able to “feel” the counselor’s level of awareness, making it all the more important for the counselor to be further evolved than the client.

Discussion

The main questions in this study were: What is the experience of mindfulness for advanced yoga teachers? How does it develop within advanced yoga practice? The participants clearly stated that the experience of mindfulness is multifaceted. They experienced mindfulness as a particular state of being (i.e., conscious awareness) that is ephemeral; however, with regular practice conscious awareness becomes more frequent until it is consistently maintained. Participants reported that the development of mindfulness is hierarchical in nature requiring a strong foundation on which to build the more subtle practices.

The participants in this study experienced mindfulness as both a state of being and doing. Mindfulness as a state of being is experienced as conscious awareness, the feeling of bliss or happiness, in the present moment, the feeling of interconnectedness between self, other and the universe, and as a compassionate

evolution of self. Mindfulness as a state of doing is the practice of conscious awareness illustrating the process of how mindfulness develops. It is achieved through waking the body, having a balanced external and internal practice, the power of pranayama, by refining certain abilities, overcoming obstacles, maintaining a holistic approach to practice, and external supports.

The participants reported that yoga, as a philosophy, both explains what mindfulness is and how it develops.

The results of this study support the prominent conclusions in the literature on the definition of mindfulness as a state of conscious awareness and a process involving awareness and attention (Baer, 2003, Bishop et al., 2004, Brown & Ryan, 2003, Kabat-Zinn, 2005). The participants' experience of mindfulness was both a state of evolving conscious awareness in the present moment and the practice of awareness, a process leading to more frequently sustained moments of conscious awareness. The participants explained that the development of conscious awareness occurred by utilizing a succession of techniques in which they refined a particular skill set including the ability to paying attention. This understanding of how mindfulness develops through yoga practice may provide useful insights for refining current mindfulness-based interventions or provide the foundation for the development of new interventions specifically incorporating techniques from the Yoga Sutras.

Participants reported that as an outcome of their yoga practice they were able to achieve greater mental and emotional clarity by becoming less reactive to

events in the present moment. Yoga, as the practice of awareness, required them to confront internal obstacles thereby providing insight into unhealthy patterns and habits. With this insight the participants reported making conscious choices that allowed them to overcome the obstacle thereby achieving a new level of awareness that was inherently positive and healthy. This outcome is congruent with the goals of counseling, which aim to alleviate psychological suffering, improve general well-being, and enhance emotion regulation (Chambers, Gullone & Allen, 2009, Germer, Siegel, Fulton, 2005). Counselors may find this information useful in their clinical work as they assist clients in finding a deeper level of insight into their personal challenges while offering tangible skills with which to overcome obstacles. Counselors may choose to incorporate the psychological teachings from the Sutras in order to deepen clients' self-awareness and provide them with an alternative perspective on how to cope with negative thoughts and behaviors.

The main findings of this study are distinguishable from previous studies in the following ways. Previous research generally accredits Buddhism as the origin of mindfulness and has yet to explore the construct of mindfulness in yogic traditions (Germer, Siegel & Fulton, 2005). According to the participants of this study, mindfulness permeates advanced yoga practice. The participants perceived their yoga practice to be a practice of mindfulness leading to greater awareness as it is explained in both theory and technique in the Yoga Sutras. As Chambers, Gullone and Allen (2009) report, extracting mindfulness from its historical roots

limits our potential understanding of the phenomenon, therefore, by studying the experience of mindfulness from the yogic perspective, this study provides counselor practitioners with a richer understanding of the construct of mindfulness. Due to the lack of consensus on the definition of mindfulness given its multidimensionality and the nascent developments in assessing mindfulness-based interventions, research that takes into account its philosophical roots may provide the clarification necessary for the expansion of future developments in the application of mindfulness in theory and practice. Since no psychological research to date specifically studies mindfulness and its development as understood in the Yoga Sutras, this study may provide counselors valuable preliminary insights into how yoga might be incorporated into their clinical work.

Previous research on yoga has primarily studied the physiological outcomes of asana practice (NCCAM, 2010) and has not fully explored the benefits of the other limbs of yoga (i.e., yama, niyama, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi). Though the physiological benefits associated with asana practice may be essential to the development of mindfulness, the participants in the current study reported that the benefits of the subtle practices of breath work, concentration and meditation are where the greatest benefits of yoga practice are achieved and are those that most contribute to the development of mindfulness.

Further, current mindfulness-based interventions primarily emphasize cognitive techniques with a limited use of asana or other physical techniques

(Hayes, 2004, Kabat-Zinn, 2005, Linehan, 1994, Segal, Teasdale & Williams, 2004). In this study, the participants explained that mindfulness develops through a combination of balanced body and mind techniques practiced in a particular order. If the yoga practitioner has not developed a strong foundation through asana and pranayama, subtle internal techniques will be restricted and overcoming obstacles and meditating will be difficult. The participants stated that yoga is intended to be a holistic practice that cannot be selectively reduced to only cognitive techniques, as that would hinder the development of conscious awareness. Therefore, the hierarchical and holistic nature of yoga practice appears to provide a strong framework for the development of mindfulness, according to the participants of the current study. Due to the structured nature of yogic techniques, mindfulness-based interventions specifically including yoga could be developed merging both ancient and contemporary wisdom. Also, counselors who are interested in incorporating mindfulness-based techniques in their work might consider how they could utilize current interventions in alignment with the holistic and hierarchical structure provided by the participants in this study.

Limitations of This Study

There are several limitations of this study. First, though the sample size is acceptable for this type of qualitative study, a larger sample size may provide a richer understanding of the essence of mindfulness. Second, there was a lack of diversity among the participants. They were all from the same part of the country,

nine participants identified as Caucasian, and all appeared to be of the same socioeconomic class. Additionally, six participants reported practicing the same style of yoga while the others reported practicing yin, restorative, Anusara and self-styled. Finally, despite engaging in epoche, my bias in support of yoga and its potential benefits may have influenced the results of this study.

Suggestions for Future Research and Implications for Practice

Future research should aim to include more participants and more diverse samples. Research questions that may be useful to address include: Do significant differences exist between yoga styles? What is the experience of mindfulness for people of different ethnicities? Are there major differences between yoga practitioners who have been practicing for ten years as compared to those who have been practicing for more than 20 years? How does yoga practice evolve over time? More research is needed to specifically examine how yoga practice improves emotional regulation given that emotional dysfunction is a core component of psychological disorders. Eventually, treatment-outcome studies that incorporate yoga techniques into mindfulness-based counseling interventions can evaluate whether these enhancements do, in fact, improve counseling interventions.

The themes and messages from the participants in this study should be relevant to counselors for the following reasons. First, it is important that counselors who intend to incorporate mindfulness-based techniques into their counseling work be engaged in their own mindfulness practice. When asked what

recommendations they had for counselors regarding the inclusion of yoga teachings in counseling, participants reported it was essential for the counselor to have an advanced level of awareness in order to effectively model the experience and techniques to the client because the client will not be able to adopt a mindful practice if the counselor is not able to demonstrate it. This recommendation includes the need for counselor self-care as it relates to mindfulness (i.e., taking yoga classes, practicing pranayama and meditation).

Second, it is important that counselors are familiar with the philosophy and practice of mindfulness in order to effectively demonstrate it to clients. This includes an understanding of eastern philosophical traditions, Buddhism, and the Yoga Sutras as well as current research in mindfulness. By having a broad understanding of the concept of mindfulness, counselors will then be able to communicate more clearly about what mindfulness is and how to practice it. Being able to speak clearly about mindfulness in a variety of ways may allow the counselor to present the material to the client in a way that is relatable.

Finally, some counselors may want to incorporate basic teachings from the Yoga Sutras into therapy sessions. As the participants explained, yoga encompasses more than physical poses, it is intended to be a philosophical foundation on which to approach and experience life. Counselors could incorporate the ethical teachings of the yamas and niyamas (i.e., moral behavior and healthy habits), breath work, sense withdrawal, concentration, and mediation

techniques in therapy sessions. Though the use of active asana poses may be limited, certain yin and restorative poses could easily be incorporated to balance the cognitive techniques.

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please provide the following information about yourself.

1. How old are you? _____
2. What is your sex (gender)? Check one: _____ Male
_____ Female
3. What is your marital/relationship status? Check one:
_____ Single (never married)
_____ Unmarried, with partner
_____ Married
_____ Divorced or separated
_____ Widowed
4. How do you usually describe your ethnic descent? Check one:
_____ Native American/ American Indian
_____ African American /Black
_____ European American / Caucasian
_____ Asian American/Pacific
_____ Latino/Hispanic/Chicano
_____ Multi-ethnic (please specify)
_____ other (please specify)

5. How many hours per week, on average do you practice yoga? (Do not count hours spent teaching.) _____
6. How many hours per week, on average do you teach yoga?

