

**LIVING A MINDFUL LIFE: AN HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL
INQUIRY INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SECULAR MINDFULNESS,
COMPASSION AND INSIGHT**

A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of
Aberdeen

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DECLARATION

I have composed this thesis myself. It is the record of my own work and it has not been presented to this or any other university in support of an application for any degree or professional qualification other than that of which I am now a candidate. Any personal data have been processed in accordance with the provision of the Data Protection Act (1998); all quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and sources of information and help specifically acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This research study explores the experience and effects of long-term practice by six student practitioners of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight forming the Mindfulness-Based Living model incorporated into the MSc in Mindfulness Studies at the University of Aberdeen. A review of existing literature on the topic of mindfulness highlights that research is predominantly postpositivist and quantitative in approach, only recently incorporating limited qualitative studies, and is focused chiefly on mindfulness as a treatment for a range of mental and physical disorders. However, the nature of mindfulness particularly when practised in conjunction with compassion and insight suggests that it is a more intense, complex, nuanced and pervasive experience than is reflected in the literature. An exploration of Buddhist and Western phenomenology highlights important parallels with contemporary secular mindfulness studies indicating, firstly, the value of an in-depth qualitative study capable of surfacing potentially transformative effects of the practice of mindfulness and related disciplines, and, secondly, the potential relevance of mindfulness to the praxis of phenomenological research. Towards these aims, this study utilises an hermeneutic phenomenological approach incorporating mindfulness approaches in its execution. The study takes a dialogical approach, intentionally surfacing the inherent dynamic between researcher and participant. Interview data were collected from participants on multiple occasions over durations of between seven and twelve months and are presented as rich narrative texts organised around emergent themes. Analysis indicates the occurrence of intense, embodied, authentic transcendental experiences that pervade day-to-day life and extend beyond a remedial effect. Researcher data indicate the usefulness of mindfulness to the practice of phenomenological research, supporting embodied interview and phenomenological reduction. The study highlights findings useful to the design of secular programmes and to further research, notably the incorporation of compassion and insight approaches, the centrality of embodiment, and the effects of long term practice on social cohesion.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	10
1.1 Introduction.....	10
1.2 Researcher Position.....	11
1.3 Outline of the Research Study	12
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	15
PART 1 MINDFULNESS AND RELATED CONCEPTS.....	15
2.1 Introduction.....	15
2.2 The Phenomenon of Mindfulness	15
2.2.1. Buddhist Roots of Mindfulness.....	15
2.2.2. The Emergence of a Secular Mindfulness.....	17
2.3 Defining Mindfulness and Compassion.....	27
2.3.1. A Problem of Operational Definition	27
2.3.2. Introducing Lovingkindness and Compassion	30
2.3.3. A Taxonomy of Secular Mindfulness.....	32
2.4 Nairn’s Psychology Of Meditation	33
2.4.1. On Mindfulness	33
2.4.2. The Inclusion of Compassion, Insight and Wisdom	41
2.4.3. Defining Insight	43
2.4.4. Wisdom	45
2.4.5. The Key Elements of Nairn’s Model of Insight.....	46
2.5 Summary.....	49
2.6 Researching Mindfulness.....	51
2.7 Current Body of Research.....	54
2.7.1. Research Pointing to Attention and Acceptance	55
2.7.2. Research on Compassion-Based, and blended Mindfulness- and Compassion-based Interventions	57
2.7.3. Self-Compassion Research	60
2.7.4. Taking a Qualitative Turn	61
2.7.5. Turning Outwards.....	66
2.8 Summary.....	68
PART 2 LOOKING THROUGH A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LENS	70

2.9	Introduction.....	70
2.10	Western Phenomenology.....	70
2.10.1	The Lived World.....	71
2.10.2	Existentialism	72
2.10.3	Transcendentalism versus Existentialism?	73
2.11	Towards a Synergy of Buddhist and Western Phenomenologies.....	75
2.11.1	Intentionality	76
2.11.2	Experiencing 'Self'	78
2.11.3	Temporality.....	81
2.11.4	Insight Through Epoche	83
2.11.5	Embodiment	87
2.11.6	Intersubjectivity	90
2.12	Conclusion	92
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN		96
PART 1 – METHODOLOGY.....		96
3.1	Introduction.....	96
3.2.	An Introduction to Experimental Phenomenology	97
3.3	The Method of the Phenomenological Reduction	101
3.4	Researcher Reflexivity.....	106
3.5	Standards of Judgement	109
3.6	Summary.....	113
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN		114
PART 2 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES		114
3.7	Introduction.....	114
3.8	Research Focus and Approach.....	115
3.9	Participants.....	117
3.10	Data Collection.....	120
3.10.1	Preparation	120
3.10.2	Interview.....	121
3.10.3	Transcribing the Spoken Narrative	124
3.11	Ethics.....	126
3.12	Explicating Meaning	128
3.12.1	Segmenting the data.....	128
3.12.2	Identifying Emergent Themes.....	131

3.12.3	Hermeneutic Interpretation	133
3.12.4	From Theme Groupings to Narrative Text and Crosscutting Themes ...	134
3.12.5	Surfacing the Researcher’s Subjective Experience of the Research.....	135
3.13	Verification	136
3.13.1	Validity Strategies.....	136
3.13.2	Bracketing.....	138
3.14	Conclusion.....	141
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION		
.....		143
PART 1 - EXPLICATIVE THEMES FROM PARTICIPANTS’ NARRATIVES AND INTERPRETIVE DIALOGUES		143
4.1	Introduction to Explicating and Interpreting Participants’ Narratives.....	143
4.2	Gillian’s Narrative	144
4.2.1	Personal Development	144
4.2.2	Learning	152
4.2.3	Work	154
4.2.4	Relationships.....	156
4.3	Fiona’s Narrative	160
4.3.1	Personal Development	160
4.3.2	Learning	170
4.3.3	Work	171
4.3.4	Relationships.....	173
4.4	Aidan’s Narrative	174
4.4.1	Personal Development	174
4.4.2	Relationships.....	188
4.4.3	Work	192
4.5	James’s Narrative.....	193
4.5.1	Personal Development	193
4.5.2	Learning	198
4.5.3	Work	199
4.5.4	Relationships.....	201
4.6	Louise’s Narrative.....	203
4.6.1	Personal Development	203
4.6.2	Relationships.....	211
4.6.3	Work	214

4.7	Patricia’s Narrative	215
4.7.1	Learning	215
4.7.2	Personal Development	217
4.7.3	Work	230
4.7.4	Relationships.....	232
4.8	Summary.....	235
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION		237
PART 2 - DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS		237
4.9	Introduction.....	237
4.10	Crosscutting Themes	237
4.10.1	Experiencing a defining life challenge.....	238
4.10.2	Recognising default modes	239
4.10.3	Developing mastery of practice	240
4.10.4	Becoming embodied	243
4.10.5	Experiencing insight.....	244
4.10.6	Relating authentically to oneself	246
4.10.7	Relating authentically to others	248
4.10.8	Connecting with the wider world	250
4.10.9	Integrating Mindfulness practice across life domains	251
4.11	Conclusions.....	252
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE SECOND RESEARCH AIM		255
PART 1 – EXPLICATING AND INTERPRETING THE RESEARCHER NARRATIVE		255
5.1	Introduction to the Researcher Narrative.....	255
5.2	Emergent Themes.....	256
5.2.1	Coming into Connection	257
5.2.2	Mindfully Present with Body Awareness and Empathy	261
5.2.3	Trusting the Emergence	265
5.2.4	Following Lines of Inquiry.....	267
5.2.5	Deepening Reflection.....	270
5.3	Summary.....	274
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE SECOND RESEARCH AIM		276
PART 2 - DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS		276
5.4	Introduction.....	276

5.5	Phenomenological Themes	276
5.5.1	Intentionality	276
5.5.2	Experiencing self	277
5.5.3	Intersubjectivity	278
5.5.4	Temporality	279
5.5.5	Epoche/Phenomenological Reduction	279
5.5.6	Embodiment	280
5.6	Conclusions	281
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY		283
6.1	Introduction.....	283
6.2	Contribution to Knowledge and Practice of Secular Mindfulness	284
6.3	Contribution to Phenomenological Research Methodology	289
6.4	Implications for Curricular Development and Further Research.....	292
REFERENCES		295
GLOSSARY OF BUDDHIST AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL TERMS		315
GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS.....		319
APPENDIX A. TESTS OF CHANGE METHODOLOGY		320
APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT FLYER		321
APPENDIX C. RESEARCH CONSENT AGREEMENT		323
APPENDIX D. INTERVALS BETWEEN INTERVIEWS		324
APPENDIX E. AIDAN'S WORDLE 21/08/14		325
APPENDIX F. EXERCISE TO IDENTIFY CROSSCUTTING THEMES.....		326
APPENDIX G. MINDMAPPING TO IDENTIFY CROSSCUTTING THEMES – MINDMAP 6: CONNECTION		328

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Mindfulness has its origins in Buddhism, and was introduced in the West during the latter part of the twentieth century, brought to popularity by the work of Kabat-Zinn (1982; 1990/2005). Kabat-Zinn developed an approach to teaching mindfulness skills, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which was used in a medical setting initially as a treatment for chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2005), and evaluated using clinical research methods. There exists a significant body of clinical research into MBSR (Irving et al, 2009), and related specialist developments such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy and Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (Krasner, 2004). Nairn's model of the psychology of meditation, as outlined in 2.4, is a blend of Western psychology and Buddhism, with the related additional disciplines of compassion and insight integrated with mindfulness (Nairn, 2011a) and this approach underpins the MSc in Mindfulness Studies, University of Aberdeen, which, from 2010, is a relatively recent contributor to the UK master degree mindfulness programmes. The research literature, examined in detail in 2.7, demonstrates that with regular practice mindfulness practitioners become able to hold attention on moment-to-moment experience of bodily sensations, sensory experiences, emotions and thoughts, with well-evidenced benefits that include decreased stress and anxiety, resilience to fear, management of depression, addictions and eating disorders, as treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and for chronic pain (Didonna ed, 2009).

The Buddhist worldview that underpins the holistic treatment of mindfulness, compassion and insight is constructivist in nature; whilst the greater part of the current body of secular mindfulness research in contrast is post-positivist and quantitative. This has come under recent criticism (Grossman, 2008) with an appeal for research methods to be more sensitive to the lived experience of mindfulness practitioners (Grossman, 2010; Scottish Mindfulness Research Group, 2012). In the current body of research, the holistic nature of mindfulness is viewed by some as distorted and undervalued, with perplexity as to how mindfulness works being evident in some research papers, e.g. Harrington &

Pickles (2009). Hamilton et al (2006, p128) note the “sharp contrast” in the different paradigms of the current medical model and the principles underpinning mindfulness. There is mention of the generalist benefits of mindfulness in some studies; for example, Bogels et al (2006, p34) found that Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) offers a longer-term “way of living” compared with another technique (Task Construction Training) which focused on coping strategies; but few studies have focused on more than the short to medium term effects that mindfulness practice has on specific pathological conditions. Although much of the mindfulness research to date has been carried out in clinical settings, mindfulness, blended with compassion-based training, is also finding a footing in less medicalised contexts where a more versatile approach is evident, such as social work (Debaene, R, 2009; Turner, 2009), education, (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000), counselling (Ringenbach, 2009) and within a social model of mental wellbeing (Duggan et al, 2002).

1.2 Researcher Position

My commitment to the topic of this thesis stems directly from my experience as a student on the first cohort of the University of Aberdeen MSc Studies in Mindfulness course in 2010. The course content was based on the approach of Rob Nairn, who had developed one-year courses in secular mindfulness, compassion and insight. I became increasingly aware that the body of mindfulness literature did not reflect the transformative insights and increased capacity for mindfulness and compassion that I and my student peers were beginning to experience. This motivated me to pursue a substantive doctoral research project study into the longer term experiences of mindfulness, compassion and insight. In this endeavour, I have been supported by the Mindfulness Association (MA) Ltd, set up by Rob Nairn, and have been employed by the MA to deliver input on the subjects of phenomenological research approaches and approaches to researching mindfully included in the Professional Inquiry and Work Based Project modules of the MSc programme. My intention, underpinning all aspects of the study; the philosophical inquiry into the synergies between mindfulness and phenomenology in chapter 2, part 2,

and the design of pluralistic methods and procedures for data collection and analysis in chapter 3, part 2, has been to remain constantly in touch with the lived experiences of participants so that their unique journeys can be made explicit. Stemming from my personal experience, I explore the proposition that mindfulness, compassion and insight practices, when followed long-term and embedded into one's daily life, have a transformative impact that is not reflected in the current body of research.

1.3 Outline of the Research Study

This study is positioned within an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm (the theoretical framework influencing the way knowledge is studied and interpreted) where there is the intention to understand human experience within a socially constructed reality (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, developed from Husserl's phenomenology and Dilthey's and Heidegger's study of interpretive understanding or hermeneutics (Mertens, 2005, p.12 citing Eichelberger, 1989), relies upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p.8) and recognises the impact on the research of the researcher's own background and experiences. Constructivism does not begin with a theory, rather a pattern of meaning is generated throughout the research process (Creswell, 2003).

From an understanding of the limitations of the clinical research methodology prevalent in the body of current mindfulness research, outlined in 2.6, an alternative methodology is laid out, pointing to the benefits of taking a phenomenological approach to research into mindfulness, compassion and insight. Building on the skilful means of mindfulness, compassion and insight practice, methods are developed and utilised where it is contended that they enhance investigation of research questions relating to living a mindful life.

A literature review comprises reflection on the current mindfulness research base, an examination of Buddhist and Western philosophy relating to mindfulness, the psychology of meditation (Nairn, 1999), contemplative

science (Wallace, 2007) and phenomenology (e.g. Husserl, 1970; Heidegger, 1927/1962). Comparisons have been drawn between the Buddhist phenomenology of mindfulness, compassion and insight and Western phenomenology; and synergies explored across Buddhist and Western phenomenologies and the emerging discoveries in biological science. In the course of reviewing the literature, a second research area emerged: how to research mindfully, and to this end the research methodology reflects the synergies between the practices of mindfulness, compassion and insight and the person of the phenomenological researcher.

The research phase, set out in chapter 3, involved a broad, holistic investigation utilising interpretive phenomenology of the lived experience of practitioners with more than one year's experience of regular mindfulness, compassion and insight practice. The study takes a broad social science viewpoint incorporating psychological, social, professional, spiritual, and environmental perspectives. The study is based on the researcher's own knowledge and direct experience of mindfulness and related concepts, and the researcher's relationship with participants on the MSc in Mindfulness Studies, University of Aberdeen. The scope of the study takes account of a range of sociological and psychological factors, aiming to point to the richness and depth of the experience of living a mindful life. The overall study provides a grounded foundation on which further research can be based. A review of the research literature features as a separate section of the research and is woven into the analysis of the qualitative findings. A philosophical examination was carried out as a preliminary exercise to the data gathering phase of the research, drawing on the parallels evident across Buddhism and Western phenomenology which affords a deeper understanding of practice and research methods. Reference is made in chapter 2, part 2 to areas of commonality described in the literature review, to the research paradigm and, in chapter 3, to core elements of phenomenological research methods that are utilised in the study.

Six participants were recruited from across four intakes on to the MSc in Mindfulness Studies at the University of Aberdeen; an ambitious number given that several interviews were undertaken with each participant. To enable

exploration of the effects of the maturation of practice, data was gathered from five participants on three occasions and one participant on two occasions with an interval of at least 6 months between the first and last occasions. Open interviews utilising phenomenological principles and methods were carried out with each participant. The open frame of reference allowed participants to examine freely what was alive for them at the time of interview in relation to their practice. Consequently, a range of topic areas was discussed, including sociological and psychological factors, traits and characteristics. An hermeneutic explication - an interpretation of what is perceived of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990) - was made of the findings, essential elements of experience drawn out from individual accounts with further themes drawn from the examination of crosscutting threads. The study provides evidence of the effects of long term practice that go beyond the predominant focus on pathology, and represent the richness and breadth of the experience of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom. Implications of the research findings have been considered and suggestions have been advanced for further research topics, which may be suitable for master level study within the research programme at the University of Aberdeen.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

PART 1 MINDFULNESS AND RELATED CONCEPTS

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores in depth literature and research regarding the concept and development of secular mindfulness and related disciplines. It examines firstly existing mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom definitions, theoretical approaches and practice methods as presented within secular and Buddhist fields of study, drawing upon a significant amount of relevant and recent publications, literature and research, and specifically on the work of Nairn. Nairn's psychology of meditation and mindfulness based living model, described in detail in 2.4, form the common foundation in which participants of the research have trained and including its examination here provides a background to the explication of the research findings. The literature review proceeds to examine the strengths and deficiencies of the current body of quantitative and more recent qualitative mindfulness research wherein the reader is directed to the type of research question where further qualitative research might offer an original contribution.

2.2 The Phenomenon of Mindfulness

2.2.1. Buddhist Roots of Mindfulness

Mindfulness and its associated concepts of compassion, insight and wisdom derive from the Abhidharma, the earliest Buddhist metaphysics (Chogyam Trungpa, 1975), regarded as "a masterpiece of phenomenology" based on the direct experiences of the historical Buddha (Flanagan, 2011, p104), although Dreyfus (2013) cautions that Buddhism as a pluralistic tradition cannot present a single perspective on mindfulness. Epistemologically, Flanagan (2011) considers that Buddhist scriptures are similar to scientific literature, and constitute a well-reasoned cultural wisdom. However, the positivist clinical paradigm within which contemporary constructs of mindfulness are customarily employed is unlike that of the phenomenological worldview of Buddhist

psychology which constitutes a radical constructivist perspective with the central premise that “what we ordinarily call ‘experience’ has already been ordered into discrete ‘things’ by perceptual and conceptual operations” (Von Glaserfeld, 2001, p39).

Kudesia & Nyima (2015) offer the following explanation of the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of traditional mindfulness. Buddhism views the mind as a complex of embodied mental processes (rather than a fixed self with inherent existence) which interacts with the world in an interdependent co-arising that is played out across Eight Consciousnesses. Reification of self and external reality (afflictive consciousness) results from the apparent dualism produced by sensory perception (cognitive consciousness). From the unconscious (ground consciousness) arises a flow of subjective activity – thoughts, feelings and behaviours - that subsequently solidify as habitual cognitive schemas. Intersubjective experience is possible only so far as our sensory physiology allows; “we do not see things as *they* are, we see things as *we* are” within a field of non-referential awareness or primordial space (Kudesia & Nyima, 2015, p915). The flow of perception is experienced as positive, negative or neutral, and accordingly causes automatic response, attachment and aversion. Through prescribed systematic practices involving restraint and attention - focused on cultivating the Four Immeasurables of equanimity, joy, compassion and lovingkindness (Wallace, 2010) – employed to inhibit discursive cognitive schemas, insight is gained into the illusory nature of mental constructs, with the effect of increasing ability to perceive multiple perspectives, exhibit mental flexibility, and abandon fixed assumptions.

Buddhist meditation incorporates three sequential stages: mindfulness or remembering to return attention to a mindfulness support (such as breath); calm abiding where the flow of consciousness can be noted without attachment; and insight where the stable mind experiences the quality of non-referential awareness and habitual mental tendencies weaken. Such practice is situated within an ethical teaching discourse supporting the development of the practitioner’s inherent purpose in life and the capacity to choose wisely how to act (Kudesia & Nyima, 2015). Traditional Buddhist perspectives on mindfulness

distinguish three definitive psychological qualities: the mechanism of paying attention; cultivating mental awareness within an experiential context, with an inherent ethical component regarding the impact of ensuing actions on self and others, which in turn fosters compassion; and wisdom gained from unbiased acceptance of the flow of experience and insight into the non-dual nature of reality (Amaro, 2015).

This section continues with an exploration of the contemporary movement of secular mindfulness and its related concepts, examining the apparent problem of secularisation and addressing the questions of definition and classification in order to elucidate the frame of reference for the subsequent research critique.

2.2.2. The Emergence of a Secular Mindfulness

Whilst meditation is a core practice within Buddhism, it should also be noted that other world religions utilise meditation techniques to further spiritual awakening from Jainism (Sadhvi Vishrut Vibha Key, 2007) and Hinduism (Flood, 1996) in the East to Christianity (Zanzig, 1996) in the West. In the nineteenth century, oriental mysticism attracted considerable curiosity in the West (McCown et al, 2010). Interest in the mindfulness practices of Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism developed in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, subsequently John Kabat-Zinn's work, 'Full Catastrophe Living', published in 1990, describing the development of an accessible secular mindfulness programme Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), sparked the secular mindfulness movement (McCown et al, 2010) which matured from the 1980s to date into a well-researched field of scientific study. The current body of research into mindfulness and related concepts will be examined in section 2.6.

2.2.2.1 Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Kabat-Zinn (2005) defines mindfulness as "moment-to-moment awareness ... cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a

moment's thought to" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p2). Kabat-Zinn's (2005) early research delivering the mindfulness based intervention MBSR to over 4,000 patients at the University of Massachusetts Stress Clinic found positive effects on patients' ability to tolerate pain and an improved mental wellbeing (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Kabat-Zinn's team in the stress clinic based their teaching on seven attitudinal pillars, factors crucial to the successful practice of mindfulness: non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go. These seven interrelated aspects practised consciously, according to Kabat-Zinn, increase skill in the ability to hold sustained attention on moment-to-moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Kabat-Zinn (2005) described the universal nature of stress and the applicability of mindfulness practice to ameliorate it by "developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacities for relaxation, paying attention, awareness and insight" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p2). In order to increase one's ability and capacity to be aware of moment-to-moment experience, the MBSR model utilises a somatic support to recall attention when the practitioner becomes distracted. Several methods are taught: body scan, where the practitioner moves attention through the body, part by part; attending to the breath as it moves in and out of the body; and mindful movement, experiencing from the inside how the body feels in motion through space. Kabat-Zinn (2005) takes the view that we are preoccupied with thoughts of what our bodies look like, so much so that we have lost touch with internally experiencing the body in real time.

An early literature review (Bishop, 2002) highlighted methodological flaws in the then current research including lack of validity and control measures. This was followed by a critique of sixty-four studies of MBSR by Grossman et al (2004) which found that forty-four were not of acceptable quality due to failings of methods of analysis, validity and reliability with only ten controlled studies indicating MBSR as a promising coping mechanism for emotional and physical difficulties. Notwithstanding, Kabat-Zinn extended the use of secular MBSR into various clinical settings, and a subsequent array of Mindfulness-Based Intervention (MBI) variants (such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy,

Mindfulness-Based Child Birth programmes, Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training, Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (<http://www.mindful.org/choosing-a-mindfulness-program/>) was developed with the aim of ameliorating a range of diverse clinical conditions. Subsequent research findings, including the introduction of a number of randomised control trials (e.g. Hoge et al, 2013) has supported the efficacy of mindfulness, particularly MBSR, as a treatment intervention.

2.2.2.2. Secular Mindfulness and Buddhism

Despite Kabat-Zinn's original description of the importance of intention to mindfulness, intention became somewhat de-emphasised in the early investigation of mindfulness due to the focus on the efficacy of the approach rather than the mechanisms underlying it (Shapiro et al, 2006). Theorists such as Wells (1990, cited in Shapiro et al, 2006) and Teasdale et al (2002, cited in Shapiro et al, 2006) thereafter focused their study on the function of attention and on the development of self-reporting questionnaires to measure attention and meta-cognitions related to clinical dysfunction, such as anxiety, depression, psychosis and hypochondria.

Building on Kabat-Zinn's approach, Shapiro, one of the 'second generation' mindfulness theorists (McCown et al, 2010), turns from the question of which mindfulness based interventions are useful with what clinical or social issues, towards articulating the structure of effective mindfulness-based interventions, developing a theoretical model of three interrelated axioms of intention, attention and attitude (IAA) that she contends are required to pay attention on purpose in a particular way (Shapiro et al, 2006). In addition to the most commonly studied mindfulness feature of attention, Shapiro et al (2006) foregrounds an ethical perspective stressing the dynamic and evolving process of intention which brings about what is intended and the attitudinal qualities of 'heart-mindfulness' (Shapiro et al, 2006, p376), defined as lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity, characterised by a "heartfelt yearning" (Shapiro and Wallace, 2006, p698). Amaro (2015) also stresses the

significance of intention in relation to ethical consideration of mindfulness, noting that it is the quality of the motivation of the actor, not the extent to which he is aware, that determines the ethical value of the action. The IAA model includes a fourth dimension, a meta-mechanism that Shapiro identifies as 'reperceiving', defined as a shift in perspective, "a rotation in consciousness in which was previously "subject" becomes "object"" (Shapiro et al, 2006, p378), bringing the practitioner closer into direct experience while simultaneously being non-attached. Blaser (2013) notes that this is a shift away from the normal day-to-day location of attention in the interpersonal realm.

Shapiro et al (2006) describe four additional mechanisms in mindfulness: self-regulation; emotional, behavioural and cognitive flexibility; values clarification and exposure. Self-regulation feedback loops are 'fed' by the intention, attention and attitude of mindfulness thus creating more healthy functioning. Flexibility is a consequence of a reduction in habitual patterns of thought and behaviours whilst the capacity to separate ourselves from our values allows the practitioner to reflect upon them and to exercise choice. Exposure is the ability to attend to difficulties without becoming involved with them; through exposure the practitioner learns that difficulties need not be overwhelming.

Whilst Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness retained core elements of Buddhist philosophy and practice, Wallace contends that, as a result of secularisation mindfulness became separated from its roots in Vipassana (insight) meditation (Wallace, 2007). Although Amaro (2015) considers the Buddhist approach to the alleviation of suffering to be pragmatic and therefore more accessible to the layperson than a purely theoretical approach, he nonetheless supports Kabat-Zinn's position that a secular mindfulness may render it more accessible to a wider population. Lindahl (2015) agrees, asserting that if too closely associated with a religion, legal challenges may ensue with the risk of rejection of mindfulness within social institutions such as education and the public sector. Indeed, the UK public sector favours a clear division between religious and secular treatment of mindfulness:

"Using these [Buddhist] methods, but freeing them from any religious or dogmatic content, Jon Kabat-Zinn began teaching his

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course (MBSR) to patients at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in the late 1970s..... The class-based MBSR curriculumremains at the core of several programmes that have been specifically adapted to deal with different clinical conditions and contexts” (Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2015, p8).

If mindfulness is to be perceived as secular, then according to Lindahl (2015) it need not be evaluated against traditional Buddhist concepts, and indeed any further adoption of Buddhist theory and practice should be empirically validated within a scientific frame of reference. However, Monteiro et al (2015) question the basis on which MBIs can be developed if not underpinned by Buddhism, and encourage a continuing dialogue between traditional and contemporary approaches to ensure robust and sound progress. Further to this, Monteiro et al (2015) and Amaro (2015) expound on the ethical dimension of traditional Buddhism and its value in the development of secular practice. Amaro (2015) contends that the concepts of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness should be introduced into the design of interventions, for example in the form of the Five Precepts, although it should be understood that:

“the practice of ethics .. becomes enhanced out of compassion for others, rather than through an external agency, or the internal narrative of the super-ego, telling us that we should or should not act in certain ways” (Amaro, 2015, p70).

Monteiro et al (2015) assert that “an absence of explicitly taught ethics [in contemporary mindfulness] may result in a misappropriation of the practices of mindfulness” (Monteiro et al, 2015, p2). The ethical dimension ‘right mindfulness’ in Buddhism derives from the Buddha’s Eightfold Path to the cessation of suffering, a set of non-dogmatic guidance to living a wholesome life with an outlook of care towards oneself and others (Chiesa, 2013). The omission of an overt ethic is viewed as dangerous by some critics (i.e. Wallace, 2012; Titmuss, 2013; Purser & Loy, 2013; Purser & Milillo, 2015) in that the attentional focus of mindfulness could be taught and practised with non-ethical intent such as within the military and commerce. Conversely, Kabat-Zinn (2013) asserts that MBSR does have an ethical foundation, but he points to the contexts within which it is taught, such as upholding the Hippocratic tradition within the clinical environment, rather than to specific sets of guidance or

instruction within the MBSR curriculum. To defend this, he maintains that “ultimately, the responsibility to live an ethical life lies on the shoulders and in the hearts of each one of us who chooses to engage in the work of mindfulness-based interventions” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p295); a perhaps unsatisfactory rebuttal. Amaro (2015) is of the view that a more grounded holistic rendering of mindfulness would enhance its ethical dimension, and to this end Greenberg & Mitra (2015) have posited in a ‘curriculum for right mindfulness’ whose fundamental principles of non-harming, interdependence and virtuous action address “wholesome ends (beneficial outcomes) as well as skilful means” to reduce suffering (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015, p77).

2.2.2.3. A Consideration of Paradigms

The question of what we can and want to know about secular mindfulness prompts some preliminary consideration of the scientific paradigms within which mindfulness can be researched. Scientific perspectives can be categorised as either consisting of a linear accumulation of knowledge of a fixed and knowable objective reality (Popper, 1968) or progressing as a series of episodic paradigm shifts (Kuhn, 1996). A scientific paradigm is a set of “universally recognized scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions for a community of practitioners” (Kuhn, 1996, p10) comprising “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator not only in their choice of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p105). In a paradigm shift, previous theories are abandoned in favour of theories that fit better with current observations (Kuhn, 1996), however, paradigms are by their nature unverifiable as they provide the set of first principles of the worldview of the researcher defined by an account of their ontological, epistemological and methodological positions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Postpositivism is the paradigm that underpins current scientific method, and is based on the belief that there is an objective truth or reality to be discovered, reducible to testable measurable hypotheses (Creswell, 2009) where the

researcher aims to test a theory or describe an experience "through observation and measurement in order to predict and control forces that surround us" (O'Leary, 2004, p.5). Postpositivism takes the ontological position of critical realism; holding that there is a reality, albeit one which is difficult to capture, about which probably knowledge can be asserted through testing hypotheses using objective experimental methods (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Positivists deal with turning observable facts into sciences that are, according to Bentz and Shapiro (1998) considered to be the only legitimate forms of knowledge. This is problematic for the social sciences as it entails the scientific handling of human beings in the same way as non-conscious physical entities:

"the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided" (Mertens, 2005, p.8).

An alternative paradigm, constructivism on the other hand maintains that reality is socially constructed, wherein knowledge is subjective and changeable and where the research aim is to elucidate the meaning of phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) criticism centres on the reductionist treatment of phenomenon within the postpositivist paradigm; they assert that the object of the study is decontextualised and externalised, generalised data is rendered inapplicable to individual cases, and there is a lack of acknowledgement of the creative genesis of new research ideas. Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that the objectivity of reality cannot be established as it is only possible to falsify a theory never to incontrovertibly verify its 'truth' (Popper, 1968), and moreover, findings cannot be held to be independent of the theory or the value base through which they are examined. Rehorick and Bentz hold that reality is constituted of "whatever one's consciousness attends to in the moment" with the danger that we become locked into believing that such experiences have an external reality rather than seeing them as constructed (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p19). Pring (2000) is less critical of postpositivist social science research, holding that an assumed notion of reality and shared meaning underpins any research study even within a socially constructed worldview.