7. How many years in total have you practiced yoga?

8. How many years in total have you taught yoga?

9. What type of teaching certification do you hold? (i.e.,, E-RYT 200, E-RYT 200, RYT 500, E-RYT 500)

10. Please list any other certifications relevant to yoga teaching/training.

11. What style of yoga do you primarily practice? Please check one:

- Ananda
- Anusara
- Ashtanga
- Bikram
- Iyengar
- Kripalu
- Kundalini
- Viniyoga
- other (please specify)

12. Please briefly describe your yoga practice and its significance in your life.

13. What are the main outcomes or benefits you've experienced from practicing yoga?

14. How do you think these benefits may have impacted your interpersonal relationships?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT-TO-PARTICIPATE

DATE

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a graduate student in the Master of Counseling Program at Arizona State University. My advisor is Dr. Richard Kinnier. I am inviting to participate in a study that explores mindfulness and yoga practice. This study is intended to provide an understanding of how mindfulness develops through advanced yoga practice.

The current study involves participating in an in-person interview with the author of the study regarding your personal yoga practice and how it has developed over time. The data collection for this interview will include audio-transcripts and field notes that will be compiled by the author. Completion of this study should take approximately 30-60 minutes.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. There are no direct benefits or foreseeable risks involved in completion of this study. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

You will also be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. No identifying information will be solicited and your responses will be kept anonymous. Your responses will be stored in a secure filing cabinet to which only Dr. Kinnier and I, Gina Beyer, will have access. Although the results of this study may be used in publications, presentations, or reports, no identifying information will be used.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please feel free to contact the author at (480) 353-9814 or Dr. Kinnier at (480) 965-3592. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or feel you have been exposed to risks, you may contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signature of Participant

Date

Sincerely,

Richard Kinnier, Ph.D.
Professor
Program
Counseling & Counseling Psychology Program
446 Payne Hall
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85257-0811

Gina Beyer
Masters in Counseling
Arizona State University

APPENDIX C
IRB/HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM

To: Richard Kinnier
EDB

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 02/07/2012

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 02/07/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1202007386

Study Title: How Yoga Masters Experience Mindfulness

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.

APPENDIX D

INVARIANT CONSTITUENTS AND CORE THEMES

Participant #1 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“self-awareness”
Feeling Bliss	“Stillness,” “Openness,” “let life flow through me”
The Present Moment	“present in the moment”
Interconnectedness	“Being of Service,” “helping someone take that journey,” Connection of self to God/Source, “To see the interconnectedness of everything”
Compassionate Evolution	“Journey inside,” Compassionate evolution of self that requires maturity, Connection of self to God/Source
Waking the Body	“asana is the gateway to knowing [self] better,” Foundational tool, “repetitive movements to release [emotions]”
Balanced Practice	“balance perhaps is what creates such an opening,” “Ebb & flow” to practice, Heat/cool, Movement/stillness
The Power of Pranayama	Breath reveals & heals emotions, Breath anchors, “breath affects emotional state,” “breathing awakens the body”
Refining Abilities	“Concentration,” Attention, “meditation and self-reflection”
Obstacles to Awareness	Reaction, Confrontation w/ self: “it’s not leaving, like committing to the practice and ... not running from it when it gets hard.”
A Holistic Approach	Need mind/body techniques: “Start with asana... continue with breathing techniques... and then meditation,” “commitment to go to therapy”

External Supports

Use of language: “‘spiritual’ freaks people out”, Environment & social supports: “support is going to be very necessary: Role of healer: ”someone there to support you and probably someone who is a little more elevated than you”

Participant #2 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“Conscious choice,” “awareness”
Feeling Bliss	“the feeling of bliss,” “a multifaceted state of Being-ness,” “happiness,” varieties of positive expression
The Present Moment	“Live in the present moment all the time”
Interconnectedness	Awareness of self and interaction with other, “Really being connected to what’s going on,” “there’s bliss everywhere around us,” “Interconnected opposites” (i.e. pain/pleasure)
Compassionate Evolution	“journey,” “lifelong process,” requires “diligence & commitment,” “level of awareness, your consciousness reaches a different understanding”
Waking the Body	“Body remembers and it will let go,” Foundational tool, Gateway to awareness (e.g. Yin/restorative)
Balanced Practice	Use different rhythms, “the quieter practices are as important as having a rigorous active physical practice”
The Power of Pranayama	Breath moves practice deeper, “simplest example...observe and watch your breathing and calm your breath”
Refining Abilities	“Meditation”, Attention, Renunciation

Overcoming Obstacles	“by practicing the asana, you’re removing [emotional] obstacles,” Distractions
A Holistic Approach	“An overall holistic approach [to daily life]”
External Supports	Social supports & Environment: “safe and supported,” Role of healer: “to bridge and to connect philosophies...toward outcome of healing,” Use of language: “depends on level because... I don’t want to overwhelm”

Participant #4 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“being aware”
Feeling Bliss	“joy can come through,” Peaceful
The Present Moment	“staying in the present”
Interconnectedness	Awareness of connection to self and to universe: “Its beautiful because ... we’re on a planet in the middle of the stars in a galaxy”
Compassionate Evolution	“It’s a process and it could take a long time and ...part of it is practicing being patient” Evolution, benefits from maturity
Waking the Body	“Iyengar and Anusara because there’s a lot of detail...it’s quiet...you’re listening and you’re doing,” Reveals habitual patterns of movement, emotion & thought, Foundational for awareness
Balanced Practice	Awareness created in both Flow/yin
The Power of Pranayama	Listening to breath to calm mind: “observing and listening to your breathing, and you’re observing and listening to your thoughts without attachments”

Refining Abilities	Attention, “question yourself,” Concentration, Non-attachment, Contemplation: “when you meditate on something,” Meditation: ”when you’re not contemplating anything”
Overcoming Obstacles	Ego: “You have to consider what enhances the ego... because the ego gets very upset,” Attachment: “identified with all the thoughts happening in your head,” Reaction: “noticing what makes you upset,” “It’s confrontational”
A Holistic Approach	Incorporated in daily life
External Supports	Use of language: “You can get so easily tangled in it, like in talking about it, I can feel myself getting entangled in what I’m saying.”

Participant #5 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“Being aware in the present moment not only for yourself but for others”
Feeling Bliss	“calm and centered,” “happier the more service mode I’m in,” “vibrant”
The Present Moment	“Being aware in the present moment”
Interconnectedness	“seeing everyone as equally worthy,” “awareness in the interchange” between self & other, “being able to empathize,” “being in service mode”
Compassionate Evolution	“Willing to go through that process,” Evolving process unique to all measured by expanding awareness, nonviolent
Waking the body	Asana practice is first step practicing awareness

Balanced Practice	Need to be “centered” in practice, feeling neutral/centered in emotions
The Power of Pranayama	“Mental, emotional, physical state of being seems to raise,” “Clear the air of the mind,” “Reveal self,” “Increased intuition”
Refining Abilities	“svadhyaya – the ability to introspect,” “born with it” or “trying to develop/gain it,” “Mindfulness [awareness] can become a habit”
Overcoming Obstacles	“Ego makes awareness & mindfulness impossible,” “the number two eraser is anger,” Reaction: “try to neutralize,” Confrontation with self: “Dissect it [self], take a look at it and not be afraid to own it”
A Holistic Approach	“Take my yoga out there with me,” “The yoga practices that I do right now are hardly any that I do in a room by myself,” Incorporate mind/body approach toward self & other
External Supports	Role of healer: “Whatever it is you’re expecting the people to attain, they’re not going to attain it unless you have it too.”

Participant #6 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“Awareness” of self & others, “aware physically, spiritually, emotionally”
Feeling Bliss	Quiet” in mind, “enlightened,” “Nirvana”
The Present Moment	“To be here in the present”
Interconnectedness	“Instilling awareness in her [child] will lead to her being mindful. That is my connection. Awareness is mindfulness. Taking a moment to be aware leads you to be aware of people: mind, body, spirit.”

Compassionate Evolution	Compassion toward self & other, “it’s been a process. It’s been a journey,” requires “maturity, life experiences,” “To be able to move deeper into your spirituality...your awareness, your compassion.”
Waking the Body	Gateway to awareness, “feeling the physical feeling,” “most people go to yoga for the physical... eventually it turns into something deeper”
Balanced Practice	“I’m quiet when I’m physical,” Moving/Still Physical/asana & still/meditation
The Power of Pranayama	“To feel your breath moving through, to feel the stress melting away by incorporating all the things,” “my breath is deep, my mind is quiet,” “tune into the breath... to be here in the present.”
Refining Abilities	self-reflection: “a desire to look within you and who you are.” Attention: “Being aware of your breath, being aware of your emotions and then letting those go. Taking a moment not to think” about past or future, Meditation
Overcoming Obstacles	Emotional reactions: “Pause carefully, taking time to not react” to consider consequences
A Holistic Approach	Need mind/body approach, Commitment
External Supports	Role of healer/ Environment: “I’m very particular about the teachers I go to and the environment around me,” “Surrounded by like-minded people...seekers,” “if I’m going to teach people to be aware and be mindful, I have to be aware and be mindful as well.”