According to Wallace (2007), contemporary evidence emerging from the embryonic discipline of contemplative science produces a new paradigm within which science and philosophy can explore concepts previously considered to be primarily spiritual or religious; and indeed there appears to be an emerging post-positivist view of science as a “peculiar hybrid” of traditional belief in a fixed external reality and a mounting comprehension that ‘reality’ is merely perceptual projection (Von Glaserfeld, 2001, p40). Similarly an emergent perspective on the concept of paradigm is the controversial concept of alethic pluralism, or multiple truths, which suggests that propositions can be true in different ways (Lynch, 2008). This perspective is proposed in an integrated approach characterised by multiple research programmes and evidenced by “extended facts, uncertainties and value loadings” (Darwin, 2010 p52). Such an approach allows for a range of theories of truth: consensual (Kuhn), correspondent (Popper) and pragmatic (Lakatos) (Darwin, 2010).

Monteiro et al (2015) consider that contemporary mindfulness insofar as it retains the essence of traditional mindfulness is sufficient to bring about a paradigm shift. However, one compelling criticism of contemporary mindfulness research stems from the “sharp contrast” in its postpositivist context with the phenomenological paradigm underpinning mindfulness theory (Hamilton et al, 2006, p128). Contemporary mindfulness would appear to stop short of the full radical transformative phenomenon of traditional Buddhist mindfulness; according to Scharf (2013) this is attributable to the Western medicalised therapeutic context within which it is employed (ibid, cited in Monteiro, 2015), and indeed the contemporary discipline has been alleged to have been diminished to an ego-serving, solipsistic mindfulness-lite approach, dubbed McMindfulness by its critics (Forbes, 2016).

Monteiro et al (2015) distinguish traditional mindfulness approaches defined as having an “explicit orientation towards systems of training and practice that are deliberately oriented around teachings derived from the Buddha” from contemporary approaches denoted as “all forms of mindfulness programmes that are not explicitly based in Buddhist practice” (Monteiro et al, 2015, p1). From this narrower perspective, contemporary MBIs derived from Kabat-Zinn’s

MBSR can be viewed as a practice of focusing attention on experiences we would otherwise avoid, with the aim of “taking responsibility for our own experience and cultivating the wisdom to manage it skilfully” (Monteiro et al, 2015, p4). Forbes (2016) however advocates for a holistic perspective with the aim of bringing about “more inclusive relationships of social justice, care, connectedness, healing, fulfilment and wellbeing ... for all” within the teaching and practice of contemporary mindfulness (Forbes, 2016, p12).

2.2.2.4. The Turn towards Neuroscience

The acceptability of mindfulness in the West owes much to concurrent technological advances in neuroscience, research now providing, according to McCown et al (2010) incontrovertible evidence of the neuroplasticity of the human brain and the effects on it of mindfulness practice. Neuroscientific mindfulness research from the mid 1990s to date, cited in Siegel (2007), demonstrates prefrontal neural effects that correlate with the regulation of emotion, attention control, empathy, insight and moral reasoning. Whilst beyond the scope of this research, it is in itself worthy of note that links have been sought between the fields of neuroscience and mindfulness; however, disciplines that depend on interior individual experience, such as mindfulness, can be distorted and undervalued within a scientific frame of reference. Even within the Mind and Life Institute (2016), whose mission is to “integrate science with contemplative practice and wisdom traditions”, researchers’ attempts to relate science and Buddhism as equally valid approaches proved so challenging that countermeasures had to be found to ensure that research scientists were not merely observing their Buddhist participants as experimental objects (Harrington & Zajonc, 2006). Flanagan (2011) looks to neuroscience to provide a complementary perspective that can be viewed alongside phenomenology (in a form of triangulation), describing this as a ‘tethering’ (ibid, p82) for Buddhist phenomenology. Flanagan’s view is that a synergy between Buddhism and Western science has been sought for the last twenty years, disagreeing with the view shared by Wallace and the Dalai Lama that there is a

lack of Western appreciation of Buddhist first person phenomenology (Flanagan, 2011, p82).

Wallace's (2007) contemplative science approach is an attempt to challenge the historical schism between science and religion and philosophy. Examination of biological and neuroscience could be expected to provide a credible bridge between positivist and constructivist paradigms, and in its own right reflects a different aspect to first person experiential perspectives. If a correlation between neuroscience and Buddhist phenomenology provides a mutual 'tethering', relating seemingly distinct epistemological disciplines might be a scientifically responsible way to proceed (Johnson, 2006). Johnson endorses Merleau-Ponty's approach to "empirically responsible philosophy":

"he saw that no one method or orientation gives all truth, and so we need to draw from every available method – phenomenological, biological, neuroscientific, sociological and psychological – in search of converging evidence about the phenomena of mind and language that we choose to study" (Johnson, 2006, p2).

It follows that the explication of the physical structure of bodily processes and their mental correlates provided individually by Thomson (2007) and Levine (2010) may afford scientific credibility to the concept of mindful embodiment and embodied empathy, pointing to their relevance within empirical methodologies. Specific methodologies, such as somatic phenomenology (Hartelius, 2015) are now utilised in the attempt to elucidate differences in definitions of mindfulness, and a recent study indicates different neurological effects from mindfulness and compassion-based mind training (Valk et al, 2017). The taking whole of the human condition provides the conditions for a mature body of wisdom to surface; and may indeed, as Monteiro et al (2015) suggest, signal a paradigm shift. Applied to human caring, these synergies may be brought to bear in compassionate therapeutic approaches.

2.3 Defining Mindfulness and Compassion

2.3.1. A Problem of Operational Definition

Mindfulness has been defined as “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p4); or according to Nairn, “knowing what is happening, when it is happening, without preference” (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11). However, discord is evident in the pursuit of a universally agreed definition. Addressing the problems inherent in identifying operational definitions and validating the concept of mindfulness has meaning when examining its effective mechanism of action (Bishop, 2002) and “the extent to which the large variety of interventions currently subsumed under the rubric of MBIs actually represent a unique rather than an heterogeneous group of practices linked by the same label ‘mindfulness’” (Chiesa, 2013, p2). Malinowski asserts that:

“a successful implementation of mindfulness approaches within the context of applied psychology has to be based on scientific scrutiny and rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness..... To achieve this aim, the construct of mindfulness needs to be clearly defined with precise, testable operational definitions, allowing measurement and validation...” (Malinowski, 2008, p157).

According to Chiesa (2013), that attempts to define mindfulness unambiguously have thus far been without success is in part related to interpretation of the original definition of mindfulness from within Buddhist literature. Van Gordon et al (2015) maintain that Buddhism narrowly defines mindfulness as a faculty whose purpose is to place and hold attention in order to regulate concentration. Dreyfus disagrees with this position, citing defining cognitive and ethical features from Buddhist literature which include “not wobbling”, “remembering”, “not drifting away from the wholesome and unwholesome mental states” (Dreyfus, 2013, p47). Definitions more commonly held across the contemporary mindfulness community assert that mindfulness is both a *faculty* (e.g. paying attention in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994); knowing what is happening when it is happening (Nairn, 2010a) and an *attitude* (e.g. non-judgementally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994); without preference (Nairn, 2010a).

While central to quantitative research, it is debatable whether a unified definition is achievable. Classical Buddhist definitions of mindfulness encompass several significant sequential concepts beyond those of present-moment attention and non-judgement, such as the development of retentive focus used to liberate the mind from unwholesome habitual tendencies in order to gain phenomenological insight (Dreyfus, 2013). Kudesia & Nyima (2015) highlight similarities between traditional and contemporary mindfulness in a definition of state mindfulness that attempts to represent accurately its holistic nature and differentiate it from related constructs (such as ‘absorption’ and ‘flow’ where the experiencer is lost in their experience):

“Mindfulness is a state of heightened meta-awareness in which discursive cognition is diminished and attention is solely focused on and receptive to goal-relevant aspects [i.e. not all arising stimuli] of the present moment.” (Kudesia & Nyima, 2015, p923)

Reflecting the neuroscientific turn, Siegel (2007) posits a scientific definition of mindfulness:

“an integrated state of mental processing that involves a wide range of attentional, emotion regulating, conceptual and observational processes that are harnessed in a flexible and adaptive manner” (Siegel, 2007, p261).

Taking Dreyfus’s (2013) position, it could be argued that a multi-factoral definition of mindfulness is more in keeping with the richness of Buddhist philosophical and psychological development. Kang & Whittingham (2010) propose a lengthier definition of mindfulness drawn from Buddhist traditions that incorporates the ‘missing’ ethical dimension in a multi-faceted, albeit dense, definition:

“Mindfulness is nonreactive, nonlaborative, nonreified awareness that has meta-cognitive functions, monitoring ongoing awareness and discriminating wisely between aspects of awareness content so that awareness and behaviour can be directed according to the goals of genuine happiness, virtue, and truth. Thus, mindfulness can be focused on present moment experience, sustaining attention on a familiar, factually concordant and positively evaluated object or on systematic recollection of constructive ideas, in a way that is volitionally generated or spontaneously emergent.” (Kang & Whittingham, 2010, p170)

Kang & Whittingham's definition attempts to distinguish yet link the progression from pure unbiased attention of the contents of the mind, meta-attention of the mind that is doing the thinking, progressing towards deliberate ethically-focused action; however, a usable definition requires further ethical debate on the complex concepts of happiness, virtue and truth and exploration of what might form the evidence criteria for genuineness.

Spontaneous emergence is understood as a desirable outcome of mindfulness practice, reflecting a transformative, not merely remedial phenomenon. Chiesa (2013) asserts that mindfulness is a multi-faceted trait as well as a state, with a range of behavioural features including observing, acting with awareness, non-judging and nonreactivity/acceptance, and describes the developmental progression of mindfulness skills, where the practitioner advances from attentional concentration on an object towards the capacity to hold unbiased open attention to all experience; the technical skill of mindful awareness balanced by an attitude of acceptance, curiosity and non-judgement:

“In sum, according to classical literature, mindfulness concerns a lucid awareness of what is occurring within the phenomenological field and meditation plays a key role in the development of mindfulness. In particular, for the correct development of mindfulness, both concentrative and open monitoring skills should be developed with the main aim of keeping the mind anchored to present moment experience and perceiving an experience in its stark form free from one's own projections and misunderstandings. Finally, an attitude of acceptance is thought to facilitate and to be the result of the development of both mindfulness and concentration.” (Chiesa, 2013, p4)

Taking an alethic pluralist position, I consider that each of the aforementioned definitions of mindfulness has relevance, and assert that multiple perspectives on the experience of mindfulness are important and relevant to the ongoing exploration of this field of study. Van Dam et al (2017) note that whilst variation in definition is often found when studying complex constructs, and likewise hold that the considerable semantic variation in mindfulness does have important relevance to the field of research such that the researcher must set out the type of mindfulness utilised and inquire into how the practitioner interprets the

phenomenon, bearing in mind that mindfulness, however defined, is not a single construct.

2.3.2. Introducing Lovingkindness and Compassion

Although secular mindfulness has been criticised as denatured by being separated from holistic Buddhist practice (Grossman & Van Dam, 2013), the practices of lovingkindness and compassion have been integrated into mindfulness-based interventions. Of the faculties of mindfulness, compassion and insight, Nairn asserts that “compassion is the most transformative energy in the universe” (Nairn, 2010b). Amaro (2015) supports the inclusion of compassion-based practice to provide an ethical dimension to secular mindfulness. Like Shapiro and Nairn, Gilbert and Choden (2013) return to Buddhist sources to align mindfulness with compassion, stating that:

“mindfulness and compassion work together but from different positions. Compassion helps us to reorganise our minds by generating particular motives and feelings, while mindfulness helps us to step back and disengage from emotional thinking loops that suck us in, thereby providing the stability and perspective which is the basis for insight” (Gilbert & Choden, 2013, p49).

Compassion means “to suffer together” and most dictionaries include in the definition the desire to alleviate suffering [<http://www.onelook.com/>]. Gilbert (2010a) defines compassion as “a basic kindness, with a deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other living things, coupled with the wish and effort to relieve it” (Gilbert, 2010a, pxv).

The Dalai Lama explains the interrelational nature of compassion:

“Genuine compassion is based not on our own projections and expectations, but rather on the rights of the other: irrespective of whether another person is a close friend or an enemywe develop a genuine concern for his or her problems. This is genuine compassion. Usually when we are concerned about a close friend, we call this compassion. This is not compassion; it is attachment..... based solely on projection and expectation (Tibetan Life, 2009, accessed 5/6/11).

Gilbert (2010a) situates the faculty of compassion within an evolutionary theory of emotion; the reptilian brain which has a protective function is nested within the paleomammalian brain with its nurturing/social function, in turn within the neomammalian brain which allows beliefs and values, and an awareness of self. The earlier the development, the more immediate the reactivity of the brain function. The most recent evolutionary development of the pre-frontal cortex allows us, according to Gilbert (2010a), to deal with the emotional challenges of the reptilian and mammalian brains.

The experience of emotion is asserted to be universal in humans, based on a biological need to “appraise and prepare to act upon situations in the interest of well-being” (Cole et al, 2006, p1237). Emotions are considered to be adaptive in that they help us to deal with life’s successes and failures (Gilbert, 2010b). Gilbert (2010a) demarcates three affect regulatory systems linked to the concept of the nested brain: the earliest system is threat which is protection-focused, ensuring rapid-firing regulation of the fight/flight/freeze mechanisms and producing the stress hormone cortisol; the drive-regulatory system, which motivates us through reward to find better ways of prospering, linked to the opiate hormones; and the soothing-contentment system triggering the production of serotonin, creating feelings of wellbeing and joy, which crucially can deregulate the other systems. The older brain reacts with emotions, the new brain grasps onto emotions and fuses them into a constructed self. Memory plays a role in emotional reactivity. The hippocampus helps form clear memories of specific events whilst the amygdala codes memories subliminally to allow us to generalise across similar situations. However, when threat is prolonged, the hippocampus becomes deactivated and the amygdala activated, causing us to feel like “something happened, I’m not sure what, but I’m really upset” (Hanson & Mendius, 2009, p57).

Notwithstanding its protective function, Gilbert (2010a, b), Nairn (2010b) and Hanson & Mendius (2009) explain how the evolutionary model of the development of the human brain can aid understanding of how our emotional and mental wellbeing is adversely affected. The capacity of our brains to conceptualise means that we experience the ‘second darts’ of suffering

(Hanson & Mendius, 2009, p50); not merely the original pain, but the replaying of emotionally laden memories, often triggered by unrelated events. This creates loops of rumination, and related neural and somatic reactions, leading to psychological distress and compromised immune system.

2.3.3. A Taxonomy of Secular Mindfulness

The discourse concerned with defining mindfulness has been outlined in its variation, from specific scientific definitions to more discursive explanations of the processes undertaken in the development of mindfulness skills. In addition, Buddhist and contemporary literature also expands on a range of concepts associated with mindfulness: acceptance (e.g. Brach, 2003; Hayes & Smith, 2009; Bond et al, 2011), intention, attention and attitude (e.g. Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000; Shapiro et al, 2006; Nairn, 2010b) lovingkindness and compassion (e.g. Neff, 2003 & 2009; Gilbert, 2009; Fredrickson et al, 2008; Choden, 2010; Chiesa, 2013) and insight and wisdom (Chogyam Trungpa, 1975 & 1993; Dalai Lama, 1999; Kenchen Thrangu, 1993 & 2001; Nairn, 1997, 1999, 2002 & 2011a, b, c; Yeshe Losal, 2001; Wallace, 2007; Allione, 2008).

Arguably, the task is not one of defining mindfulness, but of classifying a matrix of associated concepts. Neff (2014) posits a classification of secular mindfulness that she refers to as the “Mindfulness umbrella” or “big M mindfulness”, which incorporates these associated concepts:

“m1, paying attention to experience in the present moment (mindfulness); m2, relating to experience without judgement or resistance (acceptance); m3, relating to the experiencer with good will (lovingkindness/compassion) and m4, understanding the nature of both experience and experiencer (insight/wisdom).”
(Neff, 2014, online video)

Neff (2014) declared that Nairn’s approach is the only secular version of which she was aware at that time that incorporates all four of the mindfulness-related concepts in a cohesive taught programme (as described by Nixon et al, 2016). In contrast to a number of other secular approaches, the psychological theory underpinning Nairn’s (2011a) model of mindfulness-based living is an explicit

blend of contemporary and Buddhist theory, presented as a secular psychology (Nairn, 1999). Mindfulness is integrated with acceptance, compassion, insight and wisdom by Nairn (2011a) who asserts that these faculties are inherently co-existent but underdeveloped. In incorporating all elements of Neff's 'Mindfulness umbrella', Nairn presents a cohesive systemic secular approach to mindfulness, compassion and insight that draws from a range of contemporary and traditional Buddhist teachings. It is contended that a comprehensive exploration of Nairn's theory of meditation, with reference to supporting theory, may provide a useful hermeneutic for the phenomenological study into the lived experience of practitioners.

2.4 Nairn's Psychology Of Meditation

2.4.1. On Mindfulness

Rob Nairn is highly regarded in the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism as the African representative of the late Venerable Akong Rinpoche (Samye Ling, 2017) and he was instrumental in establishing Vajrayana Buddhism in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s (Clasquin, 2002). Although he is the author of several books on Buddhism meditation and mindfulness (Nairn, 1997; 1999; 2002), nonetheless, Nairn's approach has not been subject to peer reviewed research, nor are his major influences outside Buddhism made clear in the literature. Nairn's psychology of meditation is rooted in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions of the Karma Kagyu lineage, 'Diamond Mind' his only publication of his approach to the psychology of meditation; he has expanded his theory from teachings delivered during the 2000s, culminating in the course content of the MSc in Mindfulness Studies, University of Aberdeen introduced in 2010 (Nixon et al, 2016), and subsequently in one-year trainings through the Mindfulness Association Ltd. In this regard, Nairn's is an emergent psychology based on experiential phenomenology, in line with Buddhist wisdom traditions; however, without further explanation and methodological rigour his conclusions could be considered theoretical at best. In expounding Nairn's approach, reference has been made to written recordings of oral teachings given on the

University of Aberdeen MSc course, as well as to Nairn's published works. Nairn's theory will be examined relative to the findings of this research study in sections 4 and 5.

Nairn's (2010a) model has four components: as well as mindfulness, it includes compassion, insight and wisdom. Although Nairn introduces these sequentially, they are put forward as interlinked elements that arise cyclically in the experience of practitioners. Nairn's (1999) theory centres on the paradox of meditation – why practitioners are drawn to mindfulness, but also compelled to reject it. In accordance with established neuroscientific evidence (Harrington & Zajonc, eds, 2006), Nairn (2010a) maintains that habitual patterning is the main force governing our mental processes: repeating the same thought process creates neurological pathways. Nairn (2010a) contends that it is the process of acceptance that disengages habitual thought patterns, allowing the mind to rest with the situation as it is. When unresolved psychological states are activated this causes mental pain, which elicits conscious or unconscious distraction and avoidance (Jung, 1960/1965). Nairn (2010a), like other proponents of mindfulness, holds that these states may not in reality be too painful to bear; additional pain, defined in Buddhism as suffering, is caused by the process of the mind resisting pain (Dilgo Khyentse, 1993). The mind is also driven by strong emotions; Nairn (2010a) holds that negative emotions arise attached to memories of the past, creating a ruminative storyline. Nairn (2010a) observes that all three of the psychological forces described above cause us to reject what does not meet our preference.

2.4.1.1 Mindfulness as a mental process

Nairn (2010a) describes mindfulness as the faculty of “being in touch with ourselves” (Nairn, 2010a, 16-18/7/10). Closely linked to intelligence, mindfulness leads to a reduction in reactivity, and brings a different quality of being present to life (Nairn, 2010a). Similar to Kabat-Zinn (1994), Nairn's definition of mindfulness is in two parts, of which the first part is technical – “knowing what is happening while it is happening”; arising from being in the

present moment, not intellectual (Nairn, 2010a, 16/7/10). From this way of being, Nairn says “a spontaneous connectedness emerges, and the world makes sense of you, not the other way around” (Nairn, 2010a, 16/7/10). This definition applies to the inner environment of thoughts, emotions, mind states, moods, the source of happiness or unhappiness (Nairn, 2010a). Thoughts arise and dissolve spontaneously because the mind is by nature dynamic. Reasoning can only take place in conscious mind; the sub conscious mind is experiential and is not capable of engaging in logic (Jung, 1960/1965; Nairn, 2010a).

The second part of the definition of mindfulness is attitudinal: knowing what is happening while it is happening ‘*without preference*’ (Nairn, 2010a, 16/7/10): experiencing a level of awareness beyond our likes or dislikes where we can accept present moment experience. Amaro (2015) highlights a potential hazard to mindfulness practitioners of experiential avoidance and dissociation when mental content is unwanted. The term ‘non-judgemental’, used within Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness may be problematic, as it could be misconstrued as a direction, rather than the intention to welcome judgemental thought in order that it be accepted. Insofar as Nairn’s more obscure definition requires explanation, it may attract less misinterpretation in this regard. Nairn (2011a) holds that mindfulness is a necessary faculty for insight, but states that the ‘knowing’ of mindfulness can be relatively superficial, the practitioner not yet recognising in any depth what is happening in the internal environment.

Thinking is of itself neutral, but Nairn (2011a) holds that we tend to think a great deal, and much is repetitive, cyclical rumination. The unsettled mind, driven primarily by preferences, chases after thoughts, feelings, beliefs and emotions and is overwhelmed: “The mind incessantly identifies with what is within it” (Nairn, 2011a, 4/5/11). Mindfulness practice trains the mind to come to rest and experience clarity so that practitioners can hold steady to a chosen topic, follow it through with energy and then rest (Nairn, 2010a). The capacity to ‘know’ what is happening when it is happening is one of “stepping back in our inner environment without dissociating”, and constitutes a moment of pre-conceptual experience “before language is necessary” (Nairn, 2011a, 4/5/11). Mindfulness is distinguished by Nairn from psychological processes such as reflection and

contemplation which involve conceptualisation (e.g. problem solving, exploration and resolving psychological issues). When these other processes come up during mindfulness practice, they are a distraction: Nairn states that “mindfulness will help these other processes but not vice versa” (Nairn, 2010a, 16-18/7/10).

Wallace (2006) states that “mindfulness is a sequence of pulses of cognition, remembering to remember” (Wallace *in* Harrington and Zajonc, 2006, p 41) and further holds that this requires a supervisory “meta-attention” (Ibid, p42). With experience, these pulses become longer with a “higher resolution of awareness” (ibid, p43). In the early stages of practice, the practitioner is inevitably and fairly constantly in a state of distraction which can be countered by focus; energy follows focus and reinforces it (Nairn, 2010a). The essence of mindfulness training is practising shifting focus. The forces that cause distractions are involuntary; mind will be drawn back to the distraction, as if pulled by an elastic band (Nairn, 2010b). The remedy for inner confusion is to “leave it alone and to keep leaving it alone”, allowing the muddy, wind-ruffled pond of the psyche to settle and clear (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11).

2.4.1.2. Mindfulness as a Body-Based Practice

Whilst Nairn’s Psychology of Meditation is a theoretical basis for the study of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom, Nairn (2010a), as is the case with all mindfulness teaching (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; McCown et al, 2010; Didonna, ed, 2009), asserts that it is impossible to grasp fully the material without experiential practice. Nairn’s (2012) model is progressive in that it moves from awareness of course thought to subtle thought, and furthermore is cyclic, acknowledging that the same thinking patterns recur at different layers of the psyche.

Nairn’s (2010a) core mindfulness practice employs the sequential stages of settling, grounding, resting and support. During settling practice, the practitioner maintains a relaxed focus on the direct sensations of the breath in the body, utilising what Nairn (2010a) refers to as “the intelligence of the body” to instruct

the mind to release us from cycles of mental rumination (Nairn, 2010a, 16-18/7/10). The direct experience of the breath allows a natural shift of focus into the body where the practitioner may use several methods to enhance the experience of somatic awareness: using the attention to 'scan' the body, bringing awareness to where the body makes contact with a surface or allowing attention to come to rest on a bodily sensation. This phase ('grounding') creates a foundation for the practice of resting where attention rests in present moment embodied experience. A variety of contemporary body-based practices are utilised within Nairn's approach generating an appreciation of several significant phenomena:

- The body provides a reference point for noticing the course and subtle habits of the mind. Movement practice alerts the practitioner to impulse arising in the body; the motion of a thought arising and the moment that the mind engages with it.
- Bodily sensation (course physical sensations and subtle energies), emotion (including emotional tone and mood) and thought (including thoughts, rumination, storylines) form the "triangle of awareness" – a schema with which to navigate the inner world (McCown et al, 2010, p67). By becoming aware of bodily sensations, the practitioner begins to appreciate that the body and mind are inseparably linked in one system.
- Present moment is experienced through spatial embodiment.
- Somatic awareness allows for a deeper experience: "it is through the felt sense of our bodies that we can deeply experience our lives" (Mindfulness Association, 2011).

Comparable body-based approaches increasingly have application in therapeutic practice outwith the field of mindfulness. Levine (2010), developed a somatic therapeutic approach, Somatic Experiencing, to 'renegotiate' or rework traumatic experience (Levine, 2010, p23). Physical energy becomes blocked through psychosomatic trauma, and a combination of compassion and reworking at a physical level is necessary to allow the trauma to release and a natural balance or 'goodness' to be restored (Levine, 2010). An animal undergoing traumatic experience will attempt to flee or to fight, and in doing so

discharges the build up of chemicals in the body triggered by the imminent danger. If neither of these two options is available, then the animal will go into physiological shock and freeze or 'fold' into paralysis, conscious awareness temporarily abating so that the animal feels less pain – this innate response of tonic immobility “triggers a profoundly altered state of numbing” as well as a dissociation from the body (Levine, 2010, p50). For humans, with arguably greater cognitive functioning, physical reactions to trauma are triggered as easily by psychological stressors as by physical danger, with the propensity to remember and re-experience the trauma: “humans ... reterrorise themselves out of their (misplaced) fear of their own intense sensations and emotions” (Levine, 2010, p 61). The freeze or fold response becomes a 'default' mode triggered by aroused feelings, giving rise to unexpected and seemingly inexplicable reactions (Levine, 2010).

Providing an expansive treatise on somatic practice, Ray (2014) holds that the assimilation of Buddhism into the West has leached it of the direct association with embodiment, principally because of a tendency to rely on conceptual knowledge. Ray (2014) has focused his approach on synthesising Vajrayana Buddhist philosophy and practice with similar somatic aboriginal traditions, discussing those within the context of contemporary neuroscientific findings. Ray's body of work (2014, 2016a, 2016b) provides the Western student with a comprehensive immersion into the somatic realm with the aim of transforming the orientation of the self to the world:

“According to the somatic teachings, the problem with our life does not lie in the individual circumstances or occurrences of our day-to-day existence. It is not that they're inherently meaningless and boring: the problem is that we make them meaningless and boring because we are so disconnected and so invested in maintaining our own sense of “self” that we actually don't relate to them in a full and direct way. Unwilling to fully live the life that is arriving in our body moment by moment, we find ourselves with no real life at all” (Ray, 2014, p217).

Relevant to the exploration of the applicability of mindfulness and related concepts is consideration of the formation of traumatic stress. Based on findings by Gallup and Maser (1977, in Levine, 2010, p54), the key factor in whether or not an experience of psychological trauma will result in post-

traumatic stress injury is whether fear is accompanied by physical restraint or immobility; “a precondition for the development of post-traumatic stress disorder is that a person is both frightened and perceives that he or she is trapped”. If immobility occurs during a fearful event, then the fear response persists and can become entrenched in a trauma feedback loop. The younger the person, particularly those who are insecurely attached or developmentally insecure, the more likely trauma is to result in paralysis (Levine, 2010, p60); this phenomenon is well described in attachment theory (Howe, 2005; Daniel & Wassell, 2002a, b & c). While dissociation temporarily “helps to make the unbearable bearable” (Levine, 2010, p50), in the longer term traumatised people “get lost in a kind of anxious fog, a chronic partial shutdown, dissociation, lingering depression and numbness” (Levine, 2010, p52).

The survival of the human infant as an organism depends on her ability to be cared for, and later to defend herself physically and psychologically (Howe, 2005). Interaction with the world engenders a sense of self, and ongoing interaction solidifies it, until the self, with its unique array of preferences, habits and complexes, becomes fact (Wilson, 2002). Interface of thought with preference crystallises the self, which leads to further thought processes (Nairn, 2011a). Wallace (2007) agrees, pointing to neuroscientific evidence showing that neural networks are created and strengthened each time we engage in thinking and conceptualisation.

Suppression of thought occurs subliminally, just below the threshold of the mind’s awareness. Nairn (2010a) asserts that the body-mind system has an inherent intelligence only making conscious what can be tolerated unless mental ‘force’ is employed, such as being obsessive, fighting against thoughts; aggressive internal attacks that lead to fear-laden reaction. Levine advises using a method of titration – or gradual sensitisation; “sudden demolition of a defence is likely to bring with it overwhelm, chaos and possible retraumatisation” (Levine, 2010, p159). Due to these dangers, Nairn (2011a) recommends concurrent training in self-compassion and body-based mindfulness practice (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11). Levine finds that “people who are most resilient, and find the greatest peace in their lives, have learned

to tolerate extreme sensations while gaining the capacity for reflective self-awareness” (Levine, 2010, p137). Recognising and dealing with re-emergence into the ‘original’ trauma requires a momentum of ‘forward experiencing’, suggestive of Chogyam Trungpa’s (1984) warrior courage, where “‘fear’ simply does not really exist as an independent entity” (Levine, 2010, p90).

2.4.1.3. The concept of acceptance

Integral to the efficacy of mindfulness is the practice of acceptance. Kabat-Zinn (1990) advises that non-acceptance prevents healing from taking place and dissipates the energy required for positive growth. At its simplest, acceptance is a clear seeing, integral to the definition of mindfulness as non-judgemental (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Nairn, 2010a) and to Shapiro et al’s (2006) attitude axiom, i.e. bringing an attitude of acceptance to attentional practice. Acceptance is one of the three specific techniques utilised in Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) practised alongside mindfulness and values-based living as an “active, vital embrace of the moment” (Hayes & Smith, 2009, p7). The concept is perhaps most fully explored by Brach (2003) in her account of Radical Acceptance where she recognises its transformative nature within the practices of mindfulness and compassion.

Rejection is psychologically unacceptable (Levine, 2010), so within the frame of mindfulness, accepting the unacceptable is a conceptual paradox – and impossible to address straightforwardly according to Nairn (2010a). A habitual tendency to suppress the unacceptable pushes the emerging thought away (Nairn, 2010a). Psychological methods can compound suppression, e.g. attempting to ‘fix’ a psychological issue can be interpreted as rejection of the damaged inner being; so indirect methods are required to bypass the suppression reflex (Nairn, 2010a).

Acceptance of what is alive in the moment equates to accepting that something is the case, rather than resigning oneself to it. “Seeing things as they actually are in the present”, leads to a seeming paradox: “you have to accept yourself the way you are before you can really change” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p38). Nairn

reflects that usually we refuse to accept, “all our negative qualities plus our perceived inability to get what we think we should have” (Nairn, 2010a, 16-18/7/10). Germer (2009) notes:

“I’ve seen many people make changes in their lives ... when they are in contact with how bad a situation or behaviour makes them feel. Acceptance is not resignation or stagnation; change naturally follows acceptance” (Germer, 2009, p32).

Non-attachment means first becoming aware of one’s grasping impulses then choosing to let go. Kabat-Zinn (2005) accepts this is not easily accomplished, requiring cultivation of intention (what we aim towards) and motivation (what gives us impetus) in a genuine and unforced way, without applying techniques mechanically. Difficulties in maintaining mindfulness include effort, ‘waking up’, ‘staying awake’, ‘fog of .. lack of awareness’, ‘confusion, fatigue, depression and anxiety’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p45). With the unsettled mind subject to being overwhelmed by its own content; emotions, fixed beliefs, assumptions and expectations, Nairn (2010a), like Chogyam Trungpa (1984; 2009) and Chodron (2001), advises that the way to work with this is through actively welcoming what you most fear. Nairn draws on the work of psychologist Tara Brach who defines radical acceptance as:

“accepting absolutely everything about ourselves and our lives, by embracing with wakefulness and care our moment-to-moment experience” (Brach, 2003, p25).

Radical acceptance is a combination of clear recognition and compassionate presence, leading to the experience of wholeness; “being filled with wonder and fully alive” (Brach, 2003, p45).

2.4.2. The Inclusion of Compassion, Insight and Wisdom

Compassion is not mere sentiment: “compassion is the wrathful learning to face and accept kindly all the dreadful things about yourself, and finding that it is not dreadful” (Nairn, 2011a, 4/5/11). In Buddhism, compassion is seen as the path of the warrior (Chogyam Trungpa, 1984). Nairn (2011a) holds that practising both mindfulness and compassion is necessary to build the psychic

muscle to enable us to rest in present moment experience and to bear with the pain and discomfort of what arises in the mind with acceptance:

“Once one begins training in mindfulness, one begins to become honest; compassion training assisting with the development of authenticity by enabling one to come to terms with one’s shortcomings” (Nairn, 2011b, 26-29/8/11).

As compassion arises when kindness encounters pain, we require courage to hold, contain and tolerate our own and others’ suffering, and this degree of mindfulness, according to Nairn (2011c), requires full, impartial acceptance of ourselves and others. Shapiro and Wallace’s (2006) fourth type of mental balance – affective balance – is equivalent to emotional regulation. Buddhism advocates a range of practices designed to provide an antidote to emotional imbalance due to craving, hostility, arrogance, envy – all characterised by egocentricity. Practices include the deliberate cultivation of lovingkindness, joy, compassion and equanimity (the Four Immeasurables) (Wallace, 2010), all of which emphasise connectedness with others and a reduction in defensiveness.

Nairn (2011a) provides a rationale for including compassion and insight in his model. As the skill of mindfulness increases, the mind becomes less turbulently involved with thought processes, and settles and stabilises. Previously suppressed psychological states caused by an internally constructed defence - the egocentric preference system - then arise, triggering strong, painful psychological reactions. Nairn (2010b) suggests that compassion training is essential for us to accept these negative states in ourselves, further asserting that as we deepen our capacity to be present with our inner neuroses, insight occurs spontaneously (Nairn, 2011a). Similarly Buddhist practices progress from single pointed (mindfulness) meditation to Vipassana (insight) meditation, where mindful attention is used to examine lived experience “with the mind at the very centre of experiential reality” (Wallace, 2011, p5).

Thoughts and emotions arise consistent with how they have been encoded in relation to previous similar thoughts/experiences in the memory; neurological pathways that become “the default mode” (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11). The default mode is triggered by a subliminal reflex lying just below the surface of conscious awareness. Likewise, Williams et al note “if it [the driver of our

behaviour] is potentially damaging to us, it is not because it is buried deep in the psyche, but because it is left virtually unattended” (Williams et al, 2007, p163). Because the subliminal reflex is just below the surface of our consciousness, Nairn (2011b) and Williams et al (2007) agree that “it is accessible to us if we dare to look” (Williams et al, 2007, p163).

Nairn (2011b) holds that when trapped in the delusion of self, insight practice offers an immediate liberation. Insight practices are concerned with exposing the subliminal – the part of the psyche just below conscious awareness that “has always been there but not noticed” (Mindfulness Association, 2011, p3.) Like Shapiro, Nairn (2012) is mainly concerned with the mechanism or structure of mindfulness and related concepts. Although insight and wisdom are experiential phenomena, an understanding of the underpinning mechanisms creates a intentional framework (Nairn, 2012).

2.4.3. Defining Insight

The process of insight is to recognise what we are in touch with: “recognising what is happening, while it is happening” (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11), not to be confused with the similar concept, intuition. Nairn (2012) describes intuition, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/intuition>), as a quiet sense of knowing which is recognised in retrospect. Petitmengin-Peugeot, although criticised for confusing intuition and insight, takes a view similar to Nairn’s, suggesting that intuition “appears most often in a progressive manner”, whilst insight is more often instantaneous (Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999, p44, in Varela & Shear, ed. 1999). Henley (1999) appears to have a different understanding of insight to Nairn: she frames occurrences of insight within a process of rational problem solving; insight might arise ‘out of the blue’, but it is based on rational preparation, albeit after a period of non-conscious resting. Nairn (2011a) avers that there are no other conditions necessary for insight other than to sustain present moment presence, and furthermore, that insight cannot be willed into

being or manufactured: being present is the necessary and sufficient condition for insight to arise.

Within a positivist approach, self-referential experience becomes devalued as a source of learning (Idhe, 1986). Nairn (2011a) holds that because the practitioner is so dislocated from the non-rational, when it is sensed, it is treated as an alien presence, the practitioner only able to relate to it by projecting on to it; therefore specific practices are required to habituate the practitioner to the non-rational contents of the mind. Similar to mindfulness, insight training has two strands – one technical, one attitudinal: developing an attitude of preparedness to reflect on experience without avoidance, and using technical mechanisms to explore skilfully the inner psyche (Nairn, 2011a). The liberating factor is being able to let alone what arises of the observer and undercurrent. Process of self-arising, self-displaying and self-liberating can only take place if there is no direct action upon or resistance to the content (Nairn, 2011a). In this regard, insight practice builds upon the skill of mindful resting in present moment awareness. When complete:

“recognition exposes the fraud and liberates us and we are free from delusion. There was nothing there ever from which we had to be free – simply we are free from deluded perception” (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11).

Self-reflection pushes through conceptual boundaries to a state of non-conceptual cognitive awareness; an indisputable, unmistakable awareness that is immediately recognisable when it occurs. There is an observer up to the point of insight and then there is only observing – a shift from dualism to non-dualism that can only be understood non-conceptually, i.e. through direct experience. Nairn (2011b) describes this state in terms of its qualities – hugely expansive, joyful, blissful, free from problems caused by egocentrism, no sense of an experiencer being there but yet there is an experience. Whilst true insight is rare, mindfulness creates the conditions where insight results; attention is brought to the adaptive unconscious (Wilson, 2002).

Buddhism holds that thoughts are self-arising and self-liberating (Khenchen Thrangu, 1993). Furthermore, Nairn (2011) observes that once recognised, pattern and origin are revealed through a process of self-displaying, constituting

the recognition that is characteristic of insight. Insight is perceived as extraordinary, rather than ordinary, and when it is experienced fleetingly, the tendency is to discount it (Kramer, 2007). However, Nairn (2011c) asserts that insight is as much part of the human condition as the inner confusion it liberates us from, albeit less evolved.

2.4.4. Wisdom

Nairn (2011b) overtly references the Buddhist model of the Eight Consciousnesses to aid understanding of the process of developing insight and wisdom. Nairn (2011b) shares the Buddhist perspective that consciousness is a limitation: a primordial awareness is always present as a limitless field which is obscured by consciousness.

“It is due to consciousness that we do not have ultimate knowledge. It does not create ignorance. It is a state of luminosity or intelligence of mind. But what should be perceived (the true nature of phenomena) is not perceived by consciousness. It vividly perceives false appearances. This results in a state of delusion that obscures the realisation of ultimate wisdom” (Khenchen Thrangu, 2001, p16).

Wisdom is defined as “understanding what is happening, while it is happening” (Nairn, 2012, 18-24/5/12); ‘understanding’ refers to seeing through delusion; understanding the true nature of our experience, the Buddhist premise of dependent origination; that nothing exists independently of anything else, and nothing has a true existence of its own (Khenchen Thrangu, 1993). Flanagan (2011) describes the experience of wisdom thus:

“deeply absorbed (intellectually and meditatively) knowledge of impermanence, the causal interconnectedness of everything, that everything ... lacks immutable essences (emptiness) and ... that I am anatman, a passing person, a person who passes, a process or unfolding that is known by a proper name, but that changes at every moment, until it passes from the realm of being altogether” (Flanagan, 2011, p95).

The underlying assumption is that wisdom is inherent; our fundamental nature. Inner wisdom reveals what impulses are appropriate to act upon. In contrast,

the egocentric preference system produces “deluded perception and a belief in the existence of a separate egocentric identity” (Nairn, 2012, 18-24/5/12). In the inner environment, undercurrent, observer and impulse mediate the transition from non-conceptual to conceptual. As previously described, conceptual identification leads to solid egocentric identity which is at the heart of the deception. Wisdom throws solidity off balance; cracks the shell and allows one momentarily to see what is there (Chogyam Trungpa, 1975). Unwanted, split-off parts of the self appear as ‘demonic’ as a result of being disowned. The path towards wisdom requires that we understand, befriend and reintegrate these parts. The practice of “feeding the demons” satiates the unnourished parts of the self, resulting in their transformation into allies (Allione, 2008, p66).

2.4.5. The Key Elements of Nairn’s Model of Insight

The key elements of Nairn’s (2011b) psychological model of insight, namely intention, conceptualisation, undercurrent and observer, egocentric preference system, subliminal reflex and impulse, form the cyclic, yet progressive psychological processes involved in the cultivation of mindfulness, insight and wisdom. Preparedness for insight starts with intention, and as with Shapiro et al (2006) this is an early feature of Nairn’s model. Setting intention creates a “willingness to experience” and thereby supports the ability to be mindful (Nairn, 2010a, 16-18/7/10). Nairn (2012) asserts that intention actively works to support the soothing emotional regulation system in the brain; and in turn the practitioner experiences more confidence to bear with suffering. Moreover, Hacking (1995) holds that we become the person that we understand ourselves to be; not just as an accumulation of past experience but embodying the meaning that we ascribe to such experience; our intentions are unconsciously shaped by our autobiographies, what Pema Chodron (2010) refers to as our storylines, in a continuous loop.

Within the psychological environment, conceptualisation is a constant process, a reflexive activity that takes place without conscious decision. However, a subtle subliminal intention to conceptualisation may reveal itself through

mindfulness (Nairn, 2011a): a psychological impulse precedes the secondary process of conceptualisation, a reflex following the natural arising of an impulse or feeling. This view is supported by Haggard (2005), who evidenced that the frontal and parietal regions of the brain are activated in the moment preceding conscious intention, indicating that the conscious and unconscious are directly and instantaneously entwined. As a result of constant conceptualisation, Nairn holds that we almost never experience ourselves directly in a “naked experience of aliveness” (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11-5/5/11), hinting to an ineffable underlying reality that is beyond concept; the Buddhist concept of ‘emptiness’ (Khenchen Thrangu, 1993).

Whilst similar, Nairn’s (2010a) term ‘undercurrent’ is not synonymous with ‘subconscious’ (Jung, 1960). Nairn’s theory sees the undercurrent comprising the more obvious contents of the mind, flowing subliminally from the subconscious towards the conscious, containing ‘course’ thoughts (Nairn, 2010a). The qualities of the undercurrent are that it is self-arising, self-displaying and self-liberating: the undercurrent is autonomous in that it has a lifespan of its own, and arises unbidden into consciousness; like an echo, it reflects its origin, and once the energy of the undercurrent is fully expressed, it dissipates of its own accord.

According to Nairn (2011a), the internal observer aspect of self is the source of concept and habit, and the undercurrent is the effect. The observer projects values onto the undercurrent and also uses the undercurrent to project back onto itself in an act of self-attack. The mindfulness practitioner’s initial tendency is to direct focus to the undercurrent, trying to get over it or fix it. Obsessed by content, the person traumatises himself by repeatedly revisiting the experience. Bayda describes this as cognitive shock which turns off the cognitive mind’s ability to function: “to be honest, when caught in cognitive shock, we’re fortunate if we can even remember that we want to be awake” (Bayda, 2010, p51). Nairn (2011a) holds then that change occurs not with the undercurrent, but within the observer. The observer has the characteristic of being both self-aware and content obsessed, projecting judgements and preferences on to the undercurrent:

“In the beginning, they [course and subtle thoughts] won’t go away, and the practitioner just has to watch them play out their energetic message. The tendency to engage with the thoughts will assert itself, so it feels as if one is crossing back and forth over a line, and the emotional feeling will be one of loss. As one settles deeper and deeper into the tendencies of the mind, one finds no intelligence there, only the subliminal reflex of ‘I want’. The involuntary arising of “me” is simply a habitual tendency” (Nairn, 2011b, 26-29/8/11).

While mindfulness is the ability to notice the course thought of the undercurrent, Nairn (2011a) suggests that insight begins when the observer turns to look at itself in self-reflection. This paradoxical condition pushes beyond conceptual boundaries to experiences of pure awareness, or non-conceptual cognitive awareness, which Nairn (2011a) asserts is the quality within which everything else exists. Wallace describes it as “an experience that has left talking behind” (Wallace, 2007, p174).

Nairn (2010a) holds the view that the solidity of the self comes about through preference, and an internal egocentric preference system perpetuates self. The egocentric preference system can be conceptualised as three filters through which life is experienced; attraction (grasping or clinging), aversion, and indifference. A reactive, habitual process begins with a thought occurring involuntarily and autonomously, giving rise to a psychological reaction, a preference which leads to engagement with the thought. The internal environment is dominated by illusion; the idea of self, supported by the egocentric preference system:

“The idea of self is projected into my mind incessantly to the point where belief in the idea of self has become ‘fact’. I have long since lost track of the possibility that it could be different. The idea of self has become central to my life and life has become a slave of the idea of self. We become the objective witness of our experience when we can be in the turmoil and know that we are in it while it is happening, and we are mindful when we can relax in the midst of the tangle of complexes and do nothing” (Nairn, 2011a, 4/5/11)

Nairn (2011a) notes that the path of insight will bring a sense of deprivation as the egocentric preference system is exposed.

Nairn (2011a) likens the conscious mind to a cork bobbing on the surface of the psyche. Beneath surface mind is a subliminal, richly dynamic inner world, mostly below conscious awareness, that controls the way that we think, feel and act. The subliminal mind packages the unconscious in a way that causes surface mind to buy into it and this perpetuates delusion. Experience is an intriguing and complex mix of what is felt, seen and not seen, denied and attached: “we are a dynamic experience moving through time and space” (Nairn, 2011b, 26-29/8/11). Psychological reflexes are an aspect of the inner subliminal world; habitual patterns that take effect when memories are triggered by both external and internal events. That the reflexes are below conscious awareness, contained in the earlier evolutionary brain structures ensures that they are not easily recognised for what they are (Gilbert, 2010c).

When a psychological reaction kicks in via the egocentric preference system, it is mediated by a subliminal reflex, a psychological switch that asserts “now this is how it needs to be” (Nairn, 2011b, 26-29/8/11). The subliminal reflex is subtle, and, unseen, it overrides conscious wish, and these competing forces create inner experience of ambivalence. Like Nairn (2011a), Wilson (2002), Allione (2008) and Hanson and Mendius (2009) maintain that this reflex is somatic; the body reacts before emotions are felt. Crucially, according to Nairn (2011a) recognising the subliminal reflex frees it; there is no other mechanism involved: “the seeing is the doing” (Bohm & Krishnamurti, 2002).

2.5 Summary

Derived from Buddhist psychology, the secular mindfulness approaches of Nairn (2010a), Kabat-Zinn (2005) and Shapiro et al (2006) share common characteristics, notably an emphasis on training the mind in present moment, embodied attention, directed by intention and sustained by motivation. However, Shapiro and Wallace (2006) and Nairn (2010a) hold that mindfulness, separated out from Buddhist psychology, is incomplete:

“The true causes of .. well-being are rooted in a wholesome way of life, are nurtured through the cultivation of mental balance, and

come to fruition in the experience of wisdom and compassion. In this way, the pursuits of genuine well-being, understanding, and virtue come to be thoroughly integrated” (Shapiro and Wallace, 2006, p691).

Hanson & Mendius (2009) and Gilbert (2010a & b) argue that the evolutionary development of the modern human brain can adversely affect wellbeing: our ability to conceptualise and remember past trauma results in rumination and stress. It is this psychologically reactive system that mindfulness- and compassion-based practices appear to penetrate and ameliorate.

Neff (2003), Shapiro and Wallace (2006), Nairn (2010a) and Gilbert and Choden (2013) have contributed to the development of a secular understanding of compassion as it relates to mindfulness, agreeing that self-compassion is of benefit when repressed psychological material is released through practising mindfulness. The assertion that compassion allows the individual to remain present with difficulties, and to move towards insight and wisdom (Gilbert & Choden, 2013), is examined in chapter 4 in relation to the participant findings.

Whilst there are distinguishable aspects to Nairn’s treatment of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom, his descriptions are of the various components of internal mental processes surging and merging in a rich dynamic experience that defies one-dimensional definition. Indeed, his emphasis on the non-conceptual would indicate that definition should emanate from experience rather than be pre-determined. Monteiro et al’s (2015) distinction between traditional and contemporary mindfulness is not particularly useful here as Nairn’s approach is a synthesis. Nairn explicitly draws on Buddhist philosophy and psychology as well as a range of contemporary influences, such as Gilbert’s and Neff’s work on self-compassion (Gilbert, 2010a & b; Neff, 2009), and incorporates practices used in contemporary MBIs. Where Nairn draws more fully on Buddhism is in his rendering of the psychology of a cohesive approach to the practices and experience of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom.

Notwithstanding the preceding critique, and following recent debate on the subject, I agree with Van Gordon et al’s (2015) assertion that contemporary and Buddhist communities have expounded thoroughly on the compatibility of

contemporary and traditional mindfulness, and interested parties should endeavour to work together as one single mindfulness community to generate approaches to mindfulness for our current age and to develop effective methods for their evaluation.

2.6 Researching Mindfulness

Prior to a discussion of the body of research into mindfulness and related disciplines, this section introduces the historical approach to research within this field, exploring the reasons why mindfulness has been studied as it has and the strengths and limitation of existing methodology.

The prevailing Western worldview is based on what Popper (1968) defined as rational judgement based on evidence and scepticism. Wilson (2002) asserts that thinking from within this paradigm keeps us out of touch with a deeper sense of ourselves, creating an imbalance towards the logical, with the irrational mind being viewed with suspicion. While Western thinking, greatly influenced by Descartes, has made a stark distinction between the body and mind (Wilson, 2002), the Buddhist theory underpinning mindfulness, in contrast, is based on a non-dualistic constructivist position; of an integrated mind-body system operating within other systemic, dynamic constructs (Wallace, 2007).

The medical model, characterised by its narrow focus on diagnosis and treatment, prevails (Elkins, 2009); indeed, the layperson's understanding of mental health is indistinguishable from the medical model (Stickley & Timmons, 2006). Contemporary mindfulness is generally perceived as a treatment method, however, as outlined in section 2.2, this reductionist perspective has been criticised for denaturing mindfulness (Shapiro and Wallace, 2006). Although Kabat-Zinn (2005) fully accepts that practising mindfulness has generalist relevance, his research and subsequent studies by other researchers have focused largely on the application of short courses of mindfulness in clinical settings as a treatment option for specific disorders (see 2.8).

Most secular mindfulness training courses derive from MBSR and are short manualised courses based on an eight-week format, some with additional introductory and follow up sessions and a silent retreat experience (Malpass et al, 2012). Five core teaching intentions have been distinguished within the MBSR model: experiencing new possibilities, discovering embodiment, cultivating observation, moving towards acceptance, and growing compassion (McCown et al, 2010, pp145-146). The Mindfulness Awareness Training which derived from a traditional Buddhist approach is likewise of eight weeks' duration, and incorporates mindfulness and compassion within a Buddhist derived philosophy (Shonin et al, 2014). The short Mindfulness Based Living Course (MBLC) developed by the UK-based Mindfulness Association derives from Nairn's work (Mindfulness Association, 2016). Longer programmes are available at Master degree level whose course curricula are based on the 8-week MBSR and MBCT programmes (Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice, 2016; Oxford Mindfulness Centre, 2016). In contrast, the University of Aberdeen MSc in Studies in Mindfulness programme derives from Nairn's one-year mindfulness course curriculum and one-year compassion course curriculum, with additional modules in insight and wisdom and teaching skills (Nixon et al, 2016). All universities advertise their Masters programmes as secular, and adhere to nationally agreed professional standards (UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations, 2016).

Although the aforementioned short courses are manualised, McCown et al (2010) are clear that "the work [of teaching mindfulness] ultimately depends on you [the teacher], on who you are as a person" (ibid, p91). The authors point out that "no laws, no rules, no step-by-step instructions can make that happen. Only the teacher and participants, co-creating their experiences in the present can do it" (McCown et al, 2010, p163). Inquiry is a key didactic element with 'relational skills' as a required competency for mindfulness teachers, and the ability to 'convey course themes through interactive teaching' described thus:

"the teacher's ability to enable participants to notice and describe elements of direct experience, to link themes to participants' direct experience as appropriate to the group and the individual's learning stage, and to move between the different layers within

the inquiry process with a predominant focus on process rather than content” (Crane et al, 2010, p80).

Gyaltsen & Kellock (2016) present a process recording approach utilised to deconstruct the process of mindful inquiry; however, McCown et al (2010) recognise that inquiry has not been researched in its own right.

Contemporary quantitative research approaches deconstruct mindfulness into elements that can be tested for their efficacy in specific conditions; Monteiro et al (2015) see value in the clinical application of mindfulness though this could be viewed as reductionist. Quantitative research into mindfulness relies substantially on the use of a range of self-report questionnaires (Sauer et al, 2012), discussed in section 2.8. Brown et al (2007 p228) note that self-report measures rely on the assumption that participants can directly report on the experiential phenomenon of mindfulness. They note:

“as is now well-known, dissociations can exist between experiential (veridical) consciousness and meta-consciousness; that is, we can only know what people are meta-conscious of (what they believe they experience) not the actual contents of their subjective experience” (Brown et al, 2007 p228)

There is considerable argument regarding the validity and reliability of existing self-report scales due to perceived deficiencies in construct and content validity, a lack of convergent validity across different scales, disparity in the interpretation of questions, and response bias related to degree of experience (Grossman, 2011). However, in the absence of a shared definition of mindfulness, conceptual pluralism could be considered desirable in that it “adds to the exploratory fundament that is necessary to grasp all facets of mindfulness” (Sauer et al, 2012, p5).

Malinowski summarises the debate thus:

“We may be limited by the intrinsic problem that self-report scales have to rely on declarative knowledge. In other words, to measure levels of mindfulness, it may be necessary to assess the effects of enhanced mindfulness as they manifest in experience and behaviour, because direct, declarative access to this experiential quality may not be possible. Assessing mindfulness directly may furthermore be affected by the fact that the understanding of mindfulness is likely to change in the process of practising

meditation. The same items of a questionnaire may have very different meaning to somebody who actively practises mindfulness meditation and somebody who has not been exposed to these concepts.” (Malinowski, 2008, p158)

Notwithstanding their limitations, a small number of scales are recommended in the literature for specific purposes. Validation across six trait-based scales indicated a five-factor structure (non-reactivity, observing, acting with awareness, describing and non-judging) resulting in the development of the Five-Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al, 2006). Sauer et al (2012) support the use of the FFMQ for in-depth analysis, give qualified support for Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) where a short instrument is called for, and note that the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) is more directly based on Buddhist concepts.

In contrast, a recent upsurge in qualitative research aims to understand the experience of practice and its effects in personalised contexts. In their examination of the limited use of qualitative research approaches, Sauer et al (2012) opine that grounded theory approaches might afford greater understanding of the distinct components of mindfulness experiences, such as awareness and acceptance, and intra- and inter-personal experience. In recommending a comprehensive approach to defining and measuring mindfulness, Bergomi et al (2013) recommend the use of phenomenological approaches to allow greater detail to be surfaced about the experience of practising mindfulness meditation. Such qualitative analysis may determine aspects of mindfulness that cannot be meaningfully self-reported by less experienced practitioners.

2.7 Current Body of Research

Mindfulness has a growing clinical evidence base, where randomised control trials are beginning to feature. Notwithstanding the criticism of self-report questionnaires, the evidence base points to the effectiveness of short mindfulness courses, and their relevance to different population groups for a variety of issues and disorders, including psychological trauma. Growing

evidence exists for the effects of MBIs on compassion, the benefits of blended mindfulness/compassion programmes, such as lovingkindness practice and MBLC, and compassion based courses, such as Compassionate Mind Training. Nevertheless, recent qualitative studies have drawn out not insignificant challenges experienced in practising mindfulness in a secular context.

2.7.1. Research Pointing to Attention and Acceptance

There is a substantial and growing body of research in which attention and acceptance feature. The effect of self-acceptance in mindfulness has been noted by Hamilton et al (2006) and is explored further by Carson and Langer (2006). Benefits include authenticity and appropriate self-regulation, with mindful self-acceptance relevant to the stresses of modern life, such as performance anxiety and social comparison. Galantino et al (2005) found a significant decrease in stress in 69 health care employees using the Profile of Mood States (POMS) after delivery of an 8-week mindfulness meditation programme devised using elements of the MBSR and MBCT programmes.

Across a range of research studies, mindfulness has been found to enhance emotions and emotional regulation, by supporting the properties of attention regulation and acceptance (Hamilton et al, 2006). Hamilton et al (2006) refer to attention regulation as control; however Cohen (2006) holds that control and attention are very closely related, but control, which leads to focused attention, is only one form of attention: attention is “the selective effect of whatever is currently guiding thought” (Cohen, 2006, p32), with mindfulness practice shown to enhance the capacity to attend to a rapidly changing flow of perception. Sustained attention to psychological and somatic experiences increases familiarity with personal emotions and emotional range and thus “increases the tolerance of negative emotion” (Hamilton et al, 2006, p126) interrupting the complex schema of emotion, thoughts, beliefs, memories and physical sensations involved in negative emotional states. One of a small number of control studies exploring the neurological mechanisms of twenty MBSR participants and sixteen control subjects in relation to their experience of

sadness found that MBSR participants showed decreased neural reactivity to sadness that amounted to a “fundamental change in regulatory response” where previously threatening emotion became innocuous (Farb et al, 2010, p31).

There is evidence that the emotional regulation and self-acceptance resulting from MBIs has a positive psychological impact. Psychosocial attachment is a beneficial process during which primary caregivers and infants “share and are strongly affected by each other’s emotions” (Howe, 2005, p14). However, when caregivers are at variance with their baby’s emotions, or are abusive or neglectful, the child experiences the world as unpredictable or unforgiving, and the child is unable to manage or to regulate their emotional responses, with profound consequences for long-term emotional health. Cordon et al (2009) compared the effects of MBSR on people who were securely attached and a group who were insecurely attached and found that those who were not securely attached were more likely to drop out of the programme, but those of this group who did remain benefited significantly more than those who were securely attached. The researchers concluded that the social nature of the MBSR programme may deter more vulnerable students, but in itself MBSR has a positive effect for those with maladaptive attachment styles.

Comparing several approaches for their efficacy on emotional self-regulation, Delmonte found that the psychological space that mindfulness practice fosters can allow the individual to “observe the psychic nature of felt attachments” with practitioners able to better self-regulate their internal (organic) and external (social) systems (Delmonte, 2003, p160). Whilst concluding that mindfulness can be helpful, Delmonte notes that it can be used “inappropriately by the vulnerable” (Delmonte, 2003, p167). By this he means that individuals who come to mindfulness practice with a poor understanding of emotional regulation could misinterpret the concept of non-attachment, understanding it as a defensive detachment, and thereby engendering a “split-off sub-personality” (ibid, p166). In an earlier study in 1990, Delmonte found that Western meditators tended to be more likely than the general population to exhibit psychological problems (Delmonte, 1990) so this seems to be a relevant caution.

2.7.2. Research on Compassion-Based, and blended Mindfulness- and Compassion-based Interventions

Standard eight-week MBIs have been found to result in increased self-compassion. In a meta-analysis, Irving et al (2009) reviewed ten, predominantly quantitative, studies of MBSR delivered to health care professionals. Across all ten studies, data was gathered from 356 test participants and 337 control participants, 693 in total. Eight studies included a control group and two had a pre-post test design. Studies ranged in total number of participants (treatment and control groups) from 16 to 277 with a mean of 69.3 and a median of 46, and all used self-report questionnaires. All the studies reported reductions in stress, rumination, distress, low mood, anxiety, health related complaints, burnout and emotional exhaustion, and increases in positive factors including positive emotions, life satisfaction, improved mood and self-compassion. One of these studies, carried out by Shapiro et al (2005), pre- and post-intervention measures for stress, life satisfaction, self-compassion, psychological distress, and burnout were undertaken. Findings indicated that the test group of eighteen demonstrated greater positive change in all the test scores that the control group of twenty, however only scores on stress and self-compassion showed statistical significance. A mean reduction in stress on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen & Williamson, 1988) of 27% was found compared with 7% in the control group (significant at $p=.04$), and a mean increase in self-compassion using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) (Neff, 2003a) of 22% compared with the control group at 3% (significant at $p=.004$). Shapiro et al (2005) also asked an open-ended question regarding the effects that MBSR had had on participants' lives, which gathered a limited amount of qualitative data such as a greater sense of spirituality, being kinder to oneself, being more aware of details in the environment, and being able to address unwanted thought patterns and painful emotions.

Studies undertaken on a synthesis of mindfulness and compassion/self-compassion point to evidence of psychological maturation and the capacity to manage emotional difficulties. Shapiro and Wallace (2006) note an increasing number of supportive studies: Carson (2004) found that lovingkindness practice

significantly reduced pain and psychological distress; Shapiro et al (2008) found mindfulness practice increases empathy; and gratitude practice increases self-reports of happiness and health promoting behaviours (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Later studies on compassion-based interventions demonstrate similar findings (Neff et al, 2007). Recent early evidence points to the effectiveness of the MBLC in promoting dispositional mindfulness and self-compassion and reducing perceived stress, although this evidence derives from small-scale practitioner research which has not been subject to peer review (Rigg, 2014; Gyaltzen & Kellock, 2014).