Participant #7 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“Awareness is the first step”
Feeling Bliss	“peaceful contentment and happiness,” “timeless, “restored, refreshed,” “expansive”
The Present Moment	Awareness “in the moment”
Interconnectedness	Awareness of interrelationship between emotions: “We cultivate the opposite,” Connection between doing and non-doing
Compassionate Evolution	“Seems like you need to get some real life experiences behind you before you are willing to ...confront weaknesses,” “This process of evolution, the process of refinement from the gross to the subtle, from the external to the internal.”
Waking the Body	“asana can really lead to mindfulness,” Gateway to awareness (e.g. sun salutation), “The most accessible means [to awareness] tend to be external.”
Balanced Practice	“To have this balance between practice and detachment, that’s what brings us happiness and that’s also what brings us the accomplishment of whatever it is that we want to be better at.”
The Power of Pranayama	Breath calms mind: “Develop a lot of different techniques for how to breath,” “[breath] has a corresponding affect... on the mental activity.”
Refining Abilities	Attention: “Without mindfulness, without the ability to pay attention we are going to be dragged away by the senses,” “anything that helps us concentrate helps us towards mindfulness.” Renunciation: “do your actions with the best of intention, with all of your energy, but without being attached to

the results.” “The perfect regulation of the *chitta*, the consciousness. Those 3 things, would be *dharana*, *dhyana*, *Samadhi* together.” “As a skill, the more we practice, the better we become. ”

Overcoming Obstacles

Distractions: “pulls us right out of ourselves... being carried without”
 Confrontation w/ self: “you have to go within ... to confront yourself and do this kind of hard work.” Attachment: “in the beginning I had a lot of attachment [then] you gain your humility and start to get rid of the attachment.”

A Holistic Approach

Engage techniques in all aspects of life: “I wanted to bring more aspects into my life that would have me concentrate.” “You just have to try it and see what happens... It is the experience of the thing.”

External Supports

Role of Healer, Use of language: “to find language that people can relate to on a personal level is probably one of the best things, techniques for teaching mindfulness and developing mindfulness.”

Participant #8 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“sense of awareness,” “conscious participation”
Feeling Bliss	“immaterial sense of ‘I am,’” “sense of rebirth,” “possibility and openness”
The Present Moment	“Embracing the present moment not just with the mind but with the body”

Interconnectedness	Awareness of connection to self & universe, recognition of self in other, “confidence in God, ... that underlying any confusion I may have experienced while incarnate, there is sublime, beautiful underlying force”
Compassionate Evolution	Transcendent path toward subtlety of the divine, “your own compassionate evolution”
Waking the Body	“Asana...inherently wakes us up,” “starting from the material and going towards the immaterial”
Balanced Practice	Balanced in mind/body, “consciousness balancing... the greater indication of mindfulness”
The Power of Pranayama	Breath calms mind: “pranayama... stabilize the mind and not have it fluctuate”
Refining Abilities	Attention: “if attention is going to external concepts then mindfulness is nearly impossible,” Concentration: “techniques will cause introspection,” “refining the techniques turns from a lump of clay to a beautiful sculpture”
Overcoming Obstacles	Reaction, Attachment, Awareness will develop “if enough sufficient other distractions are removed”
A Holistic Approach	Utilize mind/body practices in all aspects of life: “you’re looking at this overall lineage, heritage, web of techniques”
External Supports	Use of language, Role of healer: “I needed people to teach me some of those techniques. I would never come to them on my own.”

Participant #9 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“a way of being,” “Awareness”
Feeling Bliss	“Subtle happiness on the inside”
The Present Moment	Fully present in the moment without attachment
Interconnectedness	Recognizing relationship of self to other: “impacts...how you relate to yourself and how you relate to other people and to the world”
Compassionate Evolution	Compassionate, evolving way of being toward self & other, nonviolent, “it grows and grows... then you’ll see the world around you ... it might still be the same world but your eyes are now new”
Waking the Body	Foundation for other techniques: “the physical practice starts to transform”
Balanced Practice	Balance in body to create balance in mind, Balanced styles of yoga, “when I started ... there was not a balance”
The Power of Pranayama	Breath eases practice, “focus on the breathing... until I am subtle”
Refining Abilities	self-reflection: “to look inside yourself and be true to yourself,” Practicing attention: “without judgment, trying not to attach”
Overcoming Obstacles	Attachment, Confrontation with self: “When you come to a place where you really have to look inside yourself,” “the hardest things... are the best ones to help ...create that mindfulness”

A Holistic Approach	Mind/body techniques to enhance relationships w/ self & other: “if you practice ahimsa – non-violence- the others will come,” do yoga “outside the mat” Commitment
External Supports	Role of healer: To lead by example, “everything I say and ...teach comes from a place of practicing”

Participant #10 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“being aware”
Feeling Bliss	“Timeless,” “it’s peaceful to exist within,” “happy”
The Present Moment	“Being present in every moment”
Interconnectedness	“being aware of the spiritual even in the mundane,” Awareness of relation between self and other, connection to nature
Compassionate Evolution	Compassionate journey: “to be patient and gentle with yourself,” a spiritual process, notice small changes
Waking the Body	Awaken body to progress, poses create space “have to move our bodies... in order to get to the place where we can meditate”
Balanced Practice	if not mindful of practice it “makes you more powerfully imbalanced,” need heat & cool in practice
The Power of Pranayama	Breath calms mind and reveals emotional patterns, “focus on breathing ... to take you deeper,” “to become aware of the breath is to become aware of the present moment”

Refining Abilities	Meditation: “meditation is the most powerful in developing mindfulness but breath is the segue.” self-reflection: “begin to notice that you’re not at the mercy of your habits and patterns”
Overcoming Obstacles	Attachment: “begin to notice you’re not at the mercy of your habits and patterns,” Reaction
A Holistic Approach	Need to practice all limbs “because they compliment,” make holistic lifestyle choices
External Supports	Use of language, Role of healer: guide client to “find it [guru] within themselves”

Participant #11 Clustering of Invariant Constituents into Themes

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Conscious Awareness	“aware of this state of consciousness”
Feeling Bliss	“Freedom,” “liberation”
The Present Moment	Keeping mind in present moment
Interconnectedness	Recognition of self in other: “you don’t see your friends...people ...mother and father...strangers” when you are unaware, interconnected emotions
Compassionate Evolution	“It’s a Spiritual practice” that leads to divine, awareness expands from self to other
Waking the Body	Gateway to awareness: “asana is a wonderful way to pull you out of habit”
Balanced Practice	Repetition & variation, Need for balance in body & mind, “we actually want to go ... right down the center, what those two extremes have in common with each other”
The Power of Pranayama	Focus on breathing to stay present, Breath is “calming the stream of the mind”

Refining Abilities	Paying attention, Concentrating, Meditating
Overcoming Obstacles	Ego, Reaction: “when you’re reacting there are no choices,” Attachment: “you’re mind misinterpreting things,” Distraction: “state of unconsciousness is uncomfortable to live in...want to be distracted”
A Holistic Approach	Incorporation of both mind/body techniques
External Support	Role of healer: need to be more elevated than student/client to guide them

APPENDIX E
AUDIT TRAIL

Excerpt from Transcription of Interview

Below is an audit trail from an excerpt of a verbatim transcript. It illustrates the meaning units that were extracted from the transcript and the transformation and grouping of the meaning units into common themes.

1. GB: Like I was saying, mindfulness is popular in contemporary psychology and I'm interested in looking at it more from the Eastern and yoga traditions. So how would you define mindfulness?
2. # 10: I think mindfulness is being aware of the spiritual, even in the mundane activities And I think that if we can just slow down in this busy, busy world and just take a moment to get grounded and be present. It's about being present. It's about being present in every moment. So yoga, that tradition and techniques, teaching us how to do that so that we can take it off our mat because really yoga is meant to be a lifestyle and not an exercise. We have to move our bodies in order to get to the place where we can meditate really comfortably, it's definitely necessary to do the Asana. If yoga is serving you, then it's moving out into your life, it's making you a little more of a productive, happy, thriving person.
3. GB: So in that way it sounds almost like mindfulness and yoga is one in the same, or interchangeable.
4. #10: Ideally, yes. Modern American yoga tends to be a little bit different because of a lot of distraction when you put in a lot of music and with American lyrics and it's like, what are you taking in? So when you can really focus on your breath like we did today in doing the ujjayi and turning your attention inwards, it has that ability to take you deeper.... And to have a student after class tell me it was the most present she was to herself when we did the meditation. And she's been practicing for a while... That means that somehow the sequencing was good enough that it got her to a place where she remembered herself.... the real the guru is within you, it's that light in your heart. So it's timeless, it's peaceful, to exist within. We're always looking outside of ourselves, so mindfulness is to become aware that everything you need is within you, and to rest in that.
5. GB: That kind of leads to my next question. How do you explain mindfulness to your students?
6. #10: Through the breath... And to a yogi, by nature, to become aware of the breath is to become aware of the present moment. So when you consciously remember your breath—when you are breathing with awareness, then you slip into now. When you drop in and you really become aware of your breath, that's gonna anchor you in yourself, you're gonna become more mindful.
7. GB: I can certainly relate to what you're saying. It is almost an instantaneous grounding sensation when you are breathing from your belly, and it sounds like that's kind of the key and the entryway into mindfulness.