A number of studies on compassion specifically relates to the construct of shame. Underlying shame according to Brown (2010) is a belief of unworthiness of love and belonging coupled with a striving towards perfection. Levine recognises an intrinsic association of shame and trauma: “a particularly virulent and interlocking combination” where the frozen, traumatised individual perceives himself as shamefully weak (Levine, 2010, p60). Gilbert et al (2009) found that unresolved shame can result in a range of complex psychological disorders. Gilbert et al (2009) and Goss and Allan (2009) examine the link between shame and states such as striving and pride and their behavioural corollaries, such as eating disorder (Goss & Allan, 2009). Gilbert et al note that insecure striving is an attempt, albeit ineffective, to escape from chronic shame (Gilbert et al, 2009).

Gilbert states that those with high shame are “amongst the most difficult to help develop self-compassion, yet once their fears and resistances are worked through, they may also gain greatly from compassionate mind training” (Gilbert, 2009, p206). Gilbert and Procter (2006) developed a compassion-focused therapy, Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) designed as a behavioural approach to support people with shame-related conditions to learn self-compassion skills. Participants are taught methods of visualisation borrowed from Buddhism to create soothing images, and are then helped to internalise the image through a process of reframing their view of themselves within the perspectives of evolutionary psychology and attachment theory. Although the

method was found to be effective, Gilbert and Proctor (2006) noted patients had difficulty stabilising negative emotions.

Compassion-based approaches are also gaining recognition in the workplace: Chapman-Clarke (2016) draws on neuroscientific evidence to advocate for a compassion element in workplace MBIs, effective in cultivating attunement and reducing defensiveness. In a control trial involving 139 IT employees undertaking a nine-week programme of lovingkindness practice, Fredrickson et al (2008) found a number of benefits, such as more positive emotions and increased life satisfaction. Participants reported increased equanimity across a range of positive and negative emotions. The researchers posited a 'broaden and build' approach, demonstrating that the longer participants spent in practice, the greater was their experience of positive emotions; "if people can endure these first difficult weeks, meditation becomes more effective, and positive emotions begin to accumulate and compound, changing people for the better" (Fredrickson et al, 2008, p1059). Ringenbach (2009) found that of 164 counsellors, those (62) who practised meditation of at least one hour per week for six months or longer reported increased self-compassion and lower levels of burnout and compassion fatigue. A study was undertaken of 63 students of the MSc programme at University of Aberdeen, whose course content is based on the Mindfulness Association and Nairn's approach (Nixon et al, 2016). The study examined personal and professional benefits of undertaking the three-year programme derived from questionnaire data gathered at entry and from the Mindfulness module assignments of seventeen participants. The most notable personal benefits were greater self-awareness and self-acceptance, enhanced interface of somatic and emotional experience, and the capacity to deal more effectively with stress. A range of professional benefits was highlighted, with the most common being the capacity to be less reactive in the workplace.

2.7.3. Self-Compassion Research

There is a growing research interest in the effectiveness of self-compassion as a protective factor against poor life outcomes. Neff examined the differences between the more commonly referenced psychological concept of self-esteem, which seeks to raise the self above others, and self-compassion which entails kindness towards oneself in difficult circumstances (Neff, 2003b). Neff and others (Neff, 2003b; Neff & Vonk, 2009) hold a view that there are many negative aspects to self-esteem, despite it appearing to correlate with aspects of wellbeing, that are not present in self-compassion, and moreover self-compassion has additional positive and long lasting benefits. Self-esteem relates to competition and related emotions (Neff & Vonk, 2009), and correlates with prejudice and inequality, requiring a defensiveness to maintain (Neff, 2003b). Neff & Vonk (2009) carried out a large scale comparative study that found self-esteem was greater in younger adults and those with higher incomes, was linked to narcissism and was not stable over time, whilst self-compassion increased with age, was unrelated to income and was more stable over time, concluding that self-compassion is “more relevant [than self-esteem] when things go wrong” (Neff and Vonk, 2009, p42).

Neff (2003a) defines self-compassion as higher levels of self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, and lower levels of self-judgement, isolation and over-identification, correlating with positive psychological wellbeing, including positive emotions, agreeableness, happiness, optimism, wisdom, curiosity, personal initiative and conscientiousness (Neff et al, 2007); and predicting positive states of wellbeing, such as happiness, optimism and positive emotional states (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion appears to be better aligned with the ‘being’ mode of mindfulness than the construct of self-esteem, which has more of a striving flavour to it. Indeed, Neff and Vonk (2009) found that self-compassion, like mindfulness, has a negative association with ego-reactivity. Baer et al (2006) likewise found mindfulness to be positively correlated with self-compassion. Although Baer et al were unable to clarify a causal link, Bishop et al (2004) suggest that self-compassion is an outcome of mindfulness. To develop self-compassion, Neff and Vonk (2009) recommend

mindfulness-based programmes, such as MBSR and Compassionate Mind Training, described by Gilbert as “helping people develop and work with experiences of inner warmth, safeness and soothing, via compassion and self-compassion” (Gilbert, 2009, p199).

2.7.4. Taking a Qualitative Turn

Two recent meta-analyses of the findings of qualitative research into short MBIs have been undertaken: Malpass et al (2012) and Cairns & Murray (2015). Malpass et al focus on fourteen qualitative studies of the application of MBSR and MBCT on participants with chronic illnesses, four of which were longitudinal. An interpretive meta-ethnographic method yielded a set of 24 second-order (i.e. original author interpreted) themes each occurring twice or more in the set of fourteen qualitative studies. Malpass et al then used a ‘line of argument’ approach (Noblit & Hare, 1998) to different elements of the phenomenon under investigation and from this developed a three phase meta-analysis of the patient experience of the MBI. Participants moved from an initial phase of exposure to maladaptive coping strategies inquiring into their experience and uncovering the challenges and paradoxes inherent in paying mindful attention to present moment experiences, to a second phase of shifting perspective characterised by a sense of spatial movement and spaciousness and, finally, to a phase of transformation in relationship to their illness, increased expertise, flexibility, increased agency and self-efficacy. Like Malpass et al, Cairns and Murray (2015) utilised a meta-ethnographic approach to analysing participants’ experiences of MBCT courses only across seven research studies, all but one of which were included in the Malpass et al meta-analysis. Under a higher order concept of the MBCT “journey to change” (Cairns & Murray, 2015, p355), the authors categorise their findings into five main themes, namely: taking control through understanding, awareness and acceptance; the impact of the group; taking skills into everyday life; feelings towards the self; and the role of expectation.

Several qualitative studies additional to those examined in Malpass et al (2012) and Cairns and Murray (2015) focus on the experience of MBCT and MBSR, with broadly comparable findings. Williams et al (2011) utilised an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to the experiences of nine participants (seven female, two male) suffering from severe health anxiety undertaking a MBCT course, interviewing three-months post-completion. Two meta themes emerged:

(1) Awareness of barriers to experiencing change, which reflected on participants' challenges, including positive expectations versus scepticism, uncertainty and reservations; the effort required to find time to practise, and to build practice into lifestyle; whilst the variety of practices gave choice, it could be overwhelming.

(2) Cultivation of a new approach to health anxiety and life in general, including a validation whereby health anxiety could be viewed as treatable. Notably, one male participant felt excluded in a predominantly female environment. Increased awareness of health anxiety, especially somatic, supported a greater degree of choice as to how to respond; participants became more accepting of their distressing experiences which reduced both in duration and intensity. Acceptance in participants with lower levels of health anxiety generalised more readily to other aspects of life and participants who had preconceived ideas of success benefited less from the course than those who accepted experiences non-judgementally. Some participants experienced a more self-compassionate outlook towards life.

In a study of a mindfulness-based facilitated self-help group, Moss et al (2008) used thematic analysis to explore the experience of eight participants, focusing on the quality of 'slipperiness' of mindfulness as a concept, i.e. its paradoxical nature. Similar to Williams et al (2011), this study surfaced difficulties that participants experienced with the process of learning mindfulness, including concentration problems and the unfamiliarity of the practices.

Matchim et al (2008) utilised a grounded theory approach to analysing the self-care experiences of nine healthy adults (six female, three male) with experience of practising MBSR varying in duration from 10 weeks to 9 years. Five themes were drawn from the data:

(1) Sense of peace and relaxation, occurring post-meditation, leading to feelings of being calm, kind and open, more well-intentioned towards difficult others, where participants described letting go of thoughts and feelings.

(2) Increased health awareness and concern for self-care, enabling conscious healthy behaviour choices.

(3) Increased self-management allowing better management of responsibilities and prioritisation of self care.

(4) Increased sense of giving and sharing, shifting focus from self to others.

(5) Fulfilment of a basic need for health and wellbeing through life enhancing meditational practice.

Monshat et al (2013) applied a grounded theory approach to analyse the experiences of eleven healthy young people (aged 16-24) undertaking a six-week mindfulness training course. Similar to Malpass et al (2012), Monshat et al identified phases:

(1) Experience of stress and over-reactivity to interpersonal and academic stressors prior to the course.

(2) Gaining stability characterised by relaxation, slowing, allowing experience, and the conscious management of stress.

(3) Gaining insight into the benefits of mindfulness practice and a more in-depth “appreciation of the world around you” (Monshat et al, 2013, p4) characterised by increased confidence and competence.

Whilst the literature points to positive effects of practice, these occur alongside more challenging aspects. Lomas et al (2015) examine the challenges in a study of thirty male participants engaging in contemporary Buddhist meditation practices incorporating mindfulness and lovingkindness practices. Along with compensatory positive experiences, they find that participants had difficulties learning meditation, experiencing discomfort in maintaining posture and mental attention during practice; they experienced a “troubled sense of self” (ibid, p853) in facing their difficult emotions and an exacerbation of psychological issues, such as self-criticism and suppressed grief. Around half of the participants had experiences of “reality being challenged” (ibid, p855) such as out of body sensations, strong insight into impermanence, and for one a psychotic episode.

All aforementioned qualitative studies note a generalisability from the specific course practices, to application in the wider life experience of participants. This generalisability may contribute to longer term change (Cairns & Murray, 2015) and could be emphasised to enhance motivation for continued practice beyond course completion (Williams et al, 2011).

The greater part of the research into secular MBIs focuses on practitioners with limited practical experience of mindfulness. However, an early phenomenological study had been undertaken of 100 students of a 2-week and 63 students of a 3-month duration traditional intensive Vipassana meditation course (Kornfield, 1979), finding a range of experiences including many that would be labelled as abnormal in the categorisation system of Western psychiatric medicine; however Kornfield holds that these states are normal in systematic insight training. In line with Buddhist thinking, the study asserts psychological growth occurs through surrendering to extreme mental states, resulting in an ability to adapt more easily to negative experiences. An array of mental and bodily states was described by participants: spontaneous body movement, intense sensations of pain, intense and frequent changes in moods, motivation, cognitive capabilities, perceptual clarity, concentration, inner stillness, reduction in sleep needs, and food consumption, shifts in self-image and bodily comfort, rapture and bliss states, vivid dreams and nightmares,

death-like experience of self-concept, self-image and ideals, past and future. Kornfield (1979) found that:

“Meditation does not appear to be a linear learning or developmental process. Instead the ‘mindfulness’ meditation appears to include periods of regression, restructuring and reintegration as part of the basic growth pattern. This appears to take place in regard to personality patterns and development, and on more fundamental levels such as growing awareness and integration of the inevitability of death. Students report that unresolved internal conflicts often arise in practice, and when these and their associated feelings are noticed and experienced, they are frequently resolved spontaneously” (Kornfield, 1979, p53).

In a more recent study, Shonin et al (2014) employ IPA methods to inquire into an eight-week secularised meditation approach. Meditation Awareness Training (MAT) more closely aligns with traditional Buddhist teaching of mindfulness in the inclusion of related concepts, such as insight meditation (Vipassana) and compassion practice, with the aim of developing faculties such as generosity, patience, compassion and an understanding of Buddhist concepts such as impermanence and emptiness. Participants were interviewed on two occasions at weeks three and seven of the programme, and although the main aim of the study was to examine the acceptability of the MAT approach, two lines of inquiry into development of awareness and sustainability of practice post-completion were included. Four themes emerged:

(1) Development of awareness, including increased awareness of breath, thought processes and ‘spiritual’ awareness, i.e. broader appreciation of life. Challenges noted include difficulties adhering to the rigour of practice.

(2) Importance of traditional course design; participants appreciated gaining understanding of the concept of impermanence through insight practice. The authenticity of facilitators was found to be “essential”; and “inspiring” (Shonin et al, 2014, p856) with the authors positing that facilitators should be “experientially qualified” (Shonin et al, 2014, p859) criticising models such as MBSR and MBCT where clinical facilitators may have experience limited to one 8-week programme and one year

post programme practice (Mental Health Foundation, 2010). [It should be noted that greater rigour is now incorporated in mindfulness teaching guidance (UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations, 2016).]

(3) Increased sense of acceptance, primarily of participants' negative mood states, but with some degree of generalisation to a broader acceptance of self, more contented, open and balanced in affect even in the presence of negative emotions (Shonin et al, 2014, p857).

(4) Interaction with others; the group was perceived as broadly supportive. Although some practitioners compared themselves negatively to peers, others were motivated by peer progress, where again, effects were generalisable to participants' wider interrelationships, where they experienced greater autonomy, and care towards self whilst being more attuned to the emotional needs of others (Shonin et al, 2014, p858) and aware of the potential impact of words/deeds. Shonin et al (2014) consider this to be a result of MAT's adherence to a more systematic Buddhist approach.

The authors conclude with a suggestion that further research would benefit from examining "a more traditionally congruent approach to meditation and mindfulness" (Shonin et al, 2014, p861).

2.7.5. Turning Outwards

The inclusion of practices directed outward towards others opens the field to consideration of the positive effects of mindfulness and related practices on interpersonal relationships, as suggested by Brown et al (2007). Unpacking key features of interpersonal communication, Burgoon et al (2000) consider there to be three aspects to an exchange: the intrapersonal cognitive states of both the communicator and the recipient, the (usually mindless) habitual communication pattern between them and the potential for the communication to provoke a different state of greater or lesser mindfulness. The authors

suggest that some degree of automation allows for the practice of directing purposive mindful attention to what is important within the communication flow.

In a qualitative study of MBCT utilising Grounded Theory methodology, Bihari & Mullan (2014) generated a 'relating mindfully' model to show three domains within the intra- and inter-personal relationships of practitioners experiencing depression, namely: the context of depression within the practice of MBCT, change processes resulting from mindful practice and changes in relationships resulting from greater mindfulness. Whilst the study focused on intrapersonal changes produced by increased skill in maintaining present-moment awareness, the findings indicate qualitative change in feelings of interconnectedness resulting from a range of interlinked effects. The experience of group practice gave participants an initial sense of belonging as they developed mindfulness skills which in turn allowed them to balance better their internal negative mental states (the first of Burgoon et al (2000) three aspects). Building on this, participants experienced positive changes in their personal relationships including "relating without baggage of past", "seeing and addressing problems together", "less habitual rowing, arguing", "accepting, less critical of others, tolerating", "listening, empathising", "experiencing relationships are more enjoyable", "relaxed, fun, loving" as well as a generalised sense of wellbeing towards wider society (Bihari & Mullan, 2014, p50), suggesting that mindful awareness during communication led to an interruption of habitual communication patterns replaced with more equanimous empathic exchanges. Similar findings were identified by Frisvold et al (2012) in a qualitative study of women in mid-life, where a sense of increased social support resulted from more effective interpersonal communication resulting from improved emotion self-management and development of active listening skills.

Research has found evidence of a positive impact of self-compassion on interpersonal relationships. Yarnell and Neff (2013) examined the association between self-compassion and ability to resolve conflict amongst a sample of college students, finding that those with higher levels of self-compassion were more likely to compromise than subordinate or prioritise self over others while experiencing less turmoil, greater authenticity and better relational wellbeing.

These findings pertained across relationships with parents, romantic partners and friends, however, there was evidence that women were significantly less self-compassionate than men, and significantly less authentic than men when resolving conflict.

In a mixed-method study, Nevejan (2014) examined the positive effect of a one-year compassion training (developed by Nairn/Mindfulness Association) on compassion for others amongst a cohort of seven participants (six female, one male). Whilst the cohort was small in number, all participants remarked on a positive qualitative impact on their interpersonal relationships, such as “more generous to family and friends”, “listen more to my children and offer support on their terms” (Nevejan, 2014, p41). There would appear to be a link to increased assertiveness and sense of equality with others that is supported by Yarnell and Neff’s findings: “feel more equality with others, less threatened by status etc and don’t feel as strong a need (drive) to please or be liked” (Nevejan, 2014, p42).

2.8 Summary

The clinical application of secularised mindfulness has resulted in a research focus that is predominantly postpositivist in its approach and quantitative in nature. Consequently, the early body of research contained few qualitative studies of mindfulness. The aim of reaching agreement on an operational definition of mindfulness has importance in the validation of quantitative research, however I hold that it should be less of a concern for qualitative research, the purpose of which is to elicit the experiential phenomenon of mindfulness however defined. Criticisms notwithstanding, the current body of clinical research supports the position that the practice of mindfulness is effective in the treatment of a range of mental and physical disorders and increases life-enhancing skills.

The increasing number of qualitative studies, described in 2.7.4, that have emerged in recent years mostly concern the experiences of short MBI courses. Those studies that include post-course interviews and those that are

longitudinal in nature illustrate an experiential process, supportive of Fredrickson et al (2008) 'broaden and build' theory, whereby practitioners proceed through a challenging early phase of heightened awareness of difficult thoughts and emotions towards a greater acceptance and opening towards experience, becoming mentally and emotionally more stable and capable of exercising choice in their internal and external life. Most studies highlight a range of challenges to practising mindfulness: difficulties in the early stages in learning and finding time to practice (e.g. Shonin et al, 2014;), exposure to unwanted emotions and a struggle for self-acceptance (e.g. Malpass et al, 2012; Cairns & Murray, 2015) to the descriptions of intense mental and physical struggle experienced in more intensive practice (Kornfield, 1979). Generalisability of practice is a widespread finding, with positive impacts on interpersonal relationships through the development of mindfulness and compassion. However, there has been limited examination thus far of the richness of experience made possible by a commitment to long-term secular practice. Monteiro et al (2015) note that longitudinal study may advance the understanding of how practitioners develop further over time beyond the gains made during an eight-week MBI.

The synergy between secular mindfulness and compassion has been recognised, i.e. that compassion and mindfulness practised together enhances the effects of both, with the association between mindfulness and compassion now reflected in the research findings as laid out in 2.7.2. However, whilst the contribution of Buddhist phenomenology to the understanding of secular insight and wisdom is emerging, it remains relatively undeveloped. Kornfield's (1979) early study of traditional Buddhist meditation shows a more intense, complex and nuanced intrapersonal landscape than is evident from research into contemporary MBIs. Nairn's contemporary cohesive model of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom is presented as secular, yet retains and reflects essential elements of Buddhist discourse. Whilst there are some early examinations of the short MBLC, the effects of Nairn's longer courses have had little scrutiny. A sympathetic examination of Nairn's approach to mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom would proffer a contemporary paradigm on what it is to live a mindful life.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

PART 2 LOOKING THROUGH A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LENS

2.9 Introduction

The European philosophical movement of phenomenology which arose in the early twentieth century can be understood as examining equivalent phenomena to the Buddhist Abhidharma (Flanagan, 2011), and accordingly to Nairn's synthesis of mindfulness, compassion and insight, but from different temporal, cultural and spiritual perspectives. Smith (2013) draws parallels between phenomenology and meditative religious traditions:

“Phenomenology came into its own with Husserl Yet phenomenology has been practised, with or without the name, for many centuries. When Hindu and Buddhist philosophers reflected on states of consciousness achieved in a variety of meditative states, they were practising phenomenology” (ibid, 2013, sect 2, para 1).

In part 1, it was observed that researchers, particularly those engaged in qualitative studies, have indicated that there may be useful synergies between Western phenomenology and mindfulness. In this chapter, correlations are drawn between Western phenomenology and secular approaches to mindfulness, compassion and insight with the aim of establishing a synthesis within which a phenomenological study of the lived experience of practitioners of Nairn's holistic mindfulness can be undertaken.

2.10 Western Phenomenology

The Western philosophical movement of phenomenology was advanced by Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century as a direct challenge to the scientific paradigm of positivism, which Husserl believed misunderstood and misrepresented the nature of the subjective (Moran, 2012).

Smith (2013) defines phenomenology as:

“the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions” (ibid, contents, para 1).

Phenomenological philosophy, psychology, and qualitative research methodology significantly influenced the developing social sciences, including psychology, education and nursing, where it continues to provide a vital counterpoint to the prevailing medical model. As a research methodology, phenomenology focuses on human experience, on experiential meaning, on rich description, and on the co-creation between the researcher and the research participant (Langdridge, 2007).

This chapter provides an account of key features of phenomenology, notably the philosophical positions of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Stein drawn from original texts and commentaries, and the subsequent work of contemporary phenomenologists; and whilst not attempting a fully comprehensive account, draws out those aspects of phenomenology that can be usefully viewed alongside the principles of Buddhist philosophy and psychology that underpin the fields of mindfulness, compassion and insight.

2.10.1 The Lived World

Phenomenology is a return to things as they are: “the meaning of human cultural interpenetration with the world... of living experience... the ‘life world’ ” (Moran, 2012, p6); and a resistance to dualism of subject-object. Phenomena in the life world are experienced through the perception of the subject perceiving them. Husserl put forward somewhat contradictory explanations of the life world; however, Moran encapsulates and defines these:

“It [life world] connotes a thickly experienced context of embodied human acting and knowing that is not completely surveyable, not fully objectifiable, and which has an inescapably intersubjective and ‘intertwined’ character” (ibid, 2012, p181).

For Husserl, science in the mid twentieth century had lost much of its meaning, so he was motivated to provoke a rethink of the philosophy of science which Moran (2012, p58) refers to as Husserl’s “meditative return” and also to correct what he believed to be a fundamental flaw in the developing science of psychology – its positivist, reductionist definition of the subjective and objective (Moran, 2012). Phenomenology does not present an idealistic perspective, but one that rejects an objective standpoint:

“the world is never given to us as a brute fact detachable from our conceptual frameworks. Rather, it shows up in all the describable ways it does thanks to the structure of our subjectivity and our intentional activities” (Thompson, 2007, p82).

Husserl recognised an essential structure in how physical and psychological experiences appear to us. Heidegger and others further developed an understanding of existence (existentialism) and how we find meaning in the world we experience (hermeneutic phenomenology) (Langdrige, 2007). Phenomenology studies the world experientially; but while Husserl believed that it is possible to “bracket” experience, to step outside it and reflect on it from a transcendental perspective (the descriptive, or Duquesne school), Heidegger took an existential position, viewing the self as embedded in the experience of conscious awareness (Langdrige, 2007, p16). The transcendental stance posits that we can intuit phenomena in their essential structure, whilst the existential perspective recognises that there is an element of interpretation (or hermeneutic) that mediates the lived experience; perception involves making meaning of what is perceived (Van Manen, 1990).

2.10.2 Existentialism

Heidegger’s turn towards existentialism, or the study of what exists, understood that experience and perception are necessarily embedded in the one who is experiencing (Langdrige, 2007). This existential turn necessitated a shift

towards the study of embodied experience – grounded in our living soma and environment. Heidegger held that it is only possible to study existence through an understanding of the context (historical, cultural, psychological) and through the language used to describe and interpret experience (Langdridge, 2007). In his seminal work, 'Being and Time', Heidegger (1927/1962) introduced the concept of 'Dasein' – literal 'being-there' - so as to make the person "transparent in his own Being" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p27). What distinguishes Dasein is its consciousness, its theory of mind: "understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p32). Heidegger pursued an ontological approach: concerned with what can be empirically known about people as they exist in the world (Langdridge, 2007, p29), and what people themselves can know about the world they live in (Macann, 1993). Heidegger (1927/1962) stated:

"Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself" (Ibid, p 33).

2.10.3 Transcendentalism versus Existentialism?

Macann (1993) distinguishes the fundamental difference in the approaches of Husserl and Heidegger as one of direction. Where Husserl starts with the 'natural attitude' (the unexamined, day-to-day existence) and moves *up* to a higher vantage point in order to see essential common ontological structures, Heidegger goes *deeper into* the experience of being for the same purpose. Husserl (1954/1970) posited a transcendental 'I' that had the capacity to self-reflect. However, existential phenomenologists hold the view that the apparently transcendental 'I' is not in fact transcendental, as it reflects on the experience of experiencing (Idhe, 1986). Similarly in Nairn's observer/undercurrent model, the direct experience of the thought gives way to thinking about the thought, with the present moment direct experience quickly being overwhelmed by cognition (Nairn, 2011). Both models describe the same process of replacing

the original object of experience with a new object with the same type of correlational intentional relationship. However, Nairn (2012) and Wallace (1999a) like Husserl, classify a transcendental phenomenology. When sufficiently well practised in mindfulness to avoid the pitfalls of conceptualising, the observer has the capacity to self-reflect and remain in direct experiencing until there is suddenly no experience of observer/undercurrent, only of pure observing. Nairn (2012) asserts that the paradox of a self that interprets what it experiences and the no-self of luminous self-awareness is an essential feature of awareness, and causes no problem. In order to further illustrate this, Nairn (2011b) presents a Buddhist classification of the Eight Consciousnesses, where the mindful practitioner meditatively rests in the 7th or self level of consciousness until this subsides and “we get a jolt as we feel like we are losing ourself” (ibid, 26-29/8/11).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) describes the human condition as one where:

“there appears round our personal existence a margin of almost impersonal existence which can be practically taken for granted, and which I rely on to keep me alive; round the human world which each of us has made for himself is a world in general terms to which one first of all belongs” where “my organism ... plays ... the part of an inborn complex” (ibid, p96-97).

Thompson (2007) likewise holds that at the level of attention and awareness, one can both experience the objects of perception and the experience of perception itself, though he contends that the latter is usually prereflective: “we are implicitly aware of constitutive features of our experience and not simply the objects and properties our experience presents” (ibid, p286). The awareness of both the object and the act involves not turning away from the object but exploring “how things look given my perceptual attitude” (ibid, p287). This is directly comparable to Nairn’s (2011) description of the observer observing itself observing the undercurrent, and the manifestation of the egocentric preference system. Husserl’s theory of transcendence is analogous to Nairn’s (2011a) theory of how the egocentric preference system operates: external events are indeed transcendent (i.e. not merely a product of the system) but they are intentionally immanent, i.e. they are constituted and disclosed by virtue of the system’s ‘autonomous, self organising dynamics’; the meaning and

significance of external events corresponds to “an attractor of the system’s dynamics (a recurrent pattern of activity towards which the systems tends) which itself is an emergent product of that very dynamic” (Thompson, 2007, p27).

Within phenomenology, Langdrige (2007) describes a polarisation between transcendentalism and existentialism. However, from a Buddhist perspective, there is no inherent problem. The world is experienced by the observer through the filters of the egocentric preference system, but this is only a temporary situation. The more one penetrates the deeper layers of consciousness, the more the filters drop away until there is a pure experiencing – experience without an experiencer (Khenchen Thrangu, 2001; Nairn, 2011). Chogyam Trungpa (1975) explains:

“The earthy situation of actual things as they are in the source of wisdom. You can become completely one with smell, with sight, with sound, and your knowledge *about* them ceases to exist: your knowledge becomes wisdom” (Ibid, p 12).

The practices of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom can support the practitioner in self-reflection, and by doing so with sustained mindful attention, illuminate ever finer granularity of subtle thought until, as Van Manen (1990) asserts, there is a “direct grasping of the essential structure of phenomena as they appear in consciousness” (ibid, p26).

2.11 Towards a Synergy of Buddhist and Western Phenomenologies

Theorists, notably Bentz and Shapiro (1998), Varela and Shear (1999), Shapiro et al (2006), Brown and Cordon (2009) and Flanagan (2011) have drawn comparisons between Buddhist phenomenology and Western phenomenology, exploring possibilities for merging philosophy and synthesising methodology. Through Kabat-Zinn, secular mindfulness has emerged as an important research focus; however, the more complete rendering of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom by Nairn into a secular programme presents a grounded and pragmatic parallel to Western phenomenology. Brown and

Cordon (2009) note that “the study of the nature of mindfulness is inherently phenomenological” and highlight four main common focal points of mindfulness and phenomenology: present moment awareness, suspension of habitual mental processing, paying active attention, and the cultivation of presence through practice (Ibid, p64). In widening the area of interest to include compassion, insight and wisdom, and a reflection on neuroscientific evidence, many more commonalities emerge. Consideration of selected aspects of phenomenology - intentionality, experiencing self, temporality, insight and epoche, embodiment and intersubjectivity - establish conceptual comparisons from within the disciplines of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom.

2.11.1 Intentionality

Phenomenology as a philosophy is concerned with how we turn consciousness outward and its relationship to objects in the world, the attention that we give objects in the world, and moreover, the intersubjectivity between individuals and their experiences (Langdrige, 2007). Intentionality is a key concept in phenomenology, meaning that every conscious experience has a purpose or direction: when we are conscious of something, “there is an intentional correlation” (Langdrige, 2007, p13). Intentionality is therefore teleological; it is for the sake of an end. Intentionality is understood as the function of being conscious – whenever we are conscious, we are conscious of something. Unlike the positivist concepts of object (the thing perceived) and subject (the perceiver), phenomenology substitutes the notions of ‘noema’ to refer to the intentional object, and ‘noesis’ to the “correlated intentional act” (Moran, 2012, p51). The correlational structure of intentionality is what Husserl describes as the interrelatedness of the noema (the object is its givenness) and the noesis (the mental act that intends and discloses the object in a certain manner) (Thompson, 2007). This notion of correlation does not contain a causative relationship, more sense of direction or reference (Idhe, 1986) wherein mental life is “a temporally extended and dynamic process of flowing intentional acts ... animated by precognitive habits and sensibilities of the lived body” (Thompson, 2007, p24). From a Buddhist perspective likewise, the distinction between

phenomenological and positivist perspectives centres on embodiment; being embodied (i.e. connected within one's somatic being) predicates "connection with everything" (Ray, 2014, p24).

For Heidegger (1927/1962), intention relates directly to the nature of persons: "the person is not a Thing, not a substance, not an object. ... essentially the person exists only in the performance of intentional acts..." (ibid, p73). Similarly in the field of mindfulness, Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) state that "intention is a global property of the entire system", with intention relating both to process and goal (ibid, p260). Phenomenology makes a distinction between intentional acts of presentation i.e. present in their very being, and of re-presentation i.e. phenomenally absent, mentally evoked arising in relation to ongoing presentational experiences (Thompson, 2007, p25). An intentional object may not physically exist but could be a memory of a past event, an imaginative thought of a future event, something that is "distinct from ourselves as present subject", i.e. a past event remembered. Bodily sensations and emotions are also considered to be intentional in that they are "open to what is other or having a world-involving character" (Thompson, 2007, p23) e.g. emotions related to others in the world. Intention defined as the correlational relationship between what is experienced (noema) with the act of experiencing it (noesis or noetic correlate) (Idhe, 1986) marks a departure from positivism, which separates subject and object. In phenomenology, intention is directional, i.e. the process of experiencing influences what is experienced. This is very similar to Nairn's understanding of intention, which is defined as 'bringing into being' (Nairn, 2011).

Of conscious intention, Stein (1916/1989) holds that "the will employs a psycho-physical mechanism to fulfil itself, to realise what is willed, just as feeling uses such a mechanism to realise its expression" (ibid, p240), maintaining that the will holds mastery although it is limited in its effect by counteracting tendencies, both sensory and mental, such as resistance and striving. For Nairn, the egocentric preference system and crucially the subliminal reflex mediate the relationship between the observer and that which is observed (i.e. the

undercurrent) (Nairn, 2012). Intention here is process intention, a “willingness to experience” (Nairn, 2010a) which supports attention.

Stein likens “tending” structurally to volitional will, but with the distinction that “in tending the ‘I’ is drawn into the action, does not step into it freely, and no creative strength is lived out in it” (Stein, 1916/1989, p241). The approaches of Nairn (2010; 2012), Shapiro (2000; 2006; 2008) and Kabat-Zinn (2011) look to cultivating purposeful conscious intention in order to overcome impulsive mental reflexes arising from the subliminal mind. Shapiro and Schwartz (2000) advanced the primacy of intention in the process of self-regulation, holding that it should be “an initiating antecedent” to attention (ibid, p259). Shapiro et al (2006) found that the conscious intention of the practitioner defines the extent of their practice; the practitioner does not advance beyond the horizons that they set for themselves. Intention is linked with motivation, consciously knowing for what purpose one is acting (Shapiro et al, 2008). Introducing an ethical Buddhist dimension, Shapiro and Wallace (2006) promote ‘conative balance’, i.e. “intentions and volitions that are conducive to one’s own and others’ wellbeing” (ibid, p694).

For both disciplines, intention is predicated on a dynamic correlation of the conscious person and their environment, history, context and biology in the lived moment. The lived moment equates to the embodied self enacting its existence, compelled into being by the subliminal reflex.

2.11.2 Experiencing ‘Self’

Buddhism argues for a self without an immutable soul or “anatman” (Flanagan, 2011, p124) in direct contradiction to the Hindu doctrine of Atman, or permanent self (Organ, 1987). Anatman is experienced and embodied, rather than merely conceptualised. Flanagan (2011) states “Buddhism doesn’t simply advocate recognition that there is no-self. One needs to absorb and eventually live this truth” (ibid, p125). Flanagan (2011) elucidates further:

“there are still persons who live lives in communities with other persons and sentient beings, and they have personalities, characters, traits and virtues. All that is denied is that persons possess selves, or that they are run by selves, even by their own selves, and this is because of dependent origination that says nothing is self originating” (ibid p124).

Macann (1993) describes the problem of Dasein’s understanding of itself – one’s understanding of oneself as a human being – as due to the immediacy of experience: “we are so close to that very being which we are that our (implicit) self-understanding never gets a chance to develop into an explicit understanding of self” (ibid, p65). Attempts to remedy this problem make the situation worse: “What we tend to do is understand ourselves in terms of entities whose mode of being is not that of a self, but, rather, that of a thing” (ibid, p65). Heidegger’s solution was to deconstruct this false understanding in order to provide the ground for a more authentic understanding of self. The process appeared to Heidegger (1927/1962) as cyclic: “it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself... because understanding, in accordance with its existential meaning, is Dasein’s own potentiality-for-being” (ibid, p195). In simpler terms, ontologically, we bring ourselves into being, and it is only by immersion into this cycle that we have any chance of authentic understanding. Nairn’s (2012) definitions of mindfulness, insight and wisdom: ‘knowing/ recognising/ understanding what is happening while it is happening’, resonate with Heidegger’s (1927/1963) assertion that “the question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself” (ibid, p33) and “in the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing” (ibid, p195).

Authenticity, held by Macann (1993) to be the antithesis of constructed self, is at the heart of the pursuit of mindfulness (McCown et al, 2010) and contributes to the sense-making drive so characteristic of the evolved human mind (Thompson, 2007; Varela et al, 1991; Nairn, 2011). For Heidegger, the self calls to the self in a ‘call of conscience’; an awakening, a calling back to itself from its lostness (Macann, 1993). There are common references to primordial awareness which is a key conjecture in Buddhism (Khenchen Thrangu, 2002) and provides the fore-structure of Heidegger’s Dasein where the “primordial

kind of knowing” of authenticity is to be found (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p195). For Heidegger, Dasein could either be authentic or inauthentic insofar as it is itself, which according to Macann (1993), speaks of the extent to which Dasein *chooses* its own possibilities from a conscious, explicit understanding. Moreover, Macann points out that Heidegger “suggests that the ‘I’ as which every Dasein thinks of itself as being testifies not to the being itself of Dasein but to Dasein’s failing to be itself” (Macann, 1993, p82), a reference to the false, egocentric self. Nairn’s (2010a) and Brach’s (2003) treatment of acceptance is close to what Heidegger explores as “truth as demonstrative identification” where “the intentionality of being-in-touch-with-the-subject-matter ... is immediately and transparently experienced as true”; where Heidegger states “I do not thematically study the truth of the perception itself, but rather live *in* the truth” (Heidegger, 1992, p276).

For Heidegger, Care is the nature of Dasein; its most authentic expression an empowering, “stand up for” solicitude for others (Macann, 1993, p84). However, it is because of our relationship to others (the ‘they’) that we develop our inauthenticity: “the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the “they”, and must first find itself” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p167). Heidegger observes that our being-with others falls into ‘being-of’ others (Finlay, 2011), being subsumed into a kind of group-think. Finlay asserts that this is a reaction to a fundamental dread of non-existence, of being ‘not-at-home’ (Finlay, 2011, p51).

Consciousness, according to phenomenology, is inherently intentional; it aims towards or intends something beyond itself: both mindfulness and phenomenology “deny that consciousness is self-enclosed” (Thompson, 2007, p22). Intentionality includes object directedness and openness to the world, similar concepts respectively to attention and awareness in mindfulness. Nairn holds a phenomenological position when he states that there is no separate self, all of what we experience at the level of physical existence is intimately connected and interrelated – “so there is no separate self – just let go of this belief!” (Nairn, 2011b, 26-29/8/11). The deluded self is a common theme – reflected in Nairn’s explanation of the egocentric preference system and the mechanism of the subliminal reflex, and in Husserl’s (1954/1970) treatment of

the 'natural attitude': the prephilosophical experience of the life-world (Luft, 2002).

Finlay's description of the dynamics of egocentricity and authenticity is entirely consistent with Nairn's:

"we can flee from this radical insecurity, and deny our existential anxiety by 'falling' into the attractions of a mindless, anaesthetizing 'they'. But Heidegger calls us to own up - authentically - to our self and situation; it is precisely this *being-towards-death*, he said, which gives life its intensity, urgency, meaning and potential for authenticity" (Finlay, 2011, p51).

"when we are out of touch [with ourselves] we are unable to grow psychologically or spiritually, because our subtle inner energies systems are dislocated and we are unable to understand ourselves. So we need to acknowledge and come to terms with this paradox, and live it rather than ignore or deny it. Then we begin opening up to and accepting these strange, sometimes disturbing, sometimes blissful, forces that also constitute 'us'" (Nairn, 2002, p17).

Habit is recognised in both fields as a powerful obstacle to insight and authenticity. Heidegger's reference to Dasein being 'thrown' into pre-existing situations, where we encounter other people, culture and history, to which we become accustomed and to which we usually react pre-reflectively, resonates with an evolutionary understanding of the human brain; a brain which has evolved and is not under our control (Finlay, 2011; Gilbert, 2010).

2.11.3 Temporality

For Heidegger, Dasein must be understood in relation to time; he posited that we experience the world from a temporal vantage point, looking back to the past and anticipating the future, and actively bringing ourselves into being (Langdrige, 2007). Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) likewise held that existence is made "possible and precarious by the temporal structure of our experience" (ibid, p97) where time merges instants to make a meaningful story. Varela (1999) borrows from the fields of Husserlian phenomenology and neuroscience in his explanation of lived time versus physical-computational time (i.e. linear,

'clock'-time). For Varela the main differences are that lived time does not appear linear, but has a complex fullness of texture, with a present moment that is intentional, bounded by past and future horizons which move from moment-to-moment; time is experienced as what is immediate, and we experience consciousness within time. Parallels are apparent with the emphasis of present moment experience within traditional Buddhism and contemporary mindfulness.

Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1958) understanding of our ambiguous temporal experience – where we are at once brought into existence in time and simultaneously trapped by fear into the past or future – lies at the heart of Buddhist phenomenology, as does the remedy of learning to be present in the lived moment (Nairn, 2010a). Heidegger brings the notion of authentic and inauthentic understanding to his analysis of time. Authentic insights into time are to remember that “we are our past, that we are haunted by our past, that our past lives on in our present”, and that “the present is as it were pregnant with future possibilities” (Macann, 1993, p102). Within the stream of time, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) views the present moment as a “wound”, a break in the storyline of our personal history (ibid, p98). The past, according to Merleau-Ponty is “taken up by an individual life only because that life has never transcended it, but secretly nourishes it, devoting thereto part of its strength, because its present is still that past” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958, p98). Merleau-Ponty's position is congruent with contemporary mindfulness treatment of rumination as the rerunning of previous habitual thought patterns.

With regard to the temporality of experience, Thompson (2007) holds that skilful activity appears as a flow of experience, largely unconscious in a pre-reflective (bodily) self-awareness. According to Thompson, “skilful coping, by contrast with mindless automaticity, involves a nonthematic and implicit experience of acting”; “a direct acquaintance with one's bodily subjectivity” (Thompson, 2007, p316). This is very similar to the description in mindfulness of background awareness wherein the practitioner holds a focused attention (Mindfulness Association, 2011). Thompson (2007) also describes a process identical to Nairn's on non-conceptual cognitive awareness: “our experience or existence or

manner of being comprises an immediate and nonreflective self-awareness, one in which we are acquainted with ourselves prior to any reflection” (Thompson, 2007, p317).

2.11.4 Insight Through Epoche

In the *Crisis*, Husserl (1954/1970) presented an alternative ‘pure’ transcendental phenomenological psychology based on subjectivity, with emphasis on intentionality, meaning and essential structures, or essences, discoverable through the step of epoche (Moran, 2012). Epoche is a term introduced by Husserl to describe the process by which one steps outwith or ‘brackets’ ideas (Langdrige, 2007, p17). In the examination of the epoche and the subsequent phenomenological reduction, correlations can be drawn with Nairn’s treatment of the development of mindfulness and insight.

Depraz et al (1999) outline three components which react together to form the praxis of epoche: suspension of habitual thought, shifting attention to the interior experience and letting-go into the experience. Epoche involves a deliberate doubt or curiosity about what is experienced, a willingness and faculty to reflect on what Husserl (1954/1970) calls “the natural attitude” or habitual ways of thinking about the lifeworld (ibid, p150). This stepping-outside involves a capacity to bring fresh awareness: “the challenge is to let the things we experience appear in our consciousness as if for the first time” (Langdrige, 2007, p18). This finds resonance in the concept of Beginner’s Mind, a requisite for the practice of mindfulness (Mindfulness Association, 2011) which in itself is an antidote to the ‘natural attitude’. Varela (1999) notes of Husserl: his “style as an eternal beginner, always willing to start anew; this is the hallmark of phenomenology itself” (ibid, in Varela & Shear, ed., 1999). Langdrige (2007) description of Husserl’s turn towards transcendentalism is analogous to mindful reflection on what is being experienced (the undercurrent) and the who that is doing the experiencing (observer) (Nairn, 2011b). Hartelius (2015) specifically cites mindfulness, calling the epoche “a shift in the state of consciousness” and noting that “inductions into states such as mindfulness meditation may replicate

the state to which Husserl was referring” (ibid, p1275). Likewise, Thompson (2007) compares the epoche whose “ultimate aim is not to break with the flow of experience, but to reinhabit it in a fresh way, namely with heightened awareness and attunement” (ibid, p19) to mindfulness, stating “features of the epoche closely parallel the basic mental skills cultivated in the Buddhist mindfulness meditation” (ibid, p445).

Consideration of Buddhist philosophy caused Thompson (2007) to refute his previous assertion that Husserlian phenomenology is reductionist or solipsistic (i.e. internally generated by the subject) contending that “the transcendental phenomenological reduction is a way of characterising the world, namely, at the phenomenological level at which it is experienced, and of studying the relation of the world so characterised to our subjectivity” (ibid, p415). Thompson’s (2007) description of phenomenological reduction considers two steps; the first leads from the natural attitude, where reality is taken for granted as being simply there without any active conscious engagement, to the phenomenological attitude, where reality is understood as “that which is disclosed to us as real ... an achievement of consciousness”; and where “we have no grip on what reality means apart from what is disclosed to us as real and such disclosure necessarily involves the intentional activity of consciousness” (ibid, p21). The aim of phenomenological reduction is to gain access to this activity. The second step leads from phenomenology as an empirical and psychological attitude (phenomenological psychology) to phenomenology as a philosophical attitude (transcendental phenomenology) which focuses on “the ways in which things are given” (ibid, p21). Depraz (1999) deems the task of phenomenological reduction is to take us to the edge of reason: “to question our inviolable attachment to the particular sensible *datum* and, in so doing, to free up for us the interior space of the purely *possible*”, the “reflexive abyss and the *vertigo* which arises from the falling away of the world” (ibid, in Varela & Shear, ed., 1999, p101). For Husserl (1954/1970), this task entails focusing on appearances, and their senses and meaning, and how these meaningful phenomena are constituted and brought to awareness.

The process of phenomenological reduction follows the epoche with the practice of describing conscious perceptions, treating all detail as equal (horizontalisation) and checking or verifying any hypotheses with reference to raw experience (Langdrige, 2007). The nature of what is required for the epoche and phenomenological reduction is described by Depraz et al (1999) as “more at the contemplative level of reception, of listening or of impregnation that of the looking-for in a predetermined way” (ibid, p13). Nairn’s blend of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom practices are drawn from Buddhist tradition specifically with the aim of supporting practitioners beyond the ‘natural attitude’ (Langdrige, 2007), through the dangers of repression and denial, to the extraordinary moment-to-moment lived experience of insight and wisdom. In horizontalisation, there is resonance with the element of Nairn’s definition of mindfulness that is ‘without preference’ (Nairn, 2010a), and the process of verification in phenomenology of returning to raw experience is analogous to the application of the triangle of mindfulness where the practitioner returns to direct experience of bodily sensation, emotions and thoughts (Nairn, 2010a).

Husserl’s position on essence is wholly compatible with the Buddhist concept of emptiness:

“we say “body” and we say “mind”, but we have our own interpretation of them, our own concept of them, which constantly separates us from the reality of the body and mind, the bodyness, mindness, the thingness of things as they are. This thingness of things as they are is what is called “emptiness”, sunyata, the actual isness quality of things” (Chogyam Trungpa, 1975, p43).

The concept of emptiness, according to Flanagan (2011), should be treated not as a property in itself (for that would be logically contradictory) but as the ultimate deconstruction; and once understood as such, then in practical terms, conventional regularities can be accepted as part of the phenomenological flux. Likewise, Merleau-Ponty considered the notion of truth as an attempt to create solid ground from what is necessarily contingent (Langdrige, 2007).

Husserl believed that the process of identifying underlying (universal) essences happens as an everyday occurrence; however, he also contended that it was

extremely problematic to maintain as the mind falls into habitual patterns of interpretation or 'natural attitude' (Langdridge, 2007). Nairn (2011b) likewise contends that normally only surface mind is known; subliminal activity is mostly unseen. At a subconscious level, suppression, repression and projection occur in order to protect the sense of self (egocentric preference system) and arise involuntarily, autonomously and unseen. In doing so, habitual tendencies are cultivated which obscure the process of self-liberation. We expect everything to be rational, seen, controlled and controllable, and "pitch unconsciously into denial when seeing means pain" (Nairn, 2011b, 26-29/8/11). Depraz et al (1999) likewise examine the difficulties inherent in shifting to a phenomenological method, noting in particular the force of mental habits attuned to the external world, drawing comparison with the Buddhist notion of samsara or suffering; and once turned inward, the problem of uncovering difficult, repressed material. Whilst specifically suggesting mindfulness meditation as techniques to produce the necessary shift in attention to the epoche, Depraz et al (1999) also observe that the natural attitude has "a hypnotic influence which is very difficult to interrupt" (Depraz et al, 1999, p9).

Letting go into a "fertile dimension of emptiness" (Depraz et al, 1999, p13) where potent energy is experienced is described as a pre-reflective phase of which the authors state "this period is troubling for anyone with the naive belief in an instantaneous, permanent and mechanical mastery of cognition over its functioning" (ibid, p11). Similarities are drawn between the phenomenological method and advanced Buddhist practices, and the authors note that "we may say, then that 'phenomenological reduction', 'reflective act', 'becoming aware' or 'mindfulness' all stem from what is not available in normal reflection, they are rooted in the non-verbal, the pre-reflective, the ante-predicative" (ibid, p12). Ray (2014) shares this perspective, asserting the primacy of non-conceptual direct experience as the most important kind of knowing, with conceptualisation secondary: "first we have our life; *then* we think about it and come to conclusions about it" (ibid, p100, author italics).

Nairn (2011a) emphasises the use of traditional Buddhist methods for working with habitual mental patterns. When the conceptual mind reaches its

boundaries, he contends that there is great confusion and resistance from the egocentric preference system, maintaining that the correct action at that point is non-action: let go of the determined grasping at conceptualisation in its many forms, and simply rest in experience. Nairn (2011a) holds that whilst the egocentric preference system resists in fear, there is a greater trusting awareness that allows the practitioner to move beyond fear. For Ray (2014), this means remaining in direct experience with the body as the entry point into the non-conceptual substratum, or underlying continuity (ibid, p102).

2.11.5 Embodiment

Thompson (2007) holds that the Husserl's transcendental phenomenology goes much further than the intrasubjective; his mature philosophical investigations reflect an examination of the structures of the lived body, time consciousness and intersubjectivity (ibid, p22). Husserl's transcendental phenomenology regresses back to the "roots of our experience in a meaningful world" which "ramify far beyond individual consciousness into the depths of our lived bodies and out into our social and cultural worlds" (ibid p22). Thompson (2007) also maintains Heidegger's concept of Dasein and Merleau-Ponty's concept of the 'lived body' are each ways of characterising "that which makes possible the disclosure or manifestation of the world as meaningful" (ibid, p21). Thompson (2007) is cautious of the view that consciousness is reducible to the brain and is doubtful that the brain alone is the minimal causal basis, stating that:

"yet the brain is not all we have, and not everything we can use for the purpose of representing the world is inside our brain, we have our body as well as resources in the environment, and it is far from obvious that any bodily process of environmental resource used in representing the world needs to be represented inside the brain" (ibid, p241).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) considers the person to be consciousness embedded in a body, not consciousness as a purely mental function; perception relates to the spatial position of the embodied consciousness of the perceiver, with its meaning grounded in the whole 'body-mind' phenomenon, not merely presented via concept and language. Consequently, he is critical of the

Conceptual/Propositional Theory of Meaning, which maintains that our capacity for making meaning of the world lies in our ability to relate concepts to the external world, considering this approach “disembodied” (Johnson, 2006, p5). For Merleau-Ponty, meaning has a rich definition: meaning is about an individual’s somatic connection with their environment; it relates temporally to the past, present and future; meaning can be relayed conceptually but this aspect of meaning is only a small part of “a vast, continuous, unconscious or barely conscious process of immanent meanings that involve structures, patterns, qualities, feelings, and emotions” (Johnson, 2006, p6-7). Stein (1916/1989) distinguishes between somatic and non-somatic feelings: holding that somatic feelings are inseparable from their “founding sensations”, and “issue from my ‘I’” and are fused with it” (ibid, p236), whilst moods are “general feelings of a non-somatic nature” i.e. psychic feelings, that nonetheless have a reciprocal influence on the somatic (ibid, p236). Meaning is expressed through bodily gesture which McNeill (1992) categorises into ‘beat’ gestures that are used to give rhythm and accent to our thinking; ‘iconic’ gestures that paint a spatial picture to accompany our words; and ‘metaphoric’ gestures which mirror our internal experience (Johnson, 2006, p9).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) concerns himself with the phenomenology of the body; a shift from conceiving of the body as a mechanistic external object to “a body which rises towards the world” (ibid , p87), describing a cyclical paradox:

“When I move towards a world, I bury my perceptual and practical intentions in objects which ultimately appear prior to and external to those intentions, and which nevertheless exist for me insofar as they arouse in me thoughts or volitions” (ibid, p95).

He goes further, distinguishing “the habit-body and that of the body-in-this-moment”, examining how the habitual body acts “as guarantee” for the present moment body (ibid, p95). The notion of the habitual body acting as guarantee is that the body is apprehended “in some general aspect and in the light of an impersonal being” this being caused by an act of repression where “the subject remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts, at any rate in his actual being” (ibid, p95). This habitual tendency, according to Merleau-Ponty is structural in nature (using Nairn’s model, it belongs with the

observer and the egocentric preference system) and as such, causes the subject to generalise and to lose touch with the body-in-this-moment.

Both disciplines describe a compulsive, energetic aspect to the phenomenon of impulse. Nairn (2011) notes that the observer is 'preloaded' and projects on to the thought. Stein describes the phenomenon of expression: "as I live through the feeling, I feel it terminate in an expression or release expression out of itself it is loaded with an energy which must be unloaded" (Stein, 1916/1989, p238). For both fields, impulse is rooted and experienced in the body. For Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) impulse is generated by buried intention, and surges from the body towards perceptual objects. The subliminal reflex, according to Nairn (2012) is the mechanism that reacts to impulse, that sets the internal mechanisms of impulse and preference into self. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) notes "our body ... surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them" (ibid , p121). Further, "in the concrete movement, the patient has a positing awareness neither of the stimulus nor of his reaction: quite simply, he is his body and his body is the potentiality of a certain world" (ibid, p122). He describes this surging in action:

"when I motion my friend to come nearer, my intention is not a thought prepared within me and I do not perceive the signal in my body. I beckon across the world, I beckon over there where my friend is; the distance between us, his consent or refusal are immediately read in my gesture; there is not a perception followed by a movement, for both form a system that varies as a whole" (ibid, p127).

Merleau-Ponty refers to motor intentionality as being bodily and skilful rather than as either purely sensory or purely cognitive, and as part of an 'intentional arc' that can only be understood by reference to "how a lived body experiences itself as a lived body" (Thompson, 2007, p248). According to Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is the 'here' from which one experiences self in a dynamic process of 'self-othering' where "one's body becomes other to itself" (Thompson, 2007, p251); one experiences the object and the experiencing of the object, directly comparable to Nairn's account of the observer/undercurrent. The challenge according to Thompson is "to preserve this unique double character of bodily self consciousness" (Thompson, 2007, p252). O'Regan &

Noe (2001) expand on characteristic properties of sensory experience: 'ongoingness' (inhabited by an ongoing process of 'bodiliness'), 'forcible presence' (sensory experience forces itself upon me, outwith voluntary control), 'ineffability' (more to the experience than we can describe in words) and 'subjectivity' (my experience which is for me) (ibid, p1012). These concepts are comparable to Nairn's (2011a) descriptions of the egocentric preference system.

2.11.6 Intersubjectivity

Phenomenology concerns itself with intersubjectivity – not simply individual beings in the world, but beings that are necessarily interrelated. This gives rise to concepts such as empathy and care, and the inherent social nature of Dasein (Langdrige, 2007). The human order is characterised by Merleau-Ponty as typically symbolic, based on childhood relationships to other humans - Merleau-Ponty's theory is a precursor to attachment theory (Thompson, 2007). This is later extended to intersubjective activity that transforms our natures and modifies our environment and culture; to a new kind of dialectic relationship between the self and the world, always trying to surpass our current actions and create new things. This for Merleau-Ponty is generative phenomenology of intersubjectivity and culture (Thompson, 2007).

According to Stein (1916/1989), empathy is an intentionality towards another's experience, and is based on the bodily presence of the other and can involve inferring cognitively what the other is feeling. Empathy is understood to be non-primordial, i.e. the other's experience cannot be directly comprehended, and as such is similar in nature to memory and imagination (Thompson, 2007, p387). For Stein, empathy takes place through the emergence of another's experience to me, I then inquire imaginatively into the other's experience (and when this occurs I am involved subjectively) and I then get a clarified or explicated perspective of the other's experience (Stein, 1916/1989). One's own body amplifies the experience of empathy; I experience feedback from how my body involuntarily responds to the other: Stein calls this 'sensual empathy' or

'sensing-in' (Thompson, 2007, p389). One can gain new perspectives from the 'imaginative self-transposition' of empathy, while retaining one's own bodily centre of spatial awareness. Empathy becomes reiterative and is reinforced through shared language (Thompson, 2007, p399). For Thompson (2007), "empathy is a precondition for our experience of inhabiting a common and intersubjective spatial world" (ibid, p391) without which one could not experience one's own body as a physical object perceivable by others. This is an important point: Thompson states "my sense of personal selfhood, even at a basic bodily level, is tied to recognition by another and to the ability to grasp that recognition empathetically" (ibid, p392). At a more cognitive level, the imagining of another's situation or perspective gives rise to the emergence of the ability of 'joint attention' which includes gaze following, joint engagement in events and imitative learning (Thompson, 2007, p397).

Empathy, according to Eisenberg and Strayer, has three features: feeling what another person is feeling, knowing what another person is feeling and responding compassionately to another person (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). The Buddhist concept of the Four Immeasurables (Wallace, 2010) asserts that lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity all latently exist as inherent primordial wisdom. From a Buddhist perspective, Flanagan (2011) holds that in a state of deep insight there can be no resort to selfishness; lovingkindness and compassion simply exist, without fabrication. It is acceptance of the truth of dependent origination that frees the mind and allows compassion to arise (Flanagan, 2011).

Moral empathy arises when we are able through the practices of empathy to cultivate 'other-directedness' as a stable capacity (Thompson, 2007) and is developed at the stage when we are able to empathise with others as mental agents (Tomasello, 1999). If morality becomes a reasoned activity, it does so because "empathy provides the source of that kind of experience and the entry point into it" (Thompson, 2007, p401). Flanagan (2011) describes Buddhist metta or lovingkindness practice as a moral meditation, and questions the paradoxical nature of practising lovingkindness against the view that we are no-self/anatman, inquiring as to the connection in Buddhism between the

metaphysical and the ethical positions. Flanagan states “being motivated to adopt the virtues of compassion and lovingkindness depends on the clarity and depth of one’s understanding of the metaphysical thesis that I am a selfless person” (ibid, p120).

2.12 Conclusion

Buddhist phenomenology and Western phenomenology have been explored with the aim of taking an expansive view across both disciplines to surface commonalities and synergies which might be of relevance in a constructivist and qualitative examination of the lived experience of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom. Western phenomenology is a well developed philosophical and psychological approach that includes a set of empirical practices (e.g. bracketing/phenomenological reduction) engaged in from a specific attitudinal perspective. Underpinning the main aim of phenomenology – to reach beyond the natural attitude – the phenomenological attitude is one of openness, of embodied empathy, of exchange. The phenomenological attitude can be described as a kind of expansive immersion and absorption, committing oneself to full embodied experience while at the same time bringing in a perceptive sharpness of mind. Finlay describes it as a dance, a movement between focus and reflexive self awareness (Finlay, 2011). I assert that this is indistinguishable from the attitude required for mindfulness described by Nairn (2011a) and illustrated in chapter 2 part 1.

One of the most explicit synergies between the disciplines of holistic mindfulness and phenomenology is that of embodiment. Commonly held features of embodiment most evident in the literature are that:

- Mind and body co-arise interdependently;
- Powerful internal forces (habit, repression, etc) are at the same time psychological and somatic;
- Lived experience can only be understood through embodied awareness;

- Awareness of the body is awareness of the present moment;
- Embodied experience is ineffable, it transcends the conceptual;
- The phenomenon of mind-body awareness has a cyclic, paradoxical aspect that cannot be explained by philosophical conjecture;
- There is a particular, deep, spiritual (or at least awe-inspiring) quality of experience when we are mindfully in flow or in touch with our bodies.

Moving from the search for subjective meaning into the world of intersubjective relationship and understanding, both fields of inquiry share the view that there is a world beyond the individual that is necessarily dependent on the somatic ground of the lived experience. Stein (1916/1989) recognises that the bodily presence of the other produces empathy; an intentionality towards the other, where engagement with bodiliness amplifies empathy, and for Thompson, the very existence and continued existence of selfhood is dependent on empathic recognition (Thompson, 2007). With the inclusion of compassion, the field of holistic mindfulness is shifted from one of internal experience to an intersubjective domain which points to the existence and experience of and interrelationships with other social beings.

Buddhist phenomenology resolves the polarisation between the transcendental and existential, recognising that they exist in a continuum rather than in opposition. Mindfulness and insight meditation practised over time opens the practitioner to insights emerging from repeated experience of being in the moment, unforced insights that unfold and emerge. The basic underlying patterns underpinning Buddhist phenomenology mirror those in Western phenomenological psychology, hence I contend that what Idhe (1986) describes as the phenomenological method:

“It proceeds in a prescribed order, starting from what appears as it appears; and questions retrogressively from the what of appearance to the how of appearance and ultimately back to the who of experience” (Idhe, 1986, p54)

equates to the progression of insight as described by Nairn (2012) and Wallace (1999a). As mindfulness and its related aspects correspond so elegantly to

Western phenomenology in concept and practice, I also maintain that the practices of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom as expounded by Nairn (2010, 2011, 2012) equate to seeing phenomenologically. Epoche and phenomenological reduction and mindfulness and insight meditation practised over time have the potential to shift the practitioner from habitual mental and bodily habits, from dwelling in the 'natural attitude' to the very edge of rational understanding, poised at the brink of non-conceptual emptiness and its unmistakable quality of authenticity.

Merleau-Ponty realises that to understand the world, we must have both an objective relationship to things and a phenomenological relationship to the world-as-lived; the 'tethering' described by Flanagan (2011) in chapter 2 part 1. Indeed, Thompson holds that phenomenology ought to be incorporated into experimental psychology and neuroscience research and that such research requires the research subjects to "attend to their experience in an open and non-judgemental way" and their accounts to be rendered "maximally descriptive of experience and minimally conjectural about the causes of experience" (Thompson, 2007, p302).