8. #10: And also, you know, the physical poses are for the mat and then the breath is for the mind. When we do physical poses to find space in our body, and we do pranayama so that we can gain mastery over our mind...When we're anxious, scared, nervous, angry, our breath patterns change. And when you can—you have the tools and you can master them to steady your breath, then you become more grounded and make wiser decisions, and you're not the action, but you can take action. That's being mindful. ... Where I feel like I'm gonna get nervous or scared, is that I'll just sink into sama vritti where I breathe in and out, steady and even, and then very quickly I center myself... So as you become more present to yourself, you're gonna become more present to others. And it begins with you, people think it's selfish sometimes but it's not. You so have to mature yourself first.

Meaning Units

- Mindfulness is a state of being where she recognizes both mundane and spiritual elements of life in the present moment. (Line 2).
- The state of being is described as happiness, peacefulness, timelessness, grounded. (Line 2, 4, 10)
- Mindfulness requires a conscious choice to pay attention and concentrate both when practicing techniques and in daily life activities. (Line 2, 4, 6)
- Yoga is collection of techniques that teaches how to be aware and is meant to be a lifestyle and not just physical exercise. (Line 2)
- The first step toward greater awareness is to move the body, followed by the breath then meditation. It is important to follow the progression of techniques. (Line 2, 6, 8)
- If the yoga techniques are being effective, one will experience greater awareness and happiness in all aspects of life and this awareness will grow from self to other. (Line 2, 4, 10)
- Distraction is a block to awareness and also highlights the importance of considering on all levels what you put in your body. (Line 4)
- The techniques take time to develop and through the development it leads to greater awareness of self or the inner light. (Line 4)
- She finds that practicing breathing centers her, shifts focus progressively inward, reveals emotional patterns, anchors to the present moment, and calms the mind. (Line 4, 10)

Individual Themes and Their Relation to Group Themes:

1. "Awareness" was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of "conscious awareness." The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - Mindfulness is a state of being where she recognizes both mundane and spiritual elements of life in the present moment. (Line 2).
 - The techniques take time to develop and through the development it leads to greater awareness of self or the inner light. (Line 4)

- If the yoga techniques are being effective, one will experience greater awareness and happiness in all aspects of life and this awareness will grow from self to other. (Line 2, 4, 10)
 - The first step toward greater awareness is to move the body, followed by the breath then meditation. It is important to follow the progression of techniques. (Line 2, 6, 8)
 - Yoga is collection of techniques that teaches how to be aware and is meant to be a lifestyle and not just physical exercise. (Line 2)
2. “Being-ness” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “feeling bliss.” The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - Mindfulness is a state of being where she recognizes both mundane and spiritual elements of life in the present moment. (Line 2).
 - The state of being is described as happiness, peacefulness, timelessness, grounded. (Line 2, 4, 10)
 3. “Being Present” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “the present moment”. The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - Mindfulness is a state of being where she recognizes both mundane and spiritual elements of life in the present moment. (Line 2).
 - She finds that practicing breathing centers her, shifts focus progressively inward, reveals emotional patterns, anchors to the present moment, and calms the mind. (Line 4, 10)
 4. “Lifestyle Approach” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “A Holistic Approach.” The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - Mindfulness requires a conscious choice to pay attention and concentrate both when practicing techniques and in daily life activities. (Line 2, 4, 6)
 - Yoga is collection of techniques that teaches how to be aware and is meant to be a lifestyle and not just physical exercise. (Line 2)
 5. “The Power of Breath” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “the power of pranayama.” The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - The first step toward greater awareness is to move the body, followed by the breath then meditation. It is important to follow the progression of techniques. (Line 2, 6, 8)
 - She finds that practicing breathing centers her, shifts focus progressively inward, reveals emotional patterns, anchors to the present moment, and calms the mind. (Line 4, 10)
 6. “Paying Attention” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “refining abilities.” The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - Mindfulness requires a conscious choice to pay attention and concentrate both when practicing techniques and in daily life activities. (Line 2, 4, 6)

- She finds that practicing breathing centers her, shifts focus progressively inward, reveals emotional patterns, anchors to the present moment, and calms the mind. (Line 4, 10)
7. “Distraction” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “obstacles to awareness.” The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - Distraction is a block to awareness and also highlights the importance of considering on all levels what you put in your body. (Line 4)
 8. “Journey” was the individual theme. This fit under the group theme of “compassionate evolution.” The meaning units that exemplify this theme are:
 - The first step toward greater awareness is to move the body, followed by the breath then meditation. It is important to follow the progression of techniques. (Line 2, 6, 8)
 - If the yoga techniques are being effective, one will experience greater awareness and happiness in all aspects of life and this awareness will grow from self to other. (Line 2, 4, 10)
 - The techniques take time to develop and through the development it leads to greater awareness of self or the inner light. (Line 4)

APPENDIX F

INDIVIDUAL TEXTURAL-STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTIONS

Participant 1

Participant 1 experiences mindfulness as “awareness of self” and “a journey inside” to self-reflect. Her experience is one in which she is simultaneously aware of her being and engaged in a process of introspection in the “present moment.” During a mindful moment, she has the feeling of being “very quiet” and is able to “let life flow through me.” It is a balanced state of being that is both still yet flowing “where eventually the mind quiets and there is some still more.” In the moment, she feels calm, peaceful and fully conscious of herself and her surroundings.

Another important aspect for her is the experience of being able to connect with a divine source. She stated, “The More, it can’t be explained... If you’re going to say what it is, it would be God, or Buddha, or Shiva, the Energy, the Source, or whatever you believe it to be.” For Participant 1, the theme of interconnectedness permeates her experience of mindfulness including the ordinary and divine, self to other, and self to natural world as she stated, “To know that the same stuff that I’m made up of, so are you. You know, the same stuff that I’m made up of, so is that tree. To see the interconnectedness of everything.”

She acknowledged that the use of language can be an issue in describing the experience due to the sensitive nature of spiritual rhetoric. She stated, “‘Spiritual’ sometimes freaks people out” so a different choice of words that conveys the quality of the experience without offending others is a critical part of her practice of mindfulness. Regardless of the semantics, the spiritual essence of her practice is an important part of her experience of mindfulness.

“Being of service” is another essential aspect of the experience of mindfulness. Part of the “journey” for Participant 1 is being able to identify the needs and experiences of other people in order to more compassionately serve them. She described how her ego can be a block to seeing the connection between herself and others. “It’s [ego] kind of the selfish preservation of self, and the small self, not the collective.” When she is mindfully aware, she has the recognition that her happiness will expand by serving others as she reported, “It’s not about me. It’s not about what I want to do. It’s about how can I serve my students.” Her awareness is that doing for others is essentially doing for self. In order to engage in compassionate service to others, she reported it is important for the process to begin with her; she cannot be compassionate with others if she is not compassionate with herself.

Pivotal in the journey to greater awareness are mind/body practices that create the necessary conditions to have a spiritual experience. Participant 1 described how mindful awareness develops through yoga practice:

First getting in tune with the body and the natural rhythms of the body, the natural rhythm of the breath. After that would be, maybe even delving more into the breath and how the breath affects their emotional state... We start to work deeper with the breathing and then we start going a little deeper into quieting the mind. And that’s

going to be, again a 10-fold process of how to quiet the mind. ...
And from there going into a deeper level of stillness and
concentration and inner journey.

It is through the awakening of the body, that she is able to create the necessary conditions for the more subtle practices of concentration and meditation. She stated it is “movement linked with breath” that creates the foundation for practicing mindful awareness.

In her physical practice (i.e. vinyasa, Anusara, and Iyengar), she also discussed how it is important to balance the practice in order to create change on multiple levels of awareness.

There's an ebb and flow so the moving postures create this heat, right? And this energy spins and creates this expansion. And then the still poses you're grounded. Maybe you're in Pigeon. You're sitting in a pose, and it's opening and you're still. And in that stillness the transformation can happen too, just on different levels.... That balance perhaps is what creates such an opening.

Along the journey to greater awareness there are inherent obstacles, in particular, moments of confrontation with self. For Participant 1, when these moments occur, two possible options exist in which “we either get pissed and decide to surrender or we get pissed and we just get more pissed and angry and closed.” When she experiences internal confrontation, her process is to observe her internal and external reactions and to breathe. “So within the moment, whether we breathe and we open and we surrender, or we just get more solid.” Regardless of the nature of the confrontation, she reported she is able to transcend the obstacles by focusing on her breath. For Participant 1, the practice of pranayama is paramount to transcending obstacles. “If a student can stay with it and take the deepest breath they've ever taken, not a shallow breath, but take this full breath and embrace the fear or whatever is coming up for them, then essentially they transcend it.”

Another key element of Participant 1's experience is the role of a supportive community and teacher. “I have a strong support group. I have a guru, I have a swami. I have a teacher who has been my teacher for 10 years. I have a husband who totally gets what I do for a living and gets the fact that I practice yoga. I have a family that supports what I do.” This external support provides the impetus to continue evolving because it is a lifelong commitment that “takes practice” and will happen through guidance.

In summary, conscious awareness, interconnectedness and compassionate evolution are central themes to Participant 1's experience of mindfulness as a state of being. She is able to achieve this state of being by consciously engaging in the practice of awareness which includes the core themes of waking the body, balanced practice, the power of pranayama, obstacles and external supports.

Participant 2

Participant 2's experience of mindfulness is "to get up and already be aware" of the present moment. She stated it requires a "conscious choice" to engage in daily life, and that this conscious effort is what creates a mindful experience. For her, a mindful moment is when her mind is clear, "I'm not thinking other thoughts. Just being in the moment," and this moment has a particular quality. She described it as a multifaceted "state of being-ness" that is "the feeling of bliss." She experiences bliss in a variety of ways including "the feeling of happiness," "a moment of joy," or during the routine activities of daily life. This experience of "bliss" is also inherently connected to its opposite emotional state. "Bliss can even be related to pain ... because they belong together. Interconnected opposites." This recognition of the interrelationship between states of being is an important aspect of Participant 2's experience of mindfulness.

For her, the experience of mindful awareness is also interconnected with "what I put into my body, what I'm surrounding myself with, who I'm surrounding myself with, how I speak, how I will be received by others, being aware that my actions will have a results on others or with others. So I'm trying to look at it from an overall holistic approach." By living a holistic lifestyle in which actions are consciously considered, Participant 2 described how awareness evolves:

Your level of awareness, your consciousness reaches a different understanding and a willingness to go further or deeper or open up more or getting more curious about what's really going on rather than putting another Band-Aid over it or shoving it down or not talking about it. Because on the other side of that pain, is the bliss, is the release.

Her awareness compassionately evolves because she feels curious about her experiences both the positive and the negative. She is able to recognize the interconnected nature of life and is therefore less troubled by it.

Another important aspect of the experience of mindfulness for Participant 2 is the utilization of the body as a foundational tool to building awareness. She practices restorative yoga and describes how a simple, supported pose can provide an opportunity to practice awareness of self. She described it as such:

The heart openers... So it's a very vulnerable position... but you feel like there is support around you. And with the heart being exposed and by guidance with breath or music or talk through meditation, there's hardly anyone who can resist that. Because that's actually the fascinating thing, we all know how to do it, we just have forgotten how to do it. So once you get the tools, it's like, 'Oh, the body remembers!' And I can let go.

She reported there is inherent benefit in waking the body in order to create conscious awareness because once the body is engaged it becomes easier or more natural to "let go." She also described the importance of a balanced practice. She stated, "I think the quieter practices are as important as having a rigorous active physical practice. Whatever it is, it has to be balanced." Without the balanced

practice, she finds it is difficult to create “blissful moments.”

For her, the role of breath is another important aspect of mindfulness. The breath is the tool that connects the body and the mind. “Observe and watch your breathing and calm your breath. In and out. Find the rhythm of your breath. Stay focused with your breath as long as you can.” By refining her ability to focus and concentrate on the breath, she experiences the benefits of increased insight into mental and emotional patterns, and the positive outcome of being able to let go of negative emotions. She stated:

The emotions that we are not finishing up, that we keep in the body, they end up like crystallized... you can't really define, but they're stored under the muscle layers in the body... So you have an emotional release because the energy which you were holding on to in the hip or wherever else is finally going through the muscle layers beyond, into your tissues and out of your system. And that's when you have these, again, blissful moments.

When she experiences a negative emotion, she engages the breath in order to transcend any given obstacle.

In explaining how she practices awareness using body and breath, Participant 2 also described how “a holistic approach” is necessary for expanding awareness. “Yoga requires so much more. It's a lifestyle. It's a philosophy, the concept. It's not a religion. And yet it's something that you can live by.” It is the application of this lifestyle approach that contributes to her evolving sense of mindful awareness. She also recognizes value in having supportive communities whether that is in schools, amongst families, or the community who support a mindful practice.

Another important theme for Participant 2 was the role of the healer or teacher. Because she supports integration in all aspects of her life, she also thinks it is important for healers and teachers to consider such an approach. This would include the integration of philosophies of yoga and psychology “toward the outcome of trying to support and heal somebody.” Also by having more experiences with yoga practice, counselors may come to have a better understanding of how yoga works as they experience it for themselves.

In summary, the core themes of conscious awareness, feeling bliss and interconnectedness are central to Participant 2's experience of mindfulness. In order to create and extend these “blissful” moments, the core themes of waking the body, balanced practice, the power of pranayama, refining abilities, a holistic approach and external supports are also central.

Participant 4

Participant 4 experiences mindfulness as “being aware” of the body, breath and mind in the present moment and throughout daily activities. To distinguish the state of awareness from simple wakefulness, he described how one “can be either identified with all the thoughts happening in your head” and therefore “attached” to these perceptions or is unattached to mental formations

and thereby fully aware. A mindful moment is one in which “joy can come through.”

For Participant 4, the experience of mindful awareness is a “process,” an internal journey requiring acceptance, patience, and kindness toward self. He believes the process requires an awareness of “how you are hurting yourself by thinking things that are counterintuitive to the organism... It’s beautiful because it’s alive, and we’re on a planet in the middle of the stars in a galaxy. And you think you’re bad, and it’s like ‘its genius.’” His experience is one that is connected to the greater universe, and that with time, maturity, and awareness of self, mindful awareness grows in a compassionate evolution.

For Participant 4, engaging the body is a foundation for practicing awareness. He stated asana is an effective “inlet” into gaining greater self-awareness. Using the body to build awareness by “breathing coupled with the movement of the body” requires him to “be part of active listening” which results in making the “mind more pure, more purposeful because you’re listening with intention.” By engaging the body, he has the experience of becoming more aware of his mental formations. “So following the movements gives you a chance to be aware of what you’re doing and also notice how often you don’t pay attention to what you are doing. By noticing what you’re thinking about that’s not consistent with what you’re doing, you begin to recognize how much you’re thinking and where thoughts going.” This is his foundation for building mindful awareness.

Another important theme for Participant 4 is the refinement of abilities. Using the body as a foundational tool to activate conscious awareness, it is then possible to become consciously aware of his internal experience. He stated once he is able to recognize his thoughts, then he “practices awareness” by refining the abilities to pay attention, introspect, concentrate and meditate. He described the process as “Noticing reaction, being aware, and then not being identified or attached to it like that’s who you are. You have to recognize the reaction to the thinking.” The practice is “in not judging but just noticing what makes you upset.” With time and maturity, these abilities become habitual and the relentless “flow of thoughts” slows. He stated, “Every time you become aware of it, you burn a little bit of it. So after you become aware of it for awhile it’s not like you have to be aware all day, it will happen more naturally because you won’t be thinking about as many things.”

In regard to the nature of thought and its impact on expanding awareness, he recognizes that his thinking as well as the collective thinking of his environment plays a role in the expansion of awareness. He described how collective awareness, or the lack of, can be detrimental to the development of conscious awareness. He stated, “It could also be the community at large, all the people in your society that are also thinking this way...it’s communal and it’s not personal and you don’t have to believe that it’s you, that you’re bad... you’ve inherited a lot of it.” He finds that as awareness grows individual and collective mental formations that cause “conflict” begin to dissolve and “opportunities for joy” increase.

Another important aspect of practicing awareness is the nature of obstacles encountered along the journey. Participant 4 described how obstacles like “reaction” are good indicators of the level of mindful awareness. “I started to really recognize it when certain things don’t bother me as much as they used to. Pet peeves I think are a clue. When you get upset, that’s a clue. When you shut down, that’s a clue.” These moments of confrontation with self provide insight into his personal triggers. He described it as follows:

So if you’re put in the right situation you can become very reactive. You may think you’re all zenned out, you may think you’re all enlightened, and just put yourself in that right situation that brings up all your stuff. The thing is, it has to happen sometime, it has to. You’re never going to evolve or grow, so you might as well just go throw yourself into that situation and strive to make peace with it.

His experience then is to embrace the obstacle in order to transcend it. In so doing, his mindful awareness expands. Eventually, reactions occur with less frequency, less energy is required to practice, and moments of mindful awareness occur in greater frequency.

In summary, conscious awareness, the present moment and compassionate evolution are central themes in Participant 4’s experience of mindfulness. In practicing awareness, the core themes of waking the body, refining abilities, and obstacles to awareness are essential to developing conscious awareness.