Flanagan notes "all experience takes place in our embodied nervous systems in the world, the natural world, the only world there is" (Flanagan, 2011, p90). The nature of the self within the world is common ground for both phenomenologies: each provides a different historical and cultural perspective of structurally identical phenomena and in doing so, enriches the field of experiential philosophy. Both disciplines view egocentricity and authenticity as correlated dynamic forces, mediated by intention and impulse, exemplified in embodied awareness. Each phenomenology has a moral aspect: Buddhism's comprehensive and mature concept of compassion strengthens and enriches Stein's (1916/1989) inquiry into empathy. Each phenomenology is strengthened by the other: construct validity apparent across the disciplines. Furthermore, whilst Buddhism and its secular adaptations are rising in popularity and increasingly accessible to Westerners, its religious origins continue to seem mystical and at odds with scientific rigour (Flanagan, 2011), thus I suggest that

cross-fertilisation with a Western philosophical tradition may increase the cultural acceptability of Buddhist and secular practices.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN

PART 1 – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that “both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p105), furthermore mixed method research utilising qualitative methods can be employed to offset limitations in quantitative approaches and vice versa (Creswell, 2007). In contrast, Locke et al (2009) hold that quantitative and qualitative research are reflective of distinct paradigms: for example, the genre of interpretive research aims to understand the phenomenon from the participant perspective with data grounded in participant interview data; phenomenology is a form of interpretive research where the meaning of the experience can only be constructed from the participant experience (Locke et al, 2009). Whilst I take a qualitative approach with this study, I hold a position similar to Wellington et al (2005) who regard the available methodology as forming a continuum rather than a polarisation, reflective of differing perspectives depending on which aspects of the topic is to be examined. Pring (2000) encapsulates the distinction thus:

“How we conceive the world ... is different from social group to social group.... Hence, the need for that interpretive and hermeneutic tradition in which we seek to understand the world from the perspective of the participants... However, such differences in how we understand reality are possible because there are stable and enduring features of reality, independent of us, which make such distinctions possible... There are features of what it is to be a person which enable generalizations to be made and ‘quantities’ to be added or subtracted... The qualitative investigation can clear the ground for the quantitative – and the quantitative be suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretive mode” (Pring, 2000, p55).

Both Locke et al (2009) and Wellington et al (2005) acknowledge that the range of qualitative methodology is immense and the choice far from straightforward. Because of this, it is incumbent on the qualitative researcher to articulate a robust rationale for their chosen design. Key to forming a cohesive rationale is an appreciation of the ontological, epistemological and teleological assumptions

of the researcher faced with the study to be undertaken (Wellington et al, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This study presupposes that if long-term practice supports transcendental shifts in psychological perspective as is claimed by Nairn (2011), the practitioner's experiences and perceptions will alter over time; what they regard as true may change if their beliefs and sense of identity transform as a result of practice. It follows that the type of data considered valid for this study might include nuanced and largely unstructured accounts reflecting the experience of the participant over time. The research design - methodology, methods and procedures - for this study is underpinned by such philosophical considerations and aims to explicate meaning from a series of rich descriptive first person accounts, and reflective of my motivation and intention laid out in 1.2, I ground the methods in the lived experience of practitioners.

In chapter 2 part 2, it was argued that synergies exist that point to reciprocal benefits of Buddhist and Western phenomenology within mindfulness research, teaching and practice, and within phenomenological research. In chapter 3, part 1 the relevance of applying a phenomenological approach to the examination of mindfulness and associated concepts is addressed. Comparisons are drawn within a constructivist paradigm to hermeneutic phenomenology which I argue is as relevant a research perspective for mindfulness and related concepts as the prevailing postpositivist approach, and which affords the potential to make a hitherto unrealised contribution to the body of research. The study follows an hermeneutic phenomenological methodology; applying a continuum of descriptive and interpretative approaches, as advanced by Finlay (2009), which focuses on the research participants' own experiences, views and assignation of meaning.

3.2. An Introduction to Experimental Phenomenology

In support of the use of the first person account in research, Gilbert asserts:

“If we want to know how a person feels, we must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is only one observer stationed at the critical point of view. She may not always remember what she felt before, and she may not always be aware of what she is feeling right now. We may be puzzled by her reports, sceptical of her memory, and worried about her ability to use language as we do. But when all our hand-wringing is over, we must admit that she is the *only* person who has even the *slightest* chance of describing the “view from in here”, which is why her claims serve as the gold standard against which all other measures are measured” (Gilbert, 2006, p66).

Phenomenological research “aims at being presuppositionless” (Van Manen, 1984, p29) in that it does not set out a pre-determined set of methods or techniques but is carried out through four main research activities: active commitment to the research phenomena; investigation of lived experience; description rendered through writing and rewriting; and reflection on essential themes. Idhe holds that it is impossible to understand phenomenology without “see(ing) phenomenologically” (Idhe, 1986, p15); it follows that phenomenological research cannot be purely conceptual. Rehorick and Bentz (2009) summarise thus: “phenomenology directs us to the fullness of experience rather than a remote or proforma accumulation of information and facts” (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p3). Rehorick and Bentz’ definition of lived experience is a similar definition as is used in mindfulness: “to direct feelings, thoughts and bodily awareness of actual life” (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p3).

Rehorick and Bentz (2009) assert that the practice of phenomenology is transformative; by this they mean that phenomenology affords the practitioner a “deepening awareness” (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p4) that is qualitative in nature. Phenomenology can be criticised as solipsistic, i.e. only able to articulate knowledge of self: however Bentz and Shapiro (1998) refute this, stating that phenomenology is as much about the study of the world as it is the individual experience, and citing phenomenological research that embraces a wide range of social and cultural topic areas including music, sexuality, clinical psychology, technology, geography, architecture, racism and ethnicity. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) regard phenomenological research as “gazing “through your navel” at the world that is given to you, for consciousness is part of the umbilical cord that attaches us to the world” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p104).

Finlay (2009) holds that as well as explicating a deep understanding of unique individual phenomena from phenomenological interviews, it is possible also to identify general structures of experience from the synthesis of several individual accounts.

Experimental phenomenology took an hermeneutic turn through the influences of Heidegger, of Gadamer, who was influenced both by Husserl and Heidegger, and also of Dilthey's art of interpretation or hermeneutics (Langdrige, 2007). Gadamer (1975/2004) explored language as the means by which one develops understanding, which he held is determined by pre-judgements and assumptions, which in turn arise from histories, built up from cumulative experiences. Gadamer believed moreover that understanding is also determined by horizons, essential to understanding any situation (Langdrige, 2007). Horizon is what can be 'seen' or apprehended from a particular vantage point, and can be narrow or expansive. In relation to meaning, the horizon has to be appropriate for each inquiry; the researcher is obliged to transpose herself into the history and culture of the person or text; this action leads to understanding the meaning of the matter without demanding agreement (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Furthermore, the notion of 'transposing' always entails bringing *oneself* into the realm of another, and in so doing, "rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other" (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p304): a third-person perspective. Two approaches can be taken to the art of interpretation: an hermeneutic of empathy which is descriptive in nature, an acceptance of what is presented at face value, whilst an hermeneutic of suspicion accepts that deeper meanings exist within the unconscious or subliminal mind that can be uncovered through deeper excavation (Langdrige, 2007); perspectives that align with the practices of mindfulness and insight; the former pointing to the present moment experience, the latter to the uncovering of the subliminal mental contents wrought by deepening insight.

Finlay (2009) takes a contemporary inclusive approach to phenomenological research, proposing a continuum rather than a strict divide between Husserlian and hermeneutic traditions, and notes that an interpretive approach is more

valid when description is mediated by non-verbal expression. Phenomenological interpretation is a “pointing to” something from within the phenomenon rather than pointing out with reference to an externally imposed theoretical framework (Finlay, 2009, p11). Phenomenological research puts emphasis on explicating or drawing out findings, allowing meaning to emerge through leaning in to the data without force, suggestive of the mindful process of ‘working the edge’ (Mindfulness Association, 2011). The hermeneutic aspect of phenomenology as expounded by Gadamer is a live, dynamic and spacious experience where the researcher can demonstrate understanding at three levels (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009). The first, similar to other qualitative approaches seeks to identify universal characteristics; the second seeks interpretive feedback from participants; and at the third and deepest level, the researcher is fully open to being influenced and transformed by the perceptions of the participant. It is contended that the practices of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom prepare and enable the researcher to hold the open, hermeneutic space where such transformation occurs. Textual analysis, utilised for this study, is similar to qualitative content analysis, though Bentz and Shapiro (1998) caution that this approach may serve to distance the researcher from the lived experience. Cultural-social phenomenology (Schutz, 1970 in Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), also a feature of this study, is based on the understanding of the essential structure of a life-world containing multiple realities, and of how people orientate towards one another based on typifications of how we relate (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). In this study, general structures of experience are posited through identifying the essential characteristics of several individual accounts (Finlay, 2009).

Following from the account given in chapter 2, part 2, it is proposed that phenomenological research may benefit from consideration of the concepts of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom, and phenomenological researchers from their practice. The research literature describes considerable correlation between phenomenology and mindfulness at the level of philosophical worldview and in practical application (Didonna, 2009; Thompson, 2007; Rehorick & Bentz, 2009, Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, Varela et al, 1991). A specific blended method or meta-perspective, Mindful Inquiry (MI), developed

by Bentz & Shapiro (1998), synthesises four intellectual traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory (focusing on empowerment, equal benefit and the alleviation of suffering); and Buddhism (promoting tolerance, acceptance of multiple perspectives and embodiment of mindfulness in the research process). Looking to reflections of researchers who have used MI point to the benefits of integrating Buddhist and Western phenomenologies in the research process. Simpson (2009) reflects in her doctoral study that practising phenomenology manifests as mindfulness, and she holds that “mindfulness and phenomenological *looking* are very closely aligned ... mindful transformation and phenomenological practice seem to occur in an hermeneutic spiral. Mindful transformation involves living with authentic presence in the natural flow of life” where transformation is a change to a new level of consciousness (Simpson, 2009, p63). Hudson Breen (2001) utilised the Mindful Inquiry approach to study the lived experiences of six female practitioners of mindfulness and yoga. Hudson Breen (2001) found evidence of two main categories of experience: ‘relationship with practice’ - the participants’ life journeys, their experience of practice over time, their sense of refuge, or integration, empowerment and authenticity; and ‘self in relationship’ - mindfulness experienced in daily life and in relationship with self, others and the environment. Hudson Breen’s study is noteworthy in that it describes a richness and breadth to the experience of living mindfully.

3.3 The Method of the Phenomenological Reduction

The phenomenological reduction is a rooted, intuitive, robustly scientific process which Depraz (1999) describes as an action that is, at once, self-observing and impartial, and that is both theoretically and practically intense and fertile. The phenomenological reduction disengages; leads back one’s own immediate experience, layer by layer, becoming aware of one’s conscious relationship to the object: “in this way, I enlarge my field of experience by intensifying it, by allowing another dimension to emerge from it, a dimension which precisely frees me from the ordinary pre-giveness of the world” (Depraz, 1999, p98). This is analogous to Nairn’s (2011) description of insight; the

observer observing the observer, allowing the undercurrent to self-arise, self-display and self-liberate. Depraz says of the phenomenological reduction “my manner of perceiving ... has changed” (Depraz, 1999, p98).

There are three basic processes incorporated into the phenomenological reduction. The Husserlian epoche is a suspension in the natural flow of thought:

“As soon as a mental activity, a thought anchored to the perceived object alone, turns me away from the observation of the perceptual act to reengage me in the perception of the object, I bracket it. It continues to exist in front of me. I have neither eradicated nor negated it – it would come back in force – but it is there in front of me, lacking any real efficacy, without validity. I have already, as it were, left it to itself” (Depraz, 1999, p99-100).

Further, “the epoche is only definitive if it is reactivated at each instant as a general gesture of suspension with regard to any positively given datum” (Depraz, 1999, p100), and it is this moment-to-moment requirement that makes the epoche vulnerable to relapsing into the ‘natural attitude’ wherein the phenomenon becomes conceptual rather than a lived experience. It is precisely the aim of regular mindfulness practice to train the practitioner to return to moment-to-moment experience, not only during periods of formal practice but in daily life practices (Nairn, 2012); and this discipline can be extended into the research process to achieve the epoche.

The technique of epoche is “to recognise then set aside the myriad assumptions, filters and conceptual frameworks that structure our perceptions and experiences” (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p11). Bentz noted “the investigator is able to bracket only insofar as he or she can see a scientific or cultural assumption that he or she holds in relation to the object” (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p12). In both these statements, the operative factor is recognition of the obstacle to clarity – the central tenet of mindfulness and insight practices. Husserl described the most profound form of bracketing where pure consciousness is experienced (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009). Whilst this type of experience is controversial in Western psychology, and indeed in phenomenology itself, it is accepted within Buddhist psychology as existing a priori, manifesting as non-conceptual cognitive awareness (Nairn, 2011b; Khenchen Thrangu, 2002).

A second technique is the use of “imaginative variations” i.e. changing structural components of the experience with the purpose of seeing “what elements we could remove from the thing before it ‘shatters’ or ‘explodes’ as the kind of thing it is” (Rehorick and Bentz, 2009, p15, quoting Sokalowski, 2000). There are techniques for insight practice that attempt similarly to dissolve the boundaries of internal experience. Poetry and metaphor is utilised to create inner psychological space; the metaphor becomes part of the undercurrent/observer dynamic, where the energies are played out in an allegorical arena and the story is allowed to unfold of its own accord. An example of practice using metaphor is the four-step RAIN practice using a poem, ‘The Guest House’ (Rumi) as the metaphor (Mindfulness Association, 2011) whereby the practitioner recognises a difficult thought or emotion as a guest persistently knocking at the door; allows the emotion to be present like welcoming the guest and inviting it in; inquires into how the practitioner relates to the experience, as if conversing with a guest; comes to see that the presenting emotion or difficulty is not part of identity merely a guest moving through the internal awareness. The third basic technique in the phenomenological reduction described by Rehorick and Bentz (2009) is horizontalisation which involves noticing all elements of events as equal, equivalent to the attitude of equanimity or the experience of ‘without preference’ in mindfulness (Nairn, 2010).

Finlay (2005) points out that the phenomenological reduction needs to be well carried through, to go beyond egocentric distortion and projection to gain access to a genuine phenomenological essence. It is contended that Nairn’s (2012) process and practice of insight build the skill necessary to carry out a phenomenological reduction. Depraz et al (1999) present the structure of the ‘gesture of awareness’ as three cyclical phases integral to the phenomenological reduction and epoche. These are summarised below alongside associated themes from Nairn (2011a), with the aim of broadening understanding of the method.

Suspension of habitual thought and judgement:

- Is attitudinal and is triggered by something (an event or an instruction) which may or may not be conscious. The ability to suspend thought is latent (Depraz et al, 1999).
- Is a skill and an attitude. Skill builds up through mindfulness practice of shifting attention to a support. Is characterised as awakening from delusion (Nairn, 2011).

Attention shifts from the exterior to the interior:

- Is a shift of direction from what is going on in the world to what is going on in the body-mind (Depraz et al, 1999).
- Attention is turned from thinking and distraction to observing the undercurrent (mindfulness practice), and to observing the observer (insight practice). Attention becomes grounded in the immediacy of moment-to-moment attention of bodily sensation (Nairn, 2011).

The quality of attention changes:

- The quality of attention changes from “the looking-for to the letting-come” described as a period of relative emptiness (Depraz et al, 1999, p6).
- Cultivating an attitude of acceptance, trusting that the content of the undercurrent will self-arise, self-display and self-liberate, understanding that insight and wisdom cannot be forced or conceptualised (Nairn, 2011).

Husserl further categorises phenomenological reduction into a psychological reduction which is analogous to mindfulness, and an eidetic reduction, the purpose of which is to cast doubt on the egocentric attachment to sensory objects (Depraz, 1999), which is akin to the processes of insight and wisdom as described by Khenchen Thrangu (1993) and Nairn (2011, 2012), and Depraz explains the eidetic reduction:

“In fact, the obsession with the empirical arises from the attachment to the simple efficacy of fact, which gives rise to potential alienation. On the other hand, taking account of the infinite variations of the real, of the possible internal differentiations of the latter, presupposes an imaginative capacity whose initial strength is sufficient to move beyond effective reality and so allows us to envisage the infinite plurality of possibilities” (Depraz, 1999, p101).

For Husserl, the eidetic reduction reinforces the psychological reduction, and further diverts the practitioner from the natural attitude (Depraz, 1999). Buddhist phenomenology describes this as being freed from deluded perception (Nairn, 2011b; Ricard, 2006). The eidetic reduction identifies invariants through perception and imagination. Depraz et al (1999) consider several methods of practising eidetic reduction including:

- metaphysical – the practice of doubting the separate existence of ego, and ‘neutralisation’ of the world (Depraz et al, 1999, p104), similar to the concept of equanimity (Wallace, 2010).
- psychological – leaving the world to itself, “welcoming it quietly and impassively” through “attentive observation” which Husserl referred to as a ‘doing nothing’ with an ‘egoistical affection’ going on in the background (Depraz, 1999, p104), similar to the mindfulness practice of resting in the midst of present experience (Mindfulness Association, 2011).
- interpersonal – through senses and emotions, coming to know the body more intensely and more nuanced, and through one’s own corporeality, engaging in ‘co-reduction’ (Depraz, 1999, p105), authentic engagement with the other; a similar process occurs in mindful inquiry (Mindfulness Association, 2011; and insight dialogue (Kramer, 2007).

Thompson (2007) considers that the Husserl’s epoche has been neglected in the subsequent phenomenological literature of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who created their own methods of phenomenological reduction, but recognises that contemporary phenomenologists are now developing practical methods of using the epoche to investigate consciousness. Depraz et al (1999) recognise the similarities between the phenomenological reduction and the practices of Buddhist mindfulness and insight practices, and note that the force exerted by

the natural attitude are what Buddhism refers to as suffering. As the redirection of attention from external to internal is experienced as a “wrenching” (ibid, p8), Depraz et al, alluding to mindfulness, advise the building of skilful practice, noting that the beginner cannot simultaneously engage with the outside world and practise shifting attention inwardly, but when mastery is gained through practice, “suspension can co-exist in a completely natural way with action in a fully worldly situation” (Depraz et al, 1999, p9). Similar to Nairn and Shapiro, Husserl (1954/1970) emphasised that an attitudinal shift is required to break free from the natural attitude, although Depraz et al (1999) note Husserl’s lack of method.

3.4 Researcher Reflexivity

Finlay (2005) holds that the phenomenological researcher should be aware of her embodied presence in talking and listening during the research exchange, in her spatial and temporal position and in the intersubjective empathic relationship of the physical beings of researcher and participant, immersing one into the other in “imaginative self-transposal” (Spiegelberg, 1975, quoted in Finlay, 2005, p13). “To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience, while simultaneously living in the moment” (Hertz, 1997, pvii-viii). Nagata notes that the blended Mindful Inquiry research method allows the researcher to “develop reflexivity on our feet” (Nagata, 2003, p34). It is precisely due to our innate capacity to feel into our own experience that we can understand the other, so the researcher must, if she is to claim phenomenological research, reflect on her own embodied experience (Finlay, 2005).

Phenomenological researchers agree that the world expresses itself through the body but Finlay (2006) notes this is often absent from research methods. Depraz reaffirms the centrality of the body when she states “our flesh is our original praxis” (Depraz, 1999, p106). Levering (1999) discusses Merleau-Ponty’s work on embodiment which considers that visual perception offers only one perspective of the perceived object; embodied movement is necessary to

allow the perceiver to comprehend the various available perspectives and to unite these into a whole, which is conceived of directly as an empirical interpretation. Merleau-Ponty described a radicalised phenomenology of embodiment, describing the ambiguity of the body; it is experienced both from within as 'me' and as an object that is 'mine' (Finlay, 2006). Toombs cited by Finlay (2006) notes that when the body does not work well, such as when there is illness, then there is a shift of attention to the body as object. Bodily self-consciousness occurs when there is a disruption of the unity of the lived body (Finlay, 2006).

Finlay (2006) advises the use of three layers of embodiment in a face-to-face phenomenological research encounter: bodily empathy; embodied self-awareness and embodied intersubjectivity. Bodily empathy occurs when expressive gestures reveal the emotion of lived experience and its intentionality; bodily gestures constitute feelings, and are not mere reflections of them (a belief also held by neuroscientist Pert, 1997). Embodied self-awareness refers to the visceral reactions evoked in the researcher when she reflects on the experience of the participant, stepping into the participant's shoes (Finlay, 2006). Gendlin (2003) refers to this as a felt sense that tells us when we are right about an interpretation. Finlay (2006) notes that proprioceptive awareness takes place at the subliminal level, and is required for us to gain access to the world. With embodied intersubjectivity, the researcher mirrors the participant in what Finlay (2006) describes as a 'depth interview', although she cautions that these approaches should be utilised as tools to explore the phenomenon; the researcher not assuming that they elicit truth, and that in using one's own experience, the researcher's voice should not be elevated above that of the participant.

Finlay (2005) encourages the use of 'reflexive embodied empathy' in the process of connecting with research participants, describing three layers of 'connecting-of', 'acting-into' and 'merging-with' the participant's bodily experience (Finlay, 2005, p4). Finlay describes empathy as a "'feeling-into' or gently sensing another person or an object in the process of trying to appreciate it" (Finlay, 2005, p5). Husserl argues that it is pre-existing bodily

intersubjectivity that enables empathy (empathy being intrinsically relational), and moreover that it is empathy with the other that enables an individual to know self and to understand that the world is larger than self, and that this intersubjective relation takes place through embodied sensory perception (Finlay, 2005). Empathy occurs when there is a felt similarity between individuals, although Finlay (2005) holds that individual differences can be transcended and need not compromise empathy. The attitudes and practices of acceptance, compassion and equanimity can be utilised to dissolve such differences (Shapiro & Wallace, 2006; Nairn, 2011a; Gilbert & Choden, 2013). Finlay (2005) points out that empathy waxes and wanes moment-to-moment, and the researcher could become unbalanced when the empathic connection disappears. Finlay describes the empathic connection variously as a dance, or as “reflections in multiple mirrors” with ripples of bodily sensations, feelings of humility and honour, replaced by fear and craving; complex layers of understanding emerging (Finlay, 2003, quoted in Finlay, 2005, p25). Finlay (2005) points to a divergence of opinion as to whether a dissolution of boundaries between researcher and participant is desirable (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, in Finlay, 2005) or should be avoided (Stein, 1916/1989). Finlay herself (2005) holds that research methods require to take account of embodied experience of empathy and reflexivity; one such method is engaging in mutual reflexivity or co-reduction.

Heidegger maintains that human experience always reflects a temporal perspective and therefore has to be understood in relation to time (Levering, 1999). This notion is integral to the Buddhist concept of suffering which occurs in a re-experiencing of past trauma or fear of the future (Hanson & Mendius, 2009). Moments of absence where the person is lost to the present are due to reliving the past, but according to Levering (1999), the distance between ‘then’ and ‘now’ is not cancelled, there is a transcendental realisation and insight. Likewise, the inherent capacity of the observer is to observe itself; however lost, the observer can return to present moment, embodied awareness (Nairn, 2011b). The innate urge is to ‘pro-tend’ towards what we expect to experience based on what we remember has just passed (Thompson, 2007). Nairn (2010a) further explains this phenomenon as resulting from the action of the

egocentric preference system, and the motivation to move towards what is pleasant and away from what is experienced as unpleasant. The practice of insight attunes the practitioner to noticing the difference in quality of the experiential immediacy of the present moment and the 'dead hand of the past' (Nairn, 2011a). The intersubjectivity of the research interview requires the skill to notice when the participant is engaging in conceptualisation – through their use of language and non-verbal cues, and the quality of their embodied engagement.

3.5 Standards of Judgement

Varela and Shear (1999) caution that first-person methodologies need to have rigour in order to be accepted as valid, and point to three shared commonalities: first-person methods are based on suspending the 'natural attitude'; followed this through with a robust process of inquiry into the phenomena; and the subsequent rendering of accounts that are open to intersubjective feedback. Phenomenology, like mindfulness, concerns itself with internal experience through the lens of a systematic experiential science, albeit arguably radically dissimilar to what science is understood to be in a positivist sense.

Concepts of validity (i.e. the extent to which the findings reflect the data (Noble & Smith, 2015)); and reliability (i.e. the consistency of the research processes (ibid)) developed for quantitative research have been rejected by some qualitative researchers on the basis that the two categories of approach belong in opposing paradigms where the notion of reality is treated differently (Trochim, 2006). Stenbacka (2001, p552) believes that reliability is a "misleading" concept in qualitative research; Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002) hold that reliability is a consequence of validity. Trochim (2006) would not be so hasty to dispense with concepts of reliability and validity, holding that all research makes some assumptions about reality, however that is defined. Morse et al (2002) too disagree, arguing to re-establish validity and reliability

credentials for qualitative research methods that do not rely on retrospective methodological evaluation.

The paradigmatic difference between quantitative and qualitative research approaches is highlighted by Golafshani (2003). In quantitative research reliability is demonstrated by the extent to which results are replicable, accurate for the study population and consistent over time. Golafshani (2003) indicates problems with this concept in the social sciences: participants may become sensitised to repeat exposure to research instruments and there may be participant characteristics that remain unaccounted for. In the context of quantitative research, construct validity refers to whether the research accurately measures what was intended, where the construct relates to the theoretical basis of the research. Qualitative research, on the other hand, examines phenomena in their naturalistic state in order to understand more deeply their nature and draw inferences that can be applied to other similar situations. Abduction according to Reichertz (2004) is the process by which inference emerges from the juxtaposition of a collection of features within the data “in the presence of genuine doubt or uncertainty...” (ibid, p307). Establishment of validity, or credibility, then depends to a great extent on the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). Although there remain no universally agreed standards for rigour in qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015), Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four alternative test criteria to validity and reliability: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity), and moreover assert that they should be treated as mutually inclusive under the overarching concept of trustworthiness; a position shared by Seale (1999) and Golafshani (2003), and one that has progressively influenced the field of qualitative research.

Phenomenology is a post-modern approach where truth is viewed as a matter of perspective, and consciousness is viewed as “multiple, constructed holistic realities with knower and known inseparable and interactive” (Finlay, 2009, p16); reflecting the position of alethic pluralism (Lynch, 2008). It falls from this philosophical worldview that the process of making meaning from the data gathered in phenomenological research should be undertaken with great care

so as to avoid reductionism. Walker claims that by its nature, qualitative research may have higher validity than quantitative research (Walker, 1985). Lester (1999) agrees that phenomenological research operating on the principle of “minimum structure and maximum depth” is robust in indicating the presence of factors and their effect, but not their prevalence in the population (Lester, 1999, p2). Whilst generalisability is not generally held to be a strong feature of qualitative research, Leung (2015) holds that the practice of knowledge synthesis should make it possible to transfer the results of one study to a different setting should account be taken of the context and assumptions of the original study (Trochim, 2006). Whilst qualitative research may not be replicable, the researcher should demonstrate how the research findings depend on the contextual dynamic of the research; this can be shown through reference to raw data and the treatment of data (Golafshani, 2003). Measures also should be taken to call attention to bias and to ensure that qualitative findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others.

Reliability, or the extent to which the results are reproducible, is more problematic in qualitative than in quantitative research. Reliability is of issue when the spoken interview is transcribed into a written text (Kvale, 1996). However, Walker (1985) argues that peer reflection can improve reliability. Van Manen (2009) states that “phenomenology directs the gaze towards the regions where meaning originates” (Finlay, citing Van Manen, 2009, p14), with Bentz and Shapiro arguing that the closer the researcher is to the research object, the more accurate is the meaning interpreted (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). For Finlay this reflects both the “rigour and resonance” found within phenomenology (Finlay, 2009, p14).

Creswell and Miller (2000) examine means of establishing validity in qualitative research and identify several key procedures. Through the researcher lens, triangulation may be used to collect data through multiple methods, the researcher may look for disconfirming evidence within the data, and may disclose and bracket bias (researcher reflexivity). Through the research participant lens, member checking is an important process in which the participant has the opportunity to feedback on raw data and narrative text; the

researcher may also collaborate at various stages with the participant. Through the lens of peer and readers, the researcher may provide an audit trail for critical examination, provide an account that is rich in detailed description, and call upon a peer to review the procedures and data analysis. Similar strategies are highlighted by Noble & Smith (2015). According to Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria, the findings of the research should be credible to the participant on the basis that the participant is the sole arbiter of their experience; the view also held by Gilbert (2006). By such means, qualitative research may be defended (Golafshani, 2003).

On the other hand, Morse et al (2002) argue that such strategies do not in themselves ensure quality, and moreover risk discrediting qualitative research as a scientific endeavour. Morse et al (2002) call for sound verification strategies to be used in the development of the research not merely in its evaluation. Morse et al (2002) cite lack of researcher responsiveness as the foremost hazard: rote application of procedure, not "listening to the data", failure to test theoretical assumptions, and inability to analyse data (ibid, p11). Methodological coherence calls for the research question, the data and the methods to be aligned and adapted, and for appropriate sampling. Data collection and analysis should be iterative, the researcher required to alternate micro and macro perspectives in gradual maturation of a grounded theory (Morse et al, 2002).

The Husserlian position with respect to phenomenological validity is that "knowledge that is valid is self-evident" (Langdrige, 2007, p155); it "expresses the intuited essence" (Soderhamn, 2001, p14). Essence can be surfaced by use of the phenomenological reduction which "slackens the intentional threads to the world so that we can see it better" (Soderhamn, 2001, p14). Meaning can be made through validation in the raw data, in the evidence of the lived experience (i.e. operational intentionality) (Soderhamn, 2001). Beck (1994) looks at three different approaches to validity from within the field of phenomenology: Colaizza (1978), Giorgi (1985), and Van Kaam (1996). Giorgi's method is firstly to consider the whole description then discriminate into meaning units based on the phenomenon under study. The researcher draws

out the expression of insight from each of the meaning units, re-expresses the meaning to make the insight stand out, thereafter synthesises all the meaning units into a narrative that reflects the participant's whole experience. Colaizza (1978) makes a further validation by referring back to the participant on the findings, considering them co-researchers, while Van Kaam (1966) refers the findings to external expert opinion. Giorgi (1985) holds that the participant describes their experience in everyday terms, whereas the researcher inquires through a wholly different psychological lens, and so cautions against using participants in the validation of findings; and indeed also takes issue with the employment of external experts who sit outwith the researcher/participant relationship. However, where participants, researcher and indeed available external experts have a shared experience, it would seem advantageous to consider engaging in a constructive critical co-appraisal of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.6 Summary

Synergies surfacing across the full extent of the literature point to the relevance of Western phenomenology to the experience of practitioners of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom practices. In addition to considerable correlation at the philosophical and psychological levels, I suggest that a synergy of methods of practice, teaching and research drawn from across Buddhist and Western approaches has potential to enhance the activity of phenomenological research and the application of mindfulness to the interpersonal domain. Embedded in embodied, empathic relationship, I argue that the research conversation constitutes an insight dialogue. Reflection, especially carried out in discourse with the research participant, is equivalent to mindfulness inquiry aiming at deepening practice, building capacity for compassion and creating conditions for insight. The wholeness of the human experience is the ground for the examination of lived experience, in both phenomenological research and insight practice, therefore I argue that skills developed by following Nairn's (2012) methods are wholly fitted for the practice of phenomenological research.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN

PART 2 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.7 Introduction

As has been argued in chapter 3 part 1, an understanding of the structure of the phenomenological reduction and the practical skills necessary to carry it out can be derived from Buddhist phenomenology and can provide the phenomenological researcher with essential tools of the trade. The dynamic pull of the natural attitude is illuminated by Nairn (2012), and his methods offer practical remedies for working skilfully with subliminal psychological material. In turn, this should enable the phenomenological researcher to be more aware of researcher bias, allowing for sustained mindful awareness while immersed in the flow of the interview and in data analysis. Phenomenological methods for writing reflexively, such as phenomenological protocol (Groenewald, 2004) and methods for sensitively explicating meaning (i.e. pointing to interpretation from within the phenomenon) could support a widening out from the intrapersonal psychology of mindfulness, compassion and insight to its bearing in the lived world. Whilst there are variations in both methodology and method within the field of phenomenological research, Finlay (2009) is of the opinion that all phenomenological researchers should employ the procedure of bracketing the purpose of which is to enable phenomenological reduction by disclosing and working with assumptions and bias within the research. Whilst the phenomenological literature talks about setting aside bias, I argue that the process itself is a mindful one of noticing, accepting and becoming curious about assumptions, beliefs and prejudices, where the bias could be considered in a way to set itself aside. Van Manen (1990) argues that bringing the self into the research is pertinent when “*my* experience could be *our* experience”(ibid, p57). Because of the requirement to demonstrate reflexivity (Finlay, 2006) and the centrality of the researcher’s own perspective within phenomenological methodologies (Benz & Shapiro, 1998), it should be noted this chapter incorporates first-personal statements by the researcher where this might assist the reader’s understanding of the researcher’s journey.