Participant 5

Participant 5 experiences mindfulness as an inherent “awareness” that may be awake to varying degrees depending on the individual as he states: “I think some people are born with it and some people are not and some people are trying to develop it.” His experience of mindfulness is “being aware of what is in the present moment, not only for yourself but for others.... Its self-awareness, and its how you treat other people based on being able to empathize with what they’re going through and how they feel and what they need.” For him, mindful awareness extends from not only his thoughts, feelings and behaviors, but also to others. Recognizing the interrelatedness between self and other is a key element of his experience of mindful awareness.

The aspect of “being of service” to others was found throughout Participant 4’s experience of mindfulness. For him “seeing everyone as equally worthy” and “awareness in the interchange between my student and myself” are examples of his experience of mindful awareness. “I find I’m happier the more service mode that I’m in, and I’m thinking about how can I help this person, how can I help that person. Especially in the yoga line, the more service that I do, the better I feel.” His experience of conscious awareness is directly related to his relationships with others, which is part of the core theme of interconnectedness.

For Participant 5, mindful awareness is also closely tied to “total intuition,” which he experiences as being able to both consciously and subconsciously perceive situations in his environment. He gave specific examples

of how his mindful awareness contributed to his ability to intuit a situation, and how being mindfully aware in daily life contributes to overall safety, personal pleasure and enhanced interpersonal relationships. “The more that I can intuit what someone’s going to do, what someone’s not going to do, the safer I’m going to be, the more pleasant my experience is going to be. So I try to take my yoga out there with me and that’s just one example.” This extrasensory ability to perceive the world around him is a central element in his experience of mindfulness.

Another important theme for Participant 5 was the power of pranayama as a fundamental tool for the development of mindful awareness. When teaching he finds the class is enhanced when breathing techniques are included as he stated, “Everyone seems to lift their state of being. Their mental, emotional, physical state of being seems to raise.” Additionally, he finds that pranayama has “hidden benefits.” He stated:

The breathing practice really helps you calm down, become centered. A lot of the lower functions of the human mind fall away, like anger, doubt, ‘little me’, ‘I can never do this,’ frustration. That falls away with the breathing practice... Do the *pranayama* and then after that you are going to be able to see more clearly. It’s going to clear the air of the mind.

His experience is that pranayama “can reveal the self” and leads to “increased intuition” both of which provide powerful information to examine.

Another important theme is the refinement of abilities. For Participant 5, after the mind is cleared and calm, then he engages in “svadyaya” or introspection. For him, practicing introspection is most powerful when he is confronted by either anger or ego. “I have not conquered anger yet, [but] what I am trying to do is make it episodic and short... I’ll do self-examination and figure out where did I drop the ball.” His primary concern is his role in the confrontation, and how he can best neutralize that reaction so that it doesn’t reoccur in the future. “If I’m in that situation again, I’m neutral towards it. I’m not angry, I’m not happy, it’s just like ‘Eh, okay, move on.’” Through this process he is able to let go of his mental attachments, and this practice becomes more natural with time and practice.

Finally, Participant 4 described how obstacles prevent the development of mindful awareness; “ego makes awareness and mindfulness almost impossible.” He finds that ego is a “boiler plate” that prevents introspection because it will not allow self-awareness to come through. “If you don’t have the big ego that you need to constantly maintain, if you can shrink that down, [it’s] easier to get inside.” For him, shrinking the ego requires introspection and pranayama. He explained that it “is very confrontation to you and no one is doing it to you. It’s the breath work, so it’s coming from the inside, so the revealed self is very powerful. It’s usually a good self too because then the false front starts falling away.” Through practice these techniques are able to increase mindful awareness so that it becomes habitual, and lapses in awareness become more infrequent.

In summary, the core theme of conscious awareness, the present moment, and interconnectedness were central to Participant 5’s experience of mindfulness.

In practicing mindful awareness, the core themes of the power of pranayama, refinement of ability and obstacles to awareness were also central to his experience.

Participant 6

Participant 6 experiences mindfulness as a “state of awareness” that includes not only herself but also those around her. In particular, she described the potential impact her actions may have on others, and that mindful awareness leads her “to be aware of people: mind, body, spirit.” For her, mindful awareness is a state of being that encompasses both self and other. Mindful awareness is a conscious acknowledgement of the connection between Participant 6 and her environment and is related to the core theme of interconnectedness.

Another important element for Participant 6 is the “journey” to mindful awareness. Initially, Participant 6 acknowledged she did not approach her yoga practice as an evolution of self, but viewed it primarily as a physical outlet through asana. However, “eventually it turns into something deeper which is what you want. You want to create that awareness.” The asana was the entry point for her “evolution” to greater mindful awareness. She believes it is a process that generally requires life maturity, though dependent on the individual can be “a quick evolution.” She stated, “I’d say time and allowing yourself to look deeper and allowing yourself to be able to let go... You have to be aware, mindful of who you are, to be able to move deeper into your spirituality, your yoga practice, your awareness, your compassion.” She considers each of these equally, emphasizing the interrelatedness of each element in her experience of mindfulness.

Another essential theme for Participant 6 was waking the body. She began her yoga asana practice because she was experiencing significant life stress, though her motivation for practice was solely for the physical benefits. She described the experience as “taking a moment to stop and feel your fingertips on your mat. To feel your breath moving through. To feel the stress melting away by incorporating all the things because, you know, yoga sometimes, it’s really hard to explain, and it just works.” Her experience illustrates the subconscious training that occurs when practicing asana. It was through the process of reconnecting with her body that she was eventually able to identify the “emotional stuff going on.” For her waking the body is a foundational practice in expanding mindful awareness because it necessitates that the practitioner turn their attention and concentration inwards toward their body. By refining her ability to pay attention to the body, she was then able to become aware of her mental and emotional states.

Additionally, Participant 6 found that one of the important outcomes of her asana practice is greater emotional awareness. She discussed being able to identify and appropriately express her emotions with particular regard to how it may affect others around her. She described the experience as, “Taking time to not react emotionally. Taking time as I get older to pause and to think about how my actions, my physical, emotional, spiritual actions are going to affect me and

those around me.” In the moment of confrontation and reaction, she relies on “breathing in and out,” and “pausing.” By focusing her attention on her breath, she is able to find “the space in between” which gives her enough time to evaluate her response. The outcome of her refined ability to pay attention to the breath is the transcendence of the obstacle. For Participant 6, the ability to consciously respond to obstacles is essential to the practice of mindful awareness.

Another important aspect of the process for Participant 6 is the role of the teacher/healer and the environment. Because her practice is personal and sacred, she is sensitive to the quality of the teacher under whom she studies and also the distractions in the environment in which she practices, “I’m very particular about the teachers I go to and the environment around me.” In regard to the teacher she stated it is important they be engaged in both self-care and self-study. She reported, “You lead by example. If I’m going to teach people to be aware and be mindful, I have to be aware and be mindful as well.” She also noted that it is beneficial to be surrounded by a group of “like-minded people” in a “mindful environment.” By having a more advanced teacher or healer in a supportive environment, mindful awareness develops more quickly than it otherwise would.

In summary, the core themes of conscious awareness, interconnectedness and compassionate evolution are central to Participant 6’s experience of mindfulness. In regard to her practice of mindfulness, waking the body, the power of pranayama, refinement of ability and external supports are also important themes.

Participant 7

Participant 7 described her experience of mindfulness as “a moment of really peaceful contentment and happiness.” It is a timeless moment in which she feels “restored,” and her mind “feels calm and also expansive.” She explained, “Awareness is the first step. To notice when you’re not paying attention and then gently bring it [attention] back without judgment.” Her experience of mindfulness is one in which she is consciously aware her attention is being drawn externally or to irrelevant distractions, and with kindness and compassion she brings her mind back to the present moment.

For Participant 7, mindfulness is a particular type of awareness that is enhanced by the ability to pay attention. Her experience is that mindful awareness is different from cognition though cognition does have a significant role in the growth of awareness. “I don’t think that mindfulness should be confused with cognition because it’s not, but I think that cognition can be a helpful step toward mindfulness.” For her, cognition is engaged in the practice of paying attention.

Another important aspect of mindfulness for Participant 7 is the internal process of evolution. She explained it as, “This process of refinement, from the gross to the subtle, from the external to the internal.” She finds that conscious awareness is able to expand when “we get some accessible external things” and from there the process is able to move inward. Throughout this process, she emphasized the importance of being kind to herself, and bringing her awareness and attention back to the present moment “gently” and “without judgment.”

An essential theme for Participant 7 is the refinement of abilities, in particular attention. She defined mindfulness as “paying attention.” She described how “sensory stimuli” pull at the sense thereby leaving one unable to be fully present with the task at hand. By practicing paying attention, she is better able to stay grounded in the present moment. She described previous life experiences that required her to multi-task which lead to a decreased ability to concentrate. Therefore, her compassionate evolution included bringing “more aspects into my life that would have me concentrate.”