3.8 Research Focus and Approach

The research questions originate in the researcher's experience and previous engagement in mindfulness studies, and have become more defined in the course of reviewing the literature. The focus of the research is interpretive - to gain a deep understanding of the nature of lived experience, and a number of preliminary research questions were examined, categorised and redefined (Andrews, 2003) resulting in two main focus points of the research.

The principal aim of this study is to gain understanding of the lived experience of people who have committed to and are engaged in the long term practice of mindfulness, compassion and insight methods. Specifically, the study is concerned with how participants understand and enact the concepts of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight and how they live mindfully in contemporary times, and the extent to which their practices traverse and permeate their life journey. The study provides a counterpoint to the current body of quantitative research and the focus on short mindfulness courses, as outlined in Chapter 2. Kornfield's 1979 study of the experience of traditional Vipassana insight practitioners suggests that practitioners experience a non-linear learning process, with aspects of transcendental development that would be inaccessible to self-report questionnaires. To gain access to what such experiences are like for the individual practitioner, several researchers have recommended utilising a phenomenological approach i.e. Bentz & Shapiro (1998), Bergomi et al (2013), Williams et al (2011) and Shonin et al (2014).

In the course of reviewing the literature, and on the basis of the synergies between Buddhist and Western phenomenologies, a further research aim emerged related to how the praxis of mindfulness, compassion and insight might enable and enhance a phenomenological research experience and might prepare the researcher to become a phenomenologist (Van Manen, 1990). Thompson (2007) notes that: "attention and meta-awareness could be flexible and trainable skills, so that through various first person and second person methods, individuals could become more attuned or sensitised to aspects of their experience that might otherwise remain inaccessible to them" (ibid, p306). It is to that end that the second research topic is introduced, namely, inquiry

into the experience of researching mindfully, utilising the skills gained from the practice of mindfulness, compassion and insight.

Whilst the four aspects of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social theory and Buddhism of Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) are highly relevant to a phenomenological treatment of mindfulness practice, this research approach takes its form from the understandings of fundamental synergies reflected in the review of the literature, particularly relating to embodied empathy. The two-fold research question: what is it like to live a mindful life? and what is it like to research mindfully? creates a turn within this study; laterally from the participant to the researcher, and inwardly to the essential structure of being-in-the-world mindfully and insightfully.

“Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques” (Van Manen, 1984, p27); however, rigour can be assured through a constant process of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, with techniques reflecting both the phenomenon and the intersubjectivity between the researcher and the participant (Finlay, 2009 & 2011). To achieve this, a reflexive-relational approach has been adopted which Finlay (2011) notes specifically engages empathic and embodied intersubjectivity between the researcher and participant and facilitates reflexivity. The rationale for using Finlay’s general approach is that she views phenomenology as a ‘way of being’ not solely a research approach (Finlay, 2011, p12). Whilst Finlay’s approach has provided guidance, it is typical of phenomenological research that methodological techniques and procedures are developed specific to each study in such a way as to allow maximum engagement with the research participants and their experiences; and in so doing, this study has drawn from the work of a wide range of early and contemporary phenomenologists.

In the development of a set of phenomenological techniques and procedures, a set of methodological criteria was established to support the research objectives and to provide reflective rigour to counter the criticisms put forward by Morse et al (2002). These criteria are:

- a) does the technique or procedure allow the researcher to feel connected to and remain in felt-connection with the participant throughout?
- b) does the technique or procedure help simplify what is complex and elucidate what is hidden?
- c) does the technique or procedure provide the conditions for the researcher to progress freely without inhibition or distraction?
- d) is the technique or procedure easy to use and time-efficient?

An improvement science approach for rapid small-scale testing of data collection and interpretation techniques was utilised (Langley et al, 2009). This involved testing out a sequence of modifications to a technique or procedure using a simple Excel chart to track the subjective effect of each small scale change (appendix A). The effect was assessed against the methodological criteria described above. As a result of using this approach, the set of methods, techniques and procedures was developed systematically over a period of four months based on partial data from two participants, before being scaled up. The data collection techniques are described in 3.10. The interpretation techniques and procedures are described in 3.12, and can be examined in appendices E to G.

3.9 Participants

Sampling for qualitative research is usually purposive in that participants are selected on the basis of their ability to allow access to the research phenomenon (Walker, 1985). For hermeneutic phenomenological research, Langdrige (2007) advises homogeneity so as to reduce variability; to restrict the sample to those who share the focal life experience and whose demography does not vary dramatically. However, as the aim of the study was to explore the possibilities afforded by living a mindful life, there appeared little to be gained by overly-restricting the sampling criteria. Cohen et al (2000) take

a systematic but pragmatic approach to sampling, using three framework options: experience of place, experience of time, and ways of talking about experiences. Using this framework, the sample was narrowed to practitioners of mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom who were or had been students on the MSc Studies in Mindfulness course at the University of Aberdeen on cohorts 2010 to 2013; this programme being currently the sole international secular mindfulness programme covering all four components of Neff's (2014) Mindfulness umbrella. In addition, the MSc programme requires students to apply mindfulness in the context of their workplace; as a result students have practised applying mindfulness beyond the personal. Whilst there are limitations to this approach - students and researcher may lack variation in their approach to secular mindfulness, with a bias in favour of Nairn's theoretical perspective - there are also advantages in that participants share a coherent practice base and have committed to long-term practice.

Rather than unduly limiting the criteria early in the sampling process and risking being unable to recruit an adequate number of sufficiently committed participants, applications were invited from across the four available intakes to the MSc programme from 2010 through to 2013 on the basis that recruitment from all intakes would allow capture of the maturation of practice and the mindfulness journey through time. Participation in the research was presented as an opportunity for guided reflection and engagement in an innovative research study. Talks were given to student groups in the MSc module sessions, with a two-page handout distributed seeking notes of interest (appendix B). This process allowed students to consider their commitment to the research and potential benefits for themselves as participants. Those who subsequently responded were sent or given detailed written information about the proposed research, and invited to make contact if they were willing to commit to the study, thus ensuring informed consent (University of Aberdeen, 2017). Further practical focused discussions followed with students who had indicated commitment, regarding the prospective participant's experience, availability for interview, and the time commitment required. Participants' explicit written consent to participate was sought as advised by Groenewald

(2004) and in accordance with Scottish Educational Research Association guidelines (2005) (appendix C).

Because of the in-depth nature of phenomenological research, the participant cohort is small in number; Groenwald (2004) advises between two and ten participants, and six were recruited to this study. Following the recruitment process outlined above, four people confirmed commitment and subsequently engaged in the research; three people initially confirmed then did not follow up. Of the initial recruits, there were none from intakes 2011 and 2013. As there were perceived benefits from participation from across the intakes, two people from these cohorts who had initially indicated interest but had not followed up were approached. They subsequently confirmed commitment and engaged in the research. Ultimately, a cohort of participants was recruited whose members had varying length of experience of practice and were at different stages of their mindfulness journey: two from the 2010 intake, one from the 2011 intake, two from the 2012 intake and one from the 2013 intake. While phenomenological research does not require representative sampling (Creswell, 1998), there is a gender and age balance in the cohort similar to the overall MSc Studies in Mindfulness student population (Nixon et al, 2016). Participants numbered two men and four women, with one participant in the age range 25-34 years, two in the 35-44 age range, two in the 45-54 age range and one in the 55-60 age range. All were white and European or North American.

Each participant was engaged with for a period of between 7 to 12 months, and whilst this does not constitute a longitudinal study, pauses between interviews of between 3 to 12 months (appendix D) presented opportunities for reflection on maturation of practice and for exploration of different time horizons and fusion of horizons, where previously held experience is superseded by more recent insight (Gadamer, 1975/2004). As a consequence, there were opportunities to capture the depth, breadth and non-linear nature of the insight journey that are largely absent from the existing body of contemporary mindfulness research.

3.10 Data Collection

3.10.1 Preparation

“So many good ideas fade into the background because they are not energised, not brought to the foreground through preparation and work on noticing” (Mason, 2002, p77).

As the research aim was to explore the lived experience of practitioners, preparatory work was undertaken to help orientate the research in a wide experiential framework. A broad social science viewpoint was taken incorporating psychological, social, professional, spiritual, and environmental perspectives, suggested by the researcher’s own knowledge and direct experience of Mindfulness. Eastern and Western models of wellbeing (Epstein, 1995; Rybak & Russell-Chapin, 1998; Goleman, 2003; Allione, 2008) and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006) were reviewed for wellbeing domains such as physical health, emotional wellbeing, intellectual enrichment, life-work satisfaction, social effectiveness and spiritual awareness; human needs such as physiological survival, safety, belonging/love, esteem, self-actualisation, self-transcendence; and mental afflictions such as pride, jealousy, anger, attachment, and ignorance. Although these frameworks were not utilised overtly in the research process, their consideration served as conceptual preparation for attention to participants’ interpretations of their life journeys, and afforded the researcher time for reflection on personal experience, presuppositions, biases and pre-judgements.

The standard phenomenological data collection method is interview, structured in such a way as to draw “upon an implicit bodily and emotional mode of knowing that allows a privileged access to the subject’s lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p125). However, the intimacy of the one-to-one interview and the personal nature of the content presented challenges. Although mindfulness as taught by Nairn is not a therapy per se, it has therapeutic value, and the depth of self-examination ensuing from insight and wisdom practices is as profound as any psychotherapy (Nairn, 2013). I had to be mindful of and refrain from impulses to intervene or to disconnect, as participants recounted emotional

experiences; an example of this is described in chapter 5 part 1, section 5.2.2.5 where I reflect on Patricia's third interview:

"I was very aware of ... there being that anxious energy that flutters and flickers and keeps me sharp maybe and a bit on an edge, a little bit verging on the 'must get it right', then seeing that and allowing that to just be there and choosing to re-engage with Patricia."

Phenomenological research according to Van Manen is concerned with "investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it" (Van Manen, 1990, p30). With that in mind, other methods of gathering data from in-time lived experience were considered including reflective journals as well as interviews. Initially participants were invited to share their reflective journals as part of the research process; however, only one participant chose to do so. Rather than subject the written material to analysis, which would have been time-consuming and unbalanced, the material was utilised as background contextual data for subsequent interview inquiry.

3.10.2 Interview

"Not unlike the poet, the phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations—and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative affect" (Van Manen, 2007, p13).

Finlay (2011) encourages an attitude of privilege and humility towards the participant in recognition of their contribution. Prior to engaging in this study, participants attended presentations and discussion delivered by the researcher as course tutor on the subject of phenomenological research theory and methodology and its relevance to mindfulness research. Thus began a shared enthusiasm for the study and a reciprocal sense of privilege which became evident in the ongoing researcher/participant relationship. This is encapsulated in a statement made by the researcher during co-reflection with James (chapter 5, part 1, section 5.2.1.7):

“I felt so privileged to be able to sit with what was going through you without shutting down. [*James: That’s what I was sensing from you.*] I just felt very open and touched and able to see some of my stuff that’s coming up and really feel for you.”

The process of interview was undertaken with the intention of honouring the participants, eliciting their most significant and emblematic experiences and supporting mindful reflection, using a reflexive-relational approach (Finlay, 2011). In adopting this approach, skills acquired in mindfulness and compassion practice, and in the process of mindful inquiry were utilised. Kramer describes the ability to establish a “stable, unidentified awareness” when in dialogue with another (Kramer, 2007, p152). Kramer (2007) describes a flow to receptive listening that moves within the listener and between the listener and the talker, mirroring the intra-personal stream of attention. Dynamic explorative listening is described by Kramer as active meditation (Kramer, 2007). The fact that inquiry takes place within the experience of mindfulness practice, imbues it with awareness of the “exquisite sensitivities” present for both the listener and the talker, thus increasing compassionate connection (Kramer, 2007, p156). This is consistent with portrayals of researcher/participant engagement in phenomenological research, e.g.

“interviewing is a fine art requiring exquisite sensitivity to mood, nuance and timing which enables the researcher to formulate questions that will deepen the interchange or simply remain silent witnessing the emergence of new awareness” (Nagata, 2003, p34).

A semi-structured approach was considered with a view to consistency (Langdridge, 2007); initially the intention was to design questions around the models of wellbeing and need outlined in 3.10.1. However, Gadamer’s notion that we not only use language to describe our experience, but that language and our use of it shapes our existence (Langdridge, 2007) taken with Van Manen’s dictum that the phenomenon under investigation should determine the structure of the description (Van Manen, 1984) suggested that using a pre-determined question set could create an unnecessary interruption in the participant’s flow of consciousness and obstructively direct the content of the interview at the outset. Van Manen stresses that “the essence of the [research] question is the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities” (Van Manen,

1990, p43). This 'keeping open' involves a high degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Langdridge, 2007). Consequently, a more open approach was adopted, with the aim of steering the participant towards a free narrative account of their lived experience (Finlay, 2011), eliciting their life stories and supporting the participant to make sense of their experience (Cohen et al, 2000). During the interview, meaning was clarified by reflecting back to the participant and by allowing the participant time to explore all possibilities of meaning (Kvale, 1996).

When using a narrative approach, interview questions should point the participant towards narrative description and should serve to open up the field of inquiry: Cohen et al (2000) advise starting with broad general questions then probing the answers for greater detail. To allow for a broad, holistic examination of the subject matter, an unstructured approach was adopted, using an initial question: "what is alive for you?" to orientate the participant followed by open questions emerging from the subsequent dialogue. This approach was tested on one participant, James, in a first interview, with feedback solicited in a co-reflection session immediately following the interview (see chapter 5, part 1). Both the participant and researcher found that the approach supported a deep inquiry into what was both meaningful and current to the participant. The question "what is alive for you?" was used unprompted by the participant as a cue throughout the interview to bring himself back to topic. This question was subsequently used as the initial and core question for all narrative interviews.

Kahn (2000) advises at least two interviews with the second interview used to reflect and review previous responses. In this case, data was gathered from each participant in either two or three narrative interviews with an interval of at least 7 months between the first and last occasion (see appendix D for interview scheduling) and four participants engaged in a subsequent reflective interview. Narrative interviews were carried out between June 2013 and January 2015. As advised by Kvale (1996), each interview was boundaried by a short briefing and debriefing with the participant, which served to inform the participant, co-create the approach to the interview, reduce tension, support the participant post-interview, and enable reflection. All narrative interviews began

with the “what is alive for you?” question, but second and subsequent narrative interviews were informed by lines of inquiry which were drawn up from an initial immersion in the transcript of the preceding interview. Interviews were recorded on a Sony digital IC Recorder. The interviews took place in a variety of settings suited to the time and geographical location of the interview, and the preferences of the participant, including private sitting room, hotel room, meeting room, retreat centre, shrine room, outdoors in a retreat centre garden and, on one occasion when a face-to-face interview was not possible, by Skype.

3.10.3 Transcribing the Spoken Narrative

Phenomenological researchers value the immersion that results as a consequence of transcribing the data (i.e. Finlay, 2011; Graham, 2011); however, that requires to be balanced against the time available and the volume of data recorded. Optimally, two or three interviews each around an hour-long with every participant was aimed for in order to establish a trusted relationship, to probe for emotional meaning and to enable participants to self-reflect. This generated around seventeen hours of recording to be transcribed, so an offer of assistance from a trusted individual not known to any of the participants was accepted to create the first rough transcription drafts, thereafter the draft transcripts were checked and refined by the researcher against the voice recordings allowing considerable measure of immersion. Divergences between the transcriptions that pointed to misinterpretation allowed assumptions to be explored and corrections to be made, thus affording a degree of reliability (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Repeated listening of audio recordings and the inclusion of non-verbal features (pauses, voice tone, laughs etc) can assist in authenticity and is necessary for valid psychological interpretation of spoken narrative (Kvale, 1996). Each recording was listened to carefully at least three times in order for immersion in the participant’s narrative and orientation to the style of discourse. This understanding was drawn on in the subsequent creation of narrative texts (see section 3.12). Occasional time markers were inserted into the transcript to improve access to the voice

recording. This approach also corresponds to Creswell & Miller's (2000) criterion of prolonged engagement. Phenomenological transcription should attempt to remain as true as possible to the discourse of the participant, so each recording was transcribed in full including non-linguistic verbal utterances (e.g. 'um', 'ah' and laughter), greater granularity not called for in phenomenological research (Langdridge, 2007). The word count for the full set of narrative interviews for all participants exceeded 180,000 words; this did not include the reflection interviews or post-interview reflections.

True to the reflexive-relational approach, explicit additional methods were devised to promote researcher reflexivity. A short period of mindfulness practice was undertaken by the researcher prior to each interview to centre in the present moment experience and take stock of emotional state and expectations for the interview. Field notes in the form of verbal reflection were taken as near as possible to the interview event (Groenwald, 2004); where practicable, recorded immediately post-interview, including reflection on the non-verbal interpersonal interaction of the interview (Kvale, 1996). Within the researcher reflections, the following phenomena were noted: the voice, tone, speed of vocal delivery and content; the participant's and researcher's bodily movements; the researcher's preferences and reactions to delivery and content; and the meaning made of these. Recordings of the researcher reflections were transcribed and included in the interview transcript set to aid explication of the research findings. Other methods emerged, stimulated by the intention to practice reflexively, including occasions of spontaneous co-reflection with participants immediately post-interview - a means of achieving collaboration (Creswell & Miller, 2000) - which was found to be effective in prompting insight, and were recorded and included in the transcript set, and the exercise of physically taking the perceptual position of the participant (DeLozier & Grinder, 1995).

The transcribed interviews were sent to each participant, in aid of openness and transparency (University of Aberdeen, 2017) and to empower the participant (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Whilst valued by the participants, this also

created dilemma as noted by Patricia in co-reflection before her second interview:

“I found it quite surprising and a bit overwhelming reading twelve pages of a stream of consciousness, and I thought, well, shall I try and analyse this? Shall I try and make some notes? and I decided not to. I decided I would rather either talk to you from where I am now if that’s what you want, or to be led into talking from your suggestions ... however it is that you want to lead the process.”

3.11 Ethics

Ethical research is practically founded on the researcher’s decisions, actions, relationship and commitments and extends from the building of trust to the ending of the research relationship, central to which is an ethical relational awareness with reference to power differentials and wider socio-cultural status (Hallett, 2013). This is highly relevant to phenomenological research, with its centrality of reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005), and points back to the qualitative research standards described by Creswell (1998). In interview research, the researcher’s importance is magnified because she is the main data collection instrument (Kvale, 1996); therefore the researcher’s integrity is of fundamental importance. For this study, a mature and contextual approach to ethics was afforded by being actively conscious of researcher bias and the complexities of the researcher/participant relationship, and by engaging in overt dialogue with participants about ethical issues. In compliance with the Scottish Education Research Association (2005) guidelines, explicit written consent was sought from participants (appendix C). Although participants on this study were able to understand implications and give their full consent, there were three specific issues of ethical concern that were particularly relevant to this study: power differential, bureaucratic burden and confidentiality.

Although Cohen et al (2000) advocate the separation of the role of researcher, this was not achievable as the researcher had various pre-existing connections with the participants and it was these very connections that drew prospective participants to the research study. As well as the researcher/participant

relationship, the researcher related to participants as a tutor on the MSc programme, as a student peer of two of the participants, and an occasional employee of one participant, whose organisation also funded the researcher's student fees. I drew on my training as a mindfulness teacher working within the UK Good practice guidelines for teaching mindfulness-based courses, which incorporates an ethics element (UK Network for Mindfulness Based Teachers, 2015), to work with the power imbalance inherent in these relationships. Hallett (2013) highlights the shifting boundaries of a research relationship when there are other types of relationship with a research participant. Throughout the research process, I remained alert to "ethically important moments" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004 *in* Hallett, 2013, p4) at which point I then decided how to respond. For example, one participant jocularly likened the interview to a therapy session. Whilst I appreciated the cathartic effect that the discussion had had for the participant, I took time to differentiate the two processes to call attention to our researcher/participant relationship.

The Scottish Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines state that the collection of data must be sufficiently fulsome to be robust, but the process of giving of information must be of commensurate benefit to the participant to balance their effort and time engaging in the study (SERA, 2005). To ensure sufficient quality and richness of data, the research design involved considerable commitment from the participants – to engage in three or four interviews and to reflect on the research process and output over a two- to three-year period fitting in with my study schedule, so I took deliberate action to care for participants. Interviews were arranged for times and at locations that suited participants; interview had a dual purpose of providing research material whilst supporting participants' mindful inquiry and aiding insight; participants were provided with their interview transcripts, audio recordings (when requested), data spreadsheets and narrative texts, so that they could have knowledge of how their words were transformed into narrative meanings. I informed participants of the immediate impact of their input on my own practice, which was significant, and I thanked participants frequently for their generosity.

Because of the nature of participants' personal insight journeys, participants have shared sensitive personal and social information during the research process. As the participant group is small in number, drawn from a socially-connected larger student group, presenting the findings in such a way as to protect confidentiality has been challenging, particularly as several individuals have made their participation known to others within the MSc student group. The following steps were therefore considered to protect confidentiality. Each participant was given a pseudonym, with each asked if they wished to provide a preferred pseudonym to replace their real names. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), all electronic data was stored on a password protected computer. When paper copies of electronic data were required, these were stored in a locked filing cabinet and then subsequently shredded. With the consent of the participants, electronic data will be retained for a period of 5 years on completion of the study, in line with the University of Aberdeen Records Retention Schedules (2014). As stated above, participants were sent electronic copies of their data when requested in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2005. As the research approach involved keeping participant accounts both richly detailed and whole, I endeavoured to disguise non-essential aspects of the life stories of participants in the preparation of narrative texts. I discussed with the participants the implication of how data would be used in the write up of the study, amending texts accordingly and shared final drafts with each participant before inclusion in the thesis. In line with SERA guidance (2005), research participants were free to withdraw from the research at any point (appendix C); however, none did withdraw and several favourable comments have been made regarding participant benefit from engagement with the study.

3.12 Explicating Meaning

3.12.1 Segmenting the data

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) point out that “the basic datum of phenomenology is the conscious human being” (ibid, p98), so all data on each participant was

compiled into one narrative transcript set per participant (Lester, 1999) (figure 1). The main challenge thereafter was reducing the volume of data whilst retaining and surfacing salient meaning. Initially, a basic Process Recording (PR) technique was utilised in Microsoft Word which sets an interpretation column alongside the original transcript. This is an approach familiar from the field of social work and utilised by me in mindfulness teaching (Gyaltsen & Kellock, 2016) which specifically allows for the researcher’s “feelings and gut-level reactions” to be recorded (Fordham University, 2013, p9). This was combined with reference to Finlay’s and Van Manen’s guidance on interpretation, but when subjected to a test of change as described in 3.8 and appendix A, the method was found to be cumbersome and did nothing to reduce the volume of data or surface key points.

Figure 1

			INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
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The Process Recording method was then enhanced by a technique used in descriptive phenomenology, based on Giorgi’s (1985) concept of meaning units as utilised by Pietersen, 2002, and Graham, 2011), where the full transcript is segmented into numbered Natural Meaning Units (NMUs), each with a single meaning (figure 2). This technique proved immediately effective in simplifying and elucidating the complex transcript.

Figure 2

		NATURAL MEANING UNIT NUMBER	INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT SEGMENTED INTO NMUs
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The creation of the NMUs was aided by reflection on aligned categories drawn from Western phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990; Heidegger, 1927/1962;

Finlay, 2011) and Mindfulness (Brach, 2003; Nairn, 2010; Gilbert, 2010). These categories (table 1) reflect existential themes common to both disciplines as established in Chapter 2.

Table 1

PHENOMENOLOGY	MINDFULNESS
THROWNNES – thrown into a world not created by us	EMERGENT PATTERNS WITHIN THE FLOW OF LIFE – not our fault (Gilbert)
BEING-TOWARDS-DEATH – finite nature of life (Heidegger)	SUFFERING – ego clinging (Nairn)
AUTHENTICITY – recognising the ‘being-towards-death’ reality (Heidegger)	AUTHENTICITY – wholeness; involves radical acceptance of everything about ourselves (Brach)
LIVED HUMAN RELATION/ BEING-WITH/ CARE/ COMPASSION – interrelatedness; otherness in the world, concern with others (Heidegger; Van Manen; Finlay)	COMPASSION – inherent capacity for compassion; relational suffering
LIVED SPACE/ SPATIALITY – location of experience; sense of insidedness/out-sidedness (Van Manen; Finlay)	EMBODIMENT – the intelligence of the body; awareness of the body is awareness of the present moment; mindful movement connects the body with space and time
LIVED BODY /EMBODIMENT - subjective sense of (Van Manen; Finlay)	BODY/MIND – inextricably interlinked, perceived through thoughts, emotions and sensations (Nairn)
LIVED TIME /TEMPORALITY – all experience is positioned in past, present and future; how time is experienced (Van Manen; Finlay)	PRESENT MOMENT – the ability or otherwise to stay present with experience
SELF IDENTITY - What it means to be this person (Finlay)	EGOCENTRIC PREFERENCE SYSTEM – reactive, habitual process, relates to solidity of self, mediated by preference; exposure results in sense of deprivation (Nairn)
PROJECT - What drives/motivates and gives life meaning (Finlay)	INTENTION & MOTIVATION – willingness to experience; shaped by our autobiographies (Nairn)
MOOD/PERCEPTION – we live pre-reflectively through moods; our experiences are socially constructed (Heidegger; Finlay)	UNDERCURRENT – bodily sensation emotion, thought arising into conscious awareness from the subliminal/pre-conceptual layer of consciousness (Nairn)

Next, Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2008) method of Meaning Condensation was utilised, which abridges and rephrases the NMUs into shorter statements

containing the main sense of what has been said. Levering (2006) stresses that the data collected should be a lived interpretation, rather than an interpretation of an interpretation, so the processed material was ordered to enable rapid access to the original transcription and voice recordings; moreover this would subsequently afford transparency to the participant. To achieve this, the Meaning Condensation was positioned to the left of the NMUs, thus giving a flow from left to right, with the meaning units sequentially numbered in rows (figure 3). For ease of use, these steps of the procedure were transferred from Microsoft Word to Excel.

Figure 3

	MEANING CONDENSATION	NATURAL MEANING UNIT NUMBER	INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT SEGMENTED INTO NMUs
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3.12.2 Identifying Emergent Themes

All qualitative research approaches include a process of classifying and interpreting data (Creswell, 1998). Data analysis techniques depend on the preferences of the researcher (Cohen et al, 2000) and can range from coding and sorting manually to the use of increasingly sophisticated software. Crucial to the process of phenomenological research is immersion in the data (Cohen et al, 2000). In phenomenology, the experience of the research participants should be drawn out or explicated, rather than analysed for conformity with any particular hypotheses. Hycner (1999) defines explication as “investigating the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hycner, 1999, in Groenewald, 2004, p17). A range of means to achieve this was considered, both paper and electronic, e.g. NVivo, before concluding that most methods did not meet the formative criteria; either too distracting, difficult to use or not allowing me to remain ‘in touch with’ the participant. Being already accustomed to working with spreadsheets, I transferred the data into Excel to aid in the identification of themes. Transcription of recorded interviews falls somewhere between spoken and written discourse or text – originally spoken

within a temporal frame but later fixed in writing (Langdridge, 2007). To hold on to the sense of progression over time, each data row of the Excel spreadsheet was colour-coded according to which interview it derived from: interview 1 – blue, interview 2 – purple, interview 3 – green. Once the Process Recording table was transposed into Excel, an additional ‘Emergent Themes’ column was inserted to the left of the Meaning Condensation column (figure 4 showing an illustration from Patricia’s process recording analysis) and the filter function was turned on.

Figure 4

EMERGENT THEMES	MEANING CONDENSATION	NATURAL MEANING UNIT NUMBER	INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT SEGMENTED INTO NMUs
Relationship; practice; insight; conditioning	I was consciously aware of all of these different aspects that I was balancing and co-ordinating, absolutely, absolutely, because it’s so important to me, so important.	392.	I: As you described that there, it sounds very skilful, whether it was...(P: it was hard work) I don’t know, was it conscious? Were you consciously aware of all of these different aspects that you were balancing and co-ordinating? P: Yes, <i>absolutely</i> , absolutely (I:ah, wow) because it’s so important to me, so important. I: (smiles) So, to do all of that and have a conversation with someone is fairly incredible.

With reference to the Meaning Condensations and the NMUs, interpretive themes were then identified and inserted alphabetically in the Emergent Themes column. Using the filter to check for duplication and to aid categorisation, a list of themes emerged from preliminary analysis of the

transcript of the interview set. Preliminary analysis across the participants' data revealed an overlap of four broad thematic categories of personal development, learning, work, and relationships, but sub-themes were more distinctive and nuanced, e.g. 'Gillian's Big Insight', 'Connectedness and the Breath'. Analysis was continued on the individual participant narratives as singular holistic systems. A further column was inserted to the right of the segmented interview transcript, headed 'Meaning Interpretation' and attempts were made to draw out interpretations on each Natural Meaning Unit. However, this process did not allow for differing levels of interpretation to be made, focussing attention only on granular analysis, and was abandoned as a technique at the test of change stage (appendix A).