Participant 7 considers the practices of concentration and renunciation as fundamental to the development of mindful awareness. She stated it is through this three-step process of “paying attention,” concentrating “on the task at hand,” and doing with “the best of intention, with all of your energy, but without being attached to the results” that she is able to expand her conscious awareness. If “yoga is the calming of the fluctuations of mind” then “abhyasa” or “practice” and “vairagya” or “renunciation” are how she is able to achieve it. Therefore, the refinement of attention, concentration and renunciation are central to her experience of mindfulness.

Participant 7 described her encounter with obstacles as another critical part of the development of mindful awareness. She discussed the potential distraction of music in regard to asana practice and how it draws awareness away from internal processes. She explained how distraction is “this experience of being sucked out of ourselves” which may initially give the “illusion of meditation,” when in actuality, it does not include conscious participation. However, “without the use of music, and with some different kinds of words, I think that we have the experience of really confronting ourselves from within,” and for her, this is the intended goal of asana practice. Participant 7 finds that the more she is able to focus on her internal experience through asana, pranayama, sense withdrawal and concentration, the greater her ability to remain mindfully aware of the present moment, and “as a skill, the more we practice it, I think the better we become.”

Another important element in the experience of mindfulness for Participant 7 is the use of language. She thinks it important to “find language that people can relate to on a personal level” because words like “mindfulness” or “meditation” are stigmatizing for most people particularly if they have no prior experience with either. She stated:

In English, if all we have is mindfulness, it’s a bit like the word enlightenment... I don’t think this is helpful to anyone because if you have not had the experience of enlightenment, then how can that possibly mean anything? ... We don’t have any real understanding of it because we don’t have any real experience of it.

Therefore, it is essential to be able to clearly communicate the quality of “happiness” and how to practice achieving the experience of “happiness.” Further, it is an experience that cannot be fully captured in words, it is something that must be experienced.

In summary, conscious awareness, the present moment and compassion evolution are central themes for Participant 7's experience of mindfulness. Additionally, the themes of refinement of ability, obstacles to awareness and the external supports are fundamental to her experience.

Participant 8

Participant 8 experiences mindfulness as "consciousness balancing" within the body, indicating that the body and the mind are engaged to such a degree that the two are united. For him, it is a subtle experience of "immaterial super consciousness," a state of being that transcends the mind to connect with "the subtlety of the divine." He described the quality of this state as "that immaterial sense of 'I am' as evenly distributed throughout the mind and body as it possible can be." He described it as "something that's infinite" like being "in the seat of power," having "a sense of rebirth" and "openness" that is available only in the present moment.

Another important theme for Participant 7 is "compassionate evolution." Mindful awareness for him is infinitely subtle, immediately present and evolves with time and practice. He finds that the potential energy to compassionately evolve is present in all people, though for some it may be misguided. He stated, "To what extent, to what level is that [consciousness] awake, is that aware? It's not something that in some people just doesn't grow at all. Much more is the case that we should look for what path it's found, because if it can't grow one way, it grows another." This accounts for why some people tend to be more aware than others though everyone has the inherent potential to consciously aware.

Also, he explained that the evolution of self may initially appear to be random and unpredictable but it is actually "an elegant symmetrical process, but by virtue of the way you're looking at it, it seems chaotic." In the evolution from chaos to harmony, he described the need for a new perspective. This perspective change "sort of happens once you move the emotions more into the category of predictability. Patterns that you can expect and counteract, change, redirect these things for your own compassionate evolution." By becoming consciously aware of his body and mind, he is able to make choices that increase the totality of his experience bringing him "a transcendent step closer to the subtlety of the divine."

Fundamental to the practice of mindful awareness, is the use of the physical body. Participant 8 stated it is through the physical body that he is able to move to a deeper level of self-reflection and awareness. He finds there is something inherent in the asana practice that "wakes up" the body through "moving in different planes of motions... reversing our stagnant patterns." This "waking up" can occur with or without conscious awareness due to the structure of the poses. He stated, "The techniques are effective enough that the body wakes up in that way, and if you don't do something daily that causes your body to wakeup in that way, its ability to do it is going to be basically nil... So I think I feel mindfulness when ... I've awoken those deeper energies in my body."

Another important theme is the power of pranayama. Participant 8 described how pranayama is an effective way to increase mindful awareness

because it focuses and stabilizes the mind. He explained the hierarchical structure of the practice in that it important to have the physical foundation before moving toward more subtle practices. “If I didn’t know how to support myself from the inside and other things that the [asana] practice taught me, then the pranayama might not have gotten me very far.” He emphasized the need for an “awakening in a sequential order” thereby maximizing the intended benefits of each level of practice. Eventually, “those posture are supposed to be done without thinking” so the mind “can focus on deeper and deeper things.” Without creating a strong foundation, the mind will not be able to contemplate that which it needs to in order to mindful awareness to evolve.

Another aspect that was salient for Participant 8 was the holistic approach required for mindful awareness to grow. He described the interconnected structure of each of the Sutra teachings, saying” when taken in isolation, [they] hardly ever stand on their own feet... It’s almost like taking a piece out of the puzzle... because you’re looking at this overall, lineage, heritage, web of techniques.” Without consideration and application of each of the sutras, he finds the expansion of conscious awareness to be much more difficult because “You can’t just jump from level 1 right to level 7 or 8... The point is that if your anger and fear doesn’t have a way to evolve through the 3rd, 4th and 5th” levels, awareness will not be able to reach the transcendent state of bliss. Therefore, Participant 8’s experience is one of progressive, incremental changes moving from the material to immaterial that takes time to develop.

In summary, the themes of conscious awareness, feeling bliss, the present moment, interconnectedness, and compassionate evolution are central to his experience of mindfulness. In addition, waking the body, the power of pranayama and a holistic approach are essential to his practice of conscious awareness.

Participant 9

Participant 9 describes mindfulness as an “awareness” of self in relation “in all aspects of your life.” Her experience is one of “compassion” and kindness, non-judgment, and nonattachment in the present moment. It is a feeling of “happiness” and “stillness” in which she negotiates the subtle balance between “how to be calm and how to be subtle, and how to still be motivated and driven and passionate.”

An important theme for her was that of compassionate evolution. Participant 9 described the expansion of her awareness as “a journey” and “if you follow it, it definitely leads to good things and happiness.” For her it is an evolution of self-awareness that also impacts others. She commented that for people who “truly practice yoga” in its’ holistic intent, “they start to become aware of the other spaces [and] they’re practicing outside.... Before they just wanted to be a chef, which is amazing, now they want to feed the hungry.” This growing compassion for self and other is an integral part of Participant 9’s experience of mindfulness.

In order to have the experience mindful awareness, Participant 9 described the important connection between the body and the mind. In particular, she

explains how the physical asana practice is meant to be a foundation for all other practices. She reported:

I get asked a lot how the physical postures relate to our lives. So we're always talking about how yoga transcends, but to a lot of people, especially when they're new, yoga is just a physical practice, it's the postures, the asanas.... Once you start to notice subtle things in your practice, the physical practice starts to transform so you're no longer doing a posture, you're now breathing into a posture, you're moving the body like you're trying to float the body....And from there, diving deeper inside....and it goes deeper and deeper from there.

She explained that regardless of the style of yoga practice, this development is similar, "feeling the body—so drawing attention to a specific space, giving yourself these little exercises or drills for your mind that are gonna connect you to the physical body". Eventually, the asana practice begins to evolve and correlations can be drawn from how the asana practice relates to daily life.

If you can hold Warrior C for a minute in a class and you're sweating and you don't touch your hair and you just breathe, and every time you want to get out of it you take a deeper breath. Then when you're sitting in traffic and you want to freak out, you might roll down your window and turn up your music and enjoy the breeze for a minute, and then have a freak out! Or you might take a deeper breath.

As the connection between body and mind increases, the resultant experience is one of a calmer mind and greater ease in daily life. Situations that normally cause reaction and distress are experienced from a place of centeredness and "stillness."

Participant 9 described how in any given moment there are opportunities to practice awareness because there are many obstacles on the journey to greater self-awareness. These obstacles include ego, attachment, reaction and confrontation with self. As she becomes aware of these obstacles, she practices breathing, paying attention, and introspection so eventually, "mindfulness is very natural" and the obstacles is overcome. She explained that in order to transcend obstacles, it is a "constant practice" of being a beginner and committing to the practice. The outcome for her is that she is eventually able to maintain "subtle happiness on the inside...And then you'll see the world around you in a different space. It might still be the same world but your eyes are now new."

Another important aspect of her experience is the concept of non-violence, "simple non-violence in your thought patterns" which highlights a holistic approach to cultivating mindful awareness. For her being "non-violent" includes her thoughts, words and actions not only toward herself but also toward others. She regards it as a fundamental ethical practice for the expansion of awareness. From there "the others [practices] start to come.... They all trickle from that space." The experience of mindfulness is therefore a holistic process requiring an approach to life that permeates both body and mind.

In summary, awareness, feeling bliss, and compassionate evolution are central themes to the experience of mindfulness. Waking the body, refining abilities, obstacles to awareness, and a holistic approach are core themes for the development of mindful awareness.

Participant 10

Participant 10 described mindfulness as “being aware of the spiritual even in the mundane activities.” For her, mindful awareness requires a conscious choice to live in the present moment. “It’s about being present in every moment.” When she is aware of the present moment, she described the feeling as one of happiness, “it’s timeless, it’s peaceful to exist within. We’re always looking outside of ourselves so mindfulness is to become aware that everything you need is within you.”

Another essential aspect for Participant 10 is the journey to self-realization that eventually includes a greater recognition of self in relation to other. Participant 10 stated that “as you become more present to yourself, you’re gonna become more present to others. And it begins with you, people think it’s selfish sometimes but it’s not. You so have to mature yourself first.” This maturing process requires her to be compassionate with herself as she encounters obstacles on the journey to greater awareness. She stated, “I think that sometimes we become ‘human doings’ instead of ‘human beings,’ and ideally with practicing yoga—and all aspects of yoga, all eight limbs of yoga, we can settle into [ourselves]. And it’s a challenge, it takes time.” Additionally, this process requires “being kinder to ourselves in all respects.” This highlights the theme of compassionate evolution that is central to her experience of mindfulness.

Participant 10 explained that asana and pranayama are foundational tools to assist practitioners in refining their ability to be present-centered and aware. Participant 10 reported that “we do physical poses to find space in our body and we do pranayama so that we can gain mastery over our mind.... We have to move our bodies in order to get to the place where we can meditate” and “pranayama and meditation are the ones that are going to be the most effective for developing mindfulness.” She emphasized a progression of techniques beginning with waking the body, followed by connecting with the breath to calm the mind and then advancing on to the more subtle practice of meditation as the most effective way to develop mindful awareness.

These “tools” or practices (i.e. asana, pranayama & meditation) have beneficial effects. “To a yogi, by nature, to become aware of the breath is to become aware of the present moment. So when you consciously remember your breath you slip into Now... You become more grounded and make wiser decisions and you’re not the action, but you can take action.” She explained that becoming aware of the breath increases her insight into emotional patterns. However, she also cautioned that if these practices are done “without consideration and respect to breath, it makes you more powerfully unbalanced.” This indicates that it is essential not only to do the practices but also to balance the practices in order to achieve the beneficial outcomes.

Another important theme for Participant 10 is the refinement of ability. She views yoga as a series of techniques that is meant to increase one's awareness in the present moment. "It's a daily practice, a daily remembrance" of paying attention first to the body then to the breath then to the mind. She stated, "I think that we're always trying to look outside so we're scattered, we're running around, and we just basically throw our bodies around from the moment we get out of bed, and to just slow down a little bit and not to multitask and do too many things at once. But to just do one thing at a time." Here she is referring to the ability to pay attention and concentrate. By paying attention to one thing, we increase our ability to concentrate that will also create greater ease in meditation practice. She noted that external distractions pull attention away from our self and that this obstacle is an important part of the practice of awareness. This provides a moment to self-reflect, to notice where the attention has gone, and refocus the attention on self.

Another important theme for Participant 10 was the interrelated nature of yoga practices and how they connect with her overall lifestyle. "It's hard to say one thing [practice] because they complement one another. And yoga was truly meant to be asana, pranayama, mediation, [etc.]. ...It's important that we take a look at 'Is my yoga allowing me to thrive in all areas of my life?' ... If yoga is serving you, then it's moving out into your life. It's making you a little more of a productive, happy, thriving person." She stated there is inherent benefit in the practices alone, and if holistically incorporated into one's life "then you make wiser choices about what you eat and who you hang out with and what TV shows and movies you watch—maybe there's less violence..." This emphasizes the importance of a holistic lifestyle approach in order to achieve optimal benefits from mindful practices

In summary, conscious awareness, the present moment, and compassionate evolution are central themes. Also included in her experience are the themes of waking the body, balanced practice, the power of pranayama, refining abilities, and a holistic approach.

Participant 11

For Participant 11, the experience of mindfulness is about "keeping your attention present as much as possible in whatever you're doing." Mindfulness is also "an awareness" experienced in the present moment where the mind is not attached to the past or future and is correct in its' perception of reality. "So being mindful is a state where you're noticing that you're irritated or even angry or you're frightened or you're upset and still being mindful enough to say 'call it for what it is.' This is your mind misinterpreting the situation." When Participant 11 is able to maintain present-moment awareness, he described the feeling as "freedom" and "liberation." He also stated that in a truly present moment "you're gonna probably have to get a little past the mind and go to a higher source than your mind is, ... but then we're talking something more about the spirit, consciousness, this whole—whatever you want to call it." In this regard the

experience of mindful awareness is one that transcends the mind to connect with a spiritual source of divinity.

A central part of the experience of mindfulness for Participant 11 is the refinement of certain abilities including attention, concentration and mediation. In particular, Participant 11 believes that “attention is the key. Attention is the one that’s always being rooted back on all these painful things in the past and keeping you in the cycle of repeating these things over and over and over again.” Refining the ability to pay attention is what facilitates his expanding awareness allowing him to “act in a conscious way” and to “see the choices” available in the present moment. The experience of conscious choice allows him to renegotiate previous patterns that may be detrimental to his expanding awareness.

Another important theme for Participant 11 is obstacles to awareness. He described how distraction, ego and attachment are barriers to mindful awareness.

Most peoples’ states of consciousness are uncomfortable to live in, they don’t want to be there. They want to be distracted, that’s why all these things are so popular: Facebook and movies and drugs and all these things. It pulls people out of their state of consciousness and gets them into another state that they’d rather live in.

He explained the propensity for people to focus their attention externally due to the discomfort of internally confronting self, thereby rendering the development of conscious awareness impossible. Though there are countless negative distractions, he stated the practice of yoga has a “sneaky way” of positively distracting people’s attention in the present moment. He stated,

The hatha yoga that we teach here—pulls [distracts] people in the same way, away from their state of consciousness they may be dwelling in when they walk in.... So what we ask them to do is take their attention off whatever it’s feeding and put it on your breath, put it on your body posture, put it on your awareness, put it on your balance, put it on strengthening this muscle, put it on controlling your body in this way.

This is a positive and healthy refocusing of attention, which he indicated may happen unconsciously for the new yoga practitioner though over time will become a conscious process. He explained that through asana practice “little by little, the attention is released off this thing and what was now very powerful in their consciousness in keeping them stuck in a state, is now weak and withering and cannot move them anymore because they’re not giving their attention to it anymore.”

Another obstacle to expanding awareness is the ego. Participant 11 described the ego as a state of consciousness that “doesn’t know what it is” which “allows you to identify with all these things other than what you really are.” These misidentifications are a cause of suffering because it leads to the repetition of negative patterns. He stated, “You create this wonderful little psychic loop that you’re stuck in and you’re doomed to repeat until you become a little more mindful.” For him, mindful awareness is an antidote to the suffering created by

the ego. By making the conscious choice to attend to the obstacles created by the mind, he is able to transcend them. Now they are no longer obstacles but benchmarks of progress in the development of conscious awareness.

Participant 11 finds that asana and pranayama are two of the most effective practices for developing mindful awareness. “Pranayama is taking a scattered mind and through the breath control helping to steady it a little bit.... [It’s] an effective way to become a little more calming in the stream of the mind. Asana is a wonderful way to pull you out of habit. Habit is engrained not only in your thinking but also in your movement.” Using the breath to begin examining the patterns in his physical movement, including posture, it is possible to then begin to examine subtle mental and emotional patterns connected with these movements and positions.

Regarding the asana practice, Participant 11 stated it is beneficial to have a balanced practice despite the style of yoga being practiced. For example, he pointed out the benefit of having a structured asana practice that is repetitive like “Bikram” or “ashtanga” because the analytical mind can quiet. Yet, he also states it is important to have a practice that “improvs” thereby requiring practitioners “to be really present” and engaged in active listening.

Another important aspect for Participant 11 is the role of external supports. For him it is a “spiritual practice,” therefore, it is essential to have an advanced spiritual teacher or “god-realized soul” to assist with one’s compassionate evolution. “I think yoga brought me a certain way and prepared me in a certain way for the practice that I’m in now. But again, there was no guru there. That’s what I was always needing.” In his estimation, it is essential to have a teacher who has greater mindful awareness than he in order “to become fully mindful.” The role of the teacher is to correctly interpret and share teachings relevant to the spiritual journey. By having such an advanced teacher, it prevents the misinterpretation of subtle techniques, which might otherwise stagnate the process.

In summary, the theme of conscious awareness and the present moment are central to Participant 11’s experience of mindfulness as a state of being. Waking the body, the power of pranayama, refining abilities, obstacles to awareness and external supports are central themes for the practicing awareness.

APPENDIX G
PHENOMENOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This diagram illustrates procedures specific to the phenomenological approach.