3.12.3 Hermeneutic Interpretation

One of the main challenges of phenomenological data analysis is condensing transcript data whilst avoiding reductionism. Cohen et al (2000) use the hermeneutic circle in which the parts of the text are understood in relation to the whole and vice versa; and individual texts are understood in relation to all the texts and vice versa. Simpson (2009) describes the experience of the hermeneutic spiral – encountering and understanding a phenomenon – as a tightening and then opening of a spiral; tightening with the inquiry, opening with understanding. The functionality of the Excel spreadsheet was pivotal to allow the handling of the parts of the dataset without losing touch with the whole, to enable the source of the part to be located within the chronology of the original dialogue, and to create an audit trail which could be examined by external reviewers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). That the Excel spreadsheet contained all the material in one entirety helped in several critical aspects. Being confident that the data was available and easily accessible, I was able to relax into engaging mindfully with its nuances (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). I could shift perceptual position easily in relation to the data (Mason, 2002) – at times experiencing being 'interspectively' in the interview (what are we - I and participant - doing, thinking, saying?) and at times 'extraspectively' stepping back to observe the interplay between myself and the participant. The process

of sequentially widening and then narrowing the focus allowed me to build an iterative understanding through a continuous dialectic, where meaning could be understood in context (Cohen et al, 2000).

3.12.4 From Theme Groupings to Narrative Text and Crosscutting Themes

As an aid to surfacing key themes and grouping themes, Wordle software (<http://www.wordle.net/>) was utilised to create a 'word cloud' from the content of the Emergent Theme column. This exercise surfaced key themes - the font size in Wordle increases according to frequency of the word's occurrence. Referring to the Wordle alongside the interview set, the co-occurrence of themes could be identified within theme groupings and a series of around six metathemes identified for each participant (for Aidan's Wordle, see appendix E).

Phenomenological research emphasises the collection of narrative (cf Finlay, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Anecdotal narrative gives voice to the subject's meaning of their lived experience and compels, touches and transforms the reader (Van Manen, 1990). To further condense the data and surface the key themes, the lengthy chronological narrative created from the Meaning Condensation exercise was filtered using each metatheme grouping. The themed narrative was converted into a Word document, before further condensing the material into a themed Narrative Text. Throughout the process, the original reference number was retained, ensuring that the reworded section could be traced to the original transcript and the text colour coding was also retained to demonstrate and reflect the development of metathemes throughout the chronology. Though not critical in the identification of themes and theme groupings, the use of the categories in table 1 was pivotal in the creation and interpretation of the Narrative Texts.

Bentz and Shapiro (1999) define several levels of interpretation that were utilised in forming the Narrative Texts whereby the text could be related to the participant's experiential life; the meaning of the text brought into chronological time and interpreted in relation to context; where what was intended by the

participant could be brought forth; and where my own present moment experience as researcher could be understood and incorporated or set aside in the process of bracketing. Once the set of Narrative Texts was created, each participant was offered a final interpretive interview to ascertain whether the Narrative Texts accurately reflected the life world of the participant, demonstrating validity through the procedure of member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Once each participant's narrative text had been completed and subject to interpretive dialogue, an exercise was undertaken to identify and draw out common crosscutting themes. A matrix was created, matching similar stories from each narrative (Appendix F). Participant narrative texts were thereafter reordered into separate texts under subthemes derived from the matrix, with further nuanced themes inputted into a series of MindMaps (Appendix G), providing reference for the discussion of findings comprising Chapter 5 of the thesis.

3.12.5 Surfacing the Researcher's Subjective Experience of the Research

Contemporary phenomenological research approaches lend themselves well to first person or autobiographical accounts so the same set of methods could be utilised for the treatment of the researcher reflections. Autobiography follows a similar methodological approach as participant research – creation of rich first-person description followed by hermeneutic reflection and interrogation (Finlay, 2011). In listening and re-listening to interview recordings, I could 're-member' (i.e. feel myself back into) the encounter, and also take up a new position observing the intersubjective exchange from a different spatial and temporal position. In one reflection, I noted that I became immediately aware of when my own fear and lack of confidence arose, and how that resulted in a bodily contraction and distraction. I noted that I acknowledged and accepted when this occurred, and bracketed it by shifting my attention to my bodily presence, then to the bodily presence of the participant, and then reengaged with the energy and content of the exchange. I was aware of energetic surges of gripping and

releasing within my body correlating to the arising of interest, and feelings of connection and resemblance, and a physical contraction arising when a departure or a bias occurred. Simpson (2009) experienced spaces in the hermeneutic spiral; “pauses in the work which were both natural and necessary to allow the practices of my work to settle into thoughts and feeling about what was happening” and the emergence of “identity moments” that are “transformational at the moment of analysis” (ibid, p56). Similar moments occurred for me when unforeseen meaning surfaced only when voiced aloud in reflection or co-reflection.

Researcher reflections and co-reflections were incorporated within each set of interview transcripts to aid explication of the participant narrative. In addressing the research enquiry into what it is like to research mindfully, the reflections and co-reflections were then compiled into a chronological researcher data set and treated in the same way as was the participant data, i.e. segmented into Natural Meaning Units, subject to Meaning Condensation, themes/metathemes identified and coalesced into themed Narrative Texts. This autobiographical phenomenological approach allowed me to examine the researcher journey through the activity of conducting the study as well as to aid researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Once the complete set of autobiographical themed Narrative Texts were created for my research journey, I was then able to inquire as to the extent to which I experienced the interview process as a mindful, compassionate and insightful one and to surface key aspects of the experience such that it might be applied by other researchers with a practice of mindfulness.

3.13 Verification

3.13.1 Validity Strategies

Strategies were implemented to support three perspectives on validity relevant to phenomenological research: theoretical, descriptive and conceptual validity (Creswell, 2009). For internal theoretical validity, the research should demonstrate clear association between theory and data, and put forward the

conceptual framework for the field research and subsequent data categorisation (Walker, 1985). Once recorded and transcribed, narrative data becomes a map rather than the territory; validity depends on whether the narrative is presented in a way that contextualises it within the phenomenological frame (Kvale, 1996). In building and testing theory, the philosophical and psychological theories underpinning both secular mindfulness and phenomenology were explored, as was the contexts within which each discipline was cultivated. Subsequently, a number of analogous concepts surfaced which underpinned the research methodology and provided a sympathetic contextual frame for explication of the data. Chapter 4 sets out how the principles rooted in secular mindfulness are understood by the participants and which are supported by the research findings, and explores how the experience of mindfulness gives rise to empirical knowledge of the self and the lived world.

External theoretical validity requires that the study has worth within the wider body of research literature and that it is made use of subsequent to publication. Crucially, the research has to be accessible and accessed by its potential audience. The reach of the research can be aided by 'interactive interpretation' of research findings (Walker, 1985, p193); involving verbal presentations and discussions. This research study grew from the development of a specific theoretical perspective of secular mindfulness developed from the work of Rob Nairn. Nairn situates mindfulness with the corresponding concepts of compassion, insight and wisdom, and in doing so, conceives a philosophical perspective almost entirely analogous to Western phenomenology. The juxtaposing of mindfulness and phenomenology provides a multi-layered and fresh frame of reference, which has been shared in presentation and discussions at various touch points during the study inspiring MSc students to undertake qualitative research in the field of mindfulness. Comment from academic peers has influenced the progression of the study, likely enhancing its subsequent worth to the mindfulness research community.

Descriptive validity is grounded in the quality of the data and how it is handled; how authentic are the descriptions and how descriptions reflect the participant's meaning (Walker, 1985). Data explication involves editing and therefore bias,

so I attempted to become aware of distortion, deletion and misrepresentation, and to keep to description and direct quotes as far as possible (Lester, 1999). As described above, the study was designed to capture rich descriptions of participants' life-worlds so feedback was gathered from four of the six participants that reflected to what extent the Narrative Texts represented accurately their experience. In this 'member checking' exercise (Creswell & Miller, 2000), all four reported that they recognised themselves in the narratives with Aidan considering most fully the extent to which this was the case, stating:

"It feels like my words ... When I read it it felt like a condensation of .. my words or thoughts ... so within that it feels at least accurate to the interviews ... nothing could ever be comprehensiveAgain, there could be maybe more content, but at least part of it I ... really resonate with as being, 'yeh that's me'. Some parts ... don't necessarily strike me ... but there that could be just due to the individual reading of it or just due to.... 'I've already had the thought resonant with me', if that makes sense."

Conceptual validity is concerned with the extent to which the categorisation used by the researcher fits the data, the differential between categories, and the degree of association within a category (Walker, 1985). In phenomenological research, the researcher allows themes to emerge or fall out of the data (Groenewald, 2004). As described earlier, the themes and metathemes were explicated directly from the interview data, theme names either borrowed from the words of the participant or reflective of existential theme categories shown in table 1. Metathemes were constructed from themes which commonly appeared in the transcript as occurring within a single participant's lived experience.

3.13.2 Bracketing

Whilst researcher bias is considered undesirable in quantitative research, Walker (1985) argues for the use of bias "creatively, contingently and self-consciously" in qualitative research; working with bias rather than attempting to get rid of it (ibid, p48). Cohen et al (2000) advise specific methods in phenomenological research for working with bias; counter intuitively moving

further *toward* the bias by use of critical reflection and bracketing. Understanding and treating bias in this way is wholly consistent with a mindful approach to research; building on non-judgemental acceptance of whatever arises and understanding preference in context. Finlay (2009) states that certain presuppositions should be treated with caution including scientific theories, knowledge and explanation, the truth or otherwise of what the participant says, and the personal views or theories of the researcher. These should either be acknowledged and set aside - bracketed - within the descriptive phenomenological approach, or examined and questioned within the interpretive approach. Both approaches were utilised within a relational framework where participants and researcher co-created data. One example of setting aside bias occurred during Aidan's interview, described in full in the researcher reflection in 5.2.1.2:

"At a point during the interview, self-consciousness kicked in and I shifted from being immersed in what Aidan was saying to thinking about how I was coming across. I got a little bit lost in that for a while and I lost the connection, not in an overt way, just a subtle sense of losing that connection with him as a person and his experience. It was when I heard myself think 'space cadet!' when Aidan was talking about a guru, then I noticed my judging, then felt ashamed at myself, then I parked that and leaned in again - physically leaned in - towards Aidan and opened up to what he was saying about his guru curiously. So losing connection didn't last for long because I recognised what was going on. Recognising that let me re-engage with Aidan as a person and that sense of us just being two people talking in a room together."

Below is an example of an 'embodied dialogical encounter' (Finlay, 2009, p13) extracted from the original transcript of Gillian's second interview where researcher and participant examine insight and enlightenment in relation to personal experience within the theoretical framework of mindfulness:

Participant: I've only had about four big insights but I've had other ones that have been big but not that big you know, like you get little ones, don't you, and they're kind of cumulative....

Researcher: Like little partial insights that accumulate.

P: yeh, and I think sometimes they lead to a big one, or sometimes they're just cumulative ones that are just going along so, but then you get a big one and then the big ones are the 'seeing-is-the-doing' ones.

R: *The immediately liberating ones, uh huh.*

P: *yeh, and then something shifts, yeh yeh*

R: *And then all sorts of unexpected things fall out of that.*

P: *Yeh, because it's ignorance you see, you know, like you don't know what's covered by ignorance. You've no idea whatsoever what it might be.*

R: *I suppose that's a hallmark of a deep insight, isn't it, that is unexpected.*

P: *Yeh! well, this is like what Rob's been saying this week, isn't it, you know if you really have expectations where you're going then you're setting yourself up for failure 'cause you just don't know.....you know, like some people ask questions, 'oh, what's it like to be enlightened?' No-one can answer that question until they get there, you know, and even then they can't answer in a language.... You can experience enlightenment but you can't, you can't then share that experience with someone who's not enlightened, no you can't, otherwise they would!*

R: *Yes, uh huh, yeh, you would immediately be able to say, 'this is what it's like' and...*

P: *'and this is how you do it', yeh. Well, they kind of do say, this is the path you want to go, but, but they, but they, you know, I think that em.....*

R: *'Cause enlightenment's not a thing, is it?*

P: *No, it's experience.*

R: *It's experience, yeh.*

P: *and God knows what there is after enlightenment!*

R: *The very absence of thingness, I would imagine.*

P: *See this is the thing...*

R: *..... imagining! (laughs)*

P: *Yeh, yeh,.....and there's a risk with this kind of work that you set people with an expectation that they've got to be all spacious and joyful and, you know, ... and then people fabricate and that's a problem.*

R: *Yeh, yeh. They probably don't know they've fabricated.*

P: *So people get stuck.*

These examples demonstrate researcher reflexivity within face-to-face data gathering and reflection stages of the procedure. The practice of setting aside the 'natural attitude' is also evident in the participants' own accounts of their experiences, and in the iterative nature of the meaning interpretation procedures as laid out in 3.12.

3.14 Conclusion

The research participants in this study have embarked on a long-term personal journey; engaging in practices in order to live their lives mindfully, compassionately and insightfully. The development and use in this study of a pluralistic set of methods and research procedures that is grounded in both Buddhist and Western phenomenology has the potential to explicate sympathetically participants' nuanced lived experiences. In accordance with the standards for qualitative research suggested by Creswell (1998, drawn from Howe & Eisenhardt, 1990), I have established in chapter 3 part 2 that the research focus has driven the data collection and analysis methods; that the data collection and data analysis techniques are technically competent; that assumptions are made explicit through use of methods; that the phenomenological research methods used are robust; and that as a result, the research findings have validity. In accord with the principle of being "maximally descriptive" and "minimally conjectural" (Thompson, 2007, p302), participants' sense-making has emerged through phenomenological treatment of the data.

In phenomenological research, according to Lester, research significance is to be found in the relationship between phenomena, not in the relationship between the phenomenon and some external 'reality' (Lester, 1999). Data should be a 'lived interpretation' of the phenomenon (Levering, 2006, p1). In chapters 4 and 5, the methods outlined above are utilised to deconstruct the phenomenon so that the structure of what is being described is understood (Langdridge, 2007) and to answer the 'so what?' question: demonstrating the value in understanding the phenomena more deeply, surfacing the learning that has unfolded and explaining what the findings tells us that expands or differs

from existing research (Finlay, 2011). The extent to which participants and researcher live out the philosophical and psychological theoretical worldview underpinning mindfulness and phenomenology is explored in chapter 4. In pursuit of the second research question, Chapter 5 examines the experience of the mindful researcher, utilising phenomenological methods and processes in an hermeneutic dance of researcher and participant. The data is examined by interpreting and linking the findings to theoretical perspectives and findings from within the body of current research, however, there can be no claim of objective fact (Lester, 1999). Neither do I claim that the findings of the study are generalisable beyond the participant group; simply that the fragments of lived experience that are explicated in the study demonstrate the richness of experience possible from living a mindful life.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

PART 1 - EXPLICATIVE THEMES FROM PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES AND INTERPRETIVE DIALOGUES

4.1 Introduction to Explicating and Interpreting Participants' Narratives

As outlined in Chapter 3, Giorgi's (1985) method of creating narrative texts has been utilised in the treatment of the interview data, where the whole is classified into meaning units, thereafter each of the meaning units is reworked to surface insight and integrated into a participant narrative that reflects an holistic experience. Each narrative is sorted into explicative themes representing broad life areas addressed by all participants: Personal Development, Learning, Work, Relationships, within which are unique stories, fragments of lives that are alive at the moment of the interview.

In answer to the question posed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009): "How do I analyse what my interviewees told me in order to enrich and deepen the meaning of what they said?" (ibid, p192) the following narrative texts form interpretive dialogues where the researcher inquires into each narrative text, lifting meaning as it is expressed by the participant and heard and understood by the researcher, in direct contrast to the concept of interview transcript as fixed data. The theming of interview data into the narrative text is in itself an analysis, according to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), the co-creation of participants' life stories which allow the texts to speak for themselves. Following Finlay's (2011) advice, in addition to the texts themselves, short reflective pieces of secondary analysis are offered, with the focus on further highlighting the essential characteristics of the narrative within a theoretical context. These allow a step back from immersion in the participants' life stories and form a key element of the hermeneutic endeavour, circling back to the theoretical underpinnings of participants' practice as set out in Chapter 2. In the narrative texts, the researcher's voice is indicated by italics.

4.2 Gillian's Narrative

4.2.1 Personal Development

4.2.1.1 Working authentically with 'mind poisons'

What's live for me is following the insight practices (G1:2) and getting in touch with how I construct my reality particularly around pride and jealousy. (G1:2,3) I went from "I'm not a proud person" to "oh, this is my dominant mind poison!" The practices are about letting go the storyline and then just looking directly in, feeling the emotional pain. With pride it's the pain of feeling not good enough and being ashamed of being a proud person (G1:4). When I look directly at it and see how it's not the truth or real, the energy of it dissipates, and then there's space for the realisation that fundamentally, it's actually ok. In daily life, it's very difficult for me to see pride or when I see it, unhook it. I've got reminders on my phone to help me notice when I'm hooked. (G1:5,7)

What kept the jealousy going was ignorance. I was unaware of my jealous feeling, behaviour and thinking patterns, and then the ignorance lifted and the whole thing was there for me to really notice, give it the intimate attention that it needed. After that, I was suspicious of what was hidden! I am always relieved when ignorance lifts and another aspect of my inner life is there to look at, because that where's the personal growth comes from. With the realisation of pride for me, a sense of common humanity and compassion came in. (G1:10,12)

I feel that there's a real taboo about jealousy, so I think that makes it very difficult for me to see. It is painful and embarrassing. Pride is painful because there's this sense of embarrassment and shame and for me this sense of not being good enough. I'm familiar with it, but it's a most painful thing, really difficult and incredibly painful. I feel the pain in my heart, and it's just like someone's put a dagger through from the back to the front downwards. (G1:13,14,15)

On retreat, you hear other people's experiences and then you feel curiosity about your own. (G1:9) You have a word, 'pride' or 'jealousy', but actually what does it mean? As I practise, I get clearer in my own mind and find examples of how it manifests within myself that I can share with others, that helps them to recognise it within themselves. Students share their experiences of mind poisons with me and I'll think, "Oh, shit, I've got that one as well!" (G1:32)

I do try not to act out how I feel, but I don't know how healthy that is. When something's live, and there's reactivity going on inside, I

always really try not to act it out there and then. I want to go away and think about it a bit first to make sure that it's not because I'm egocentrically hooked into something, that there's actually something that needs to be said. But I think that there's something there about suppression or lack of authenticity. Maybe sometimes it would be appropriate to say something. (G1:19,20) I think it's conditioning. In my family I've always been the one that's mediated arguments between everybody else. So many of my family members are so uninhibited in their anger. They'll just say anything and without any consequences for the hurt that that's caused. (G1:21,22) But I might need to be a bit more courageous sometimes and just say what I think, but it's so difficult to know when it's egocentrically driven or whether it's authentic and justified to say something in a situation. I don't want to think or behave in an egocentric way. The truth comes from being able to put that 'me-first' thing to one side and see a bigger situation from different perspectives. (G1:23,24,25)

I can feel an egocentric drive-ness in my body. If I'm feeling self-righteous, I'm beginning to know that that's egocentrically driven and not to act out on that because it's not the truth. I'm becoming familiar with how pride feels, like this kind of puffed-up-ness. I hear my inner voice saying things like, "That's not my place to do that. I am better than that, that's way below me" kind-of-thing. (G1:27,28) I've started countering it by trying to be more of service, as a way of triggering the pride and exploring it a bit in daily life, doing something opposite to the pride. What I find so amazing is that if I follow the insight practice then I'll always keep moving closer to the truth, becoming more and more free of egocentricity, having more freewill and agency in my life with more energy for beneficial activity. (G1:29, 30)

Nowadays, the jealousy and pride and puffed-up-ness doesn't happen so much, or so big, and I notice it when it starts so I'm able to refrain sooner. (G2:131) It's more subtle than a feeling in the body. It's a recognition of a felt sense, it is a body and mind thing not one or the other. Before I would feel too heady and not embodied, but I don't feel like that now. (G2:132)

Secondary analysis:

Gillian is an experienced mindfulness teacher and practitioner, and at the point of the first interview was engaging in the insight practices. Gillian is systematic about her practice. Here she talks about the challenges of working with mind poisons - default modes of thinking that are generally viewed as unwanted or shameful, such as pride, jealousy, anger. Gillian values group practice because it allows her to reflect on what might be going on subliminally in herself, and she

applies an hermeneutic of suspicion to her own insight practice. Reflections with the student group help her to deconstruct the concept of the mind poison, which allows clear seeing of how mind poisons manifest in her. In becoming aware of pride in its physicality, the underlying causes are revealed to Gillian, demonstrating the interrelatedness of body, emotion and thought, and reflecting the centrality of embodiment within insight practice (Ray, 2014).

Gillian believes that truth is to be found in seeing the situation from multiple perspectives, signifying a social constructivist worldview. It is her intent to refrain from acting out egocentrically in the world, a behaviour that echoes her familial natural attitude. Conceptualising about it is recognised as counterproductive, so Gillian shifts to describing what happens in her body when she is egocentrically driven: this in turn helps her to recognise when it is happening – Nairn's (2010) definition of mindfulness, and to become more confident in relying on insight practice to free up her energy, suggestive of Levine's (2010) position regarding psychosomatic trauma. Moving physically into the discomfort frees Gillian from egocentricity and she becomes less reactive to negative emotions. Gillian's intent to act in an ethically informed manner demonstrates her ability to bring forth her practice into the world as compassion-into-action reflective of Forbes's holistic perspective of mindfulness which includes social justice (Forbes, 2016).

4.2.1.2 *Gillian's journey*

When I went to university I did science because I wanted to understand the meaning of life, but I was disappointed! The insight training gives me a much better understanding of my place within the universe and what it is to be a human being, understanding actually what's the truth because life is such an amazing illusion. (G1:35)

Most powerful for me is mindfulness, seeing the emptiness of the emotional difficulty. (G1:45) Compassion and kindness practices have helped me to be more allowing and accepting of my experience, and because of that I can see through it, and it's the seeing through it that is the most powerful actually. It loses its grip because I'm gradually believing it less. But I've got a long way to go! (G1:46, 47)

When I first started on the mindfulness course, I did a runner because I couldn't tolerate the intensity of what I was feeling and I wanted to go home where I was safe. It was a difficult time. One of the weekends a very close family member had just died, so I shouldn't have made myself be there anyway. (G1:59)

I think that there's only two things we can do. We can set our intention and motivation (what do I want to do and why), and we can refrain. In practice, coming back to the mindfulness support again and again, seeing the mind poisons so that you're able to refrain from them in daily life. That's what I focus on now, a lot. (G2:138) It strikes me that difficulty and confusion and fear are good things, because that's where the potential comes from, you change once you've gone through feeling fear. I'm welcoming the difficulties at the moment. (G2:136, 140) I'll go through phases where the practice is difficult and I'll go through phases when practice is easy but then within that, there's jumps as well and I think retreat helps with that. (G2:141)

Secondary analysis:

In the study and practice of mindfulness and associated concepts, Gillian has found a life changing path. Study of science within a positivist frame of reference did little to contribute to Gillian's search for life's subjective meaning (echoing Guba & Lincoln's (1994) critique of positivism) which Gillian can now realise through insight practice. While mindfulness and insight practices appeal more to Gillian, compassion practice allows Gillian to accept her experiences which in turn allows her to see more clearly what is happening. The mechanisms of mindfulness identified by Shapiro et al (2006) can be seen at play here. At first, Gillian found it hard to bear her intense emotional feelings. Gradually, as she built up her mindfulness practice and increased her exposure, she finds she can tolerate more intense emotions. Gillian recognises that she is relatively powerless in the face of subconscious forces, and so she attends rigorously to what underpins her practice, namely intention, motivation and refraining.

4.2.1.3 Gillian's big insight

Something has changed for me since the last time we met very much linked to working with pride and the underlying sense of worthlessness that I was finding. (G2:85) I had a month assisting

in a retreat and just one morning when I was sitting in the shrine room, I had an insight. First of all, I have a kind of felt sense of sadness, but not overwhelming or big, just kind of melancholy and with that came a recognition of all the criticism that I'd had when I was being brought up and how sad that was and the consequences for that little girl and then spontaneously a sense of forgiveness came up towards a particular family member and a recognition that actually I was loved and that they were doing their best in difficult circumstances. But it wasn't really conceptual, it was like knowing a felt sense of things that arose so it wasn't a thinking process at all. It was a knowing in a felt sense and there weren't any images (G2:86) and then the felt sense arose with the words: "I am good enough?!", kind of a wondering and a question with a real felt sense behind that and then the thought that came straight after that was, "How could that even be relevant?". They were the words that came. (G2:87) And then there was just joy and openness and then afterwards lots of things changed and I was much less fearful. I could welcome retreat participants and I could spend time with them socially whereas previously I was very scared of connecting on that level because maybe that I would have been found out, that I wasn't good enough. (G2:88)

Since then, I felt much more confident in my teaching and everything's so much easier and lighter. (G2:89) I've lost a lot of weight because I've been able to stick to a diet for the first time and not be overwhelmed by unconscious forces arising. And I've been able to run consistently as well. (G2:90,92) I just feel like I've lost 10 years, I feel a lot younger. My face has changed, much more open. I was hiding away from people whereas I don't feel I need to do that anymore. I can stand up for myself more assertively. I'm okay to be as I am and I feel joyful for that. It's like a complex is dissolved and all the energy there released. (G2:92,93,94,96)

It's not that I thought about it and conceptualised. All these things are linked to that insight. I know. It's because of an insight and it did itself. (G2:91,97) It's not like it's gone completely and forever. Sometimes I can see it on the periphery, but I can just let it be. (G2:95)

On the retreat before the insight, I felt a bit rejected by the teacher, but I couldn't say that the sense of rejection was a trigger of the insight as such. But the time before the retreat, I was feeling a lot of criticism for how I was running my organisation. My Buddhist teacher told me to practise appreciation, so I'd been doing that. But I think that the insight was mostly due to the work that I'd been doing that year on my mind poisons, particularly looking directly at pride. (G2:98,100,101,102,103)

I've since been on a further retreat and seen my Buddhist teacher, and that has consolidated things. I've felt a loosening of a sense

of self, because there's no unworthiness there. I don't have to puff up like I used to. A loosening of having to protect that 'me'. Now, everything's easier, less caught up. (G2:104,108,109) And I'm no longer ashamed. I realise that I feel normal now. Beforehand I thought I was abnormal, really self conscious all the time. Then after I lost some of the weight, I felt normal. I also have a sense that my perception of my weight was affecting other people's perception of me. (G2:106)

I didn't realise just how interconnected the 'not-good-enough' complex was with so many other aspects of my being. I thought that it would be to do with my father who left when I was nine, but I now realise that it was to do with my mother. (G2:109)

I haven't had many big insights. I've only had about four and they have been big but not that big. I get little ones that accumulate, and sometimes they lead to a big one. The big ones are the seeing-is-the-doing ones, the immediately liberating ones. That's a hallmark of a deep insight, that is unexpected. Then something shifts, then all sorts of unexpected things fall out of that. (G2:142,143,144,145)

I've been reflecting recently on sense of self, which I know is not a solid thing but I've recognised that I'm still conceptualising, replacing the 'fixed self' with 'self-as-process', because I feel safer with a conceptual representation. But I recognise that actually it doesn't really matter anyway because as things are experienced they become apparent. (G2:146,147,148)

There's a risk with this kind of work that you set people up with an expectation that they've got to be all spacious and joyful and then people fabricate and that's a problem. They probably don't even know they've fabricated. So people get stuck. (G2:150)

Secondary analysis:

In the second interview, Gillian describes a big insight that came about on retreat. The insight dismantled her lifelong sense of not being 'good enough'. She describes in detail the process that took place - a spontaneous self-arising, a comprehensive recognition, the emotions, her felt sense of the insight and the words that came into her mind – an account fitting with Nairn's (2011b) description of insight as non-conceptual cognitive awareness where a dualistic relating to the world gives way without further effort to direct non-dualistic experience which is transcendental and transformative. This is indeed the case for Gillian, as she further accounts a wide range of changes in her life

consequent to the insight. Gillian backtracks to the antecedents of the big insight, identifying her sustained work on mind poisons as contributing to the insight. In the process of insight, Gillian recognises the causes of the not-good-enough complex, an example of the 'self-displaying' part of the process of insight (Nairn, 2010a). Gillian notes how interconnected her 'not-good-enough' complex was with her whole way of being in the world. Several significant lifestyle behaviours have changed unforced as a result of her big insight, and Gillian has a felt sense of being more open, joyful and emotionally lighter. The changes that have come about as a result of her big insight have given her a new appreciation of sense of self; a loosening and a lightening. Gillian uses her knowledge of the Nairn's psychological theory of meditation to reflect; noticing that she has replaced one concept - solid self - with another - self-as-process, and in that reflection has a further realisation that she can let that concept go also, trusting to the emergence. This is reflective of Nairn's (2012) discussion of the Buddhist concept of wisdom as 'seeing through delusion' and speaks to the inherent nature of wisdom.

4.2.1.4 *Life after the big insight*

That big insight I described the last time, a major shift in terms of how I see myself and how I am in the world, that's sustained. My habitual pattern is still to obsess about things that bother me, but I find now that I can see that more quickly. Even when I see it, often it still carries on for a while, but it loses its power to some extent, and then it just gives up! (G3:178,179) I'm more at ease, less caught up and controlling. I'm a planner, but I plan with less of an agenda, happy to let things unfold, realising I don't have any control anyway. (G3:180) I've stopped watching television so much, stopped drinking caffeine, eating more healthily. The urges to do these things are missing, it doesn't enter my mind. My personal attachment to that isn't there. (G3:182,183,184)

I've carried on doing the appreciation practice and that has brought about a massive change. (G3:201) Here's an illustration of my physical felt-sense of life. Over the years I've gone through layers and layers of tension and I've become more attuned to the subtle physicality of it. I'd relax but underneath that there seemed to be more tension and more tension and then the final subtle layer seemed to be this real bracing against life. I could feel it in

my posture like a subtle bracing. That doesn't seem to be there anymore. (G3:203,204)

I think my confidence in the insight's sustainability is building. Going into groups and being more myself, more relaxed and realising that that's not actually risky, then my confidence and trust increases and I don't have to protect myself. (G3:228) It's not like anger and anxiety and fear and resentment have gone away. I still do experience all those things and get caught by them as well. The difference is that I come back quicker and I come back to being more relaxed and open about the whole thing. (G3:231,232) It's all just rattling on and all you can do is work with the habits. I have very little control over me and how my experience manifests and how I think and behave and speak. I've absolutely no control over other people. I think that's quite a liberating view. That's how it is, it's ridiculous to do anything other than accept it, because it's obvious you're fighting a losing battle. (G3:233,234,235)

If you have a view that if something's wrong then you have to fight it to get it right, then that's what you'll do. If you have a view that it's just lots of processes going on together and all you can do is kind of maybe give them a little bit of a steer then that's what you do and you don't imagine you've got any more power or control than that. Whatever happens, it's not really anybody's fault. It's just how it is. That's the power of the insight training. (G3:235)

Secondary analysis:

In the ensuing three months, the wellbeing that had featured after her big insight has sustained. Gillian recognises when she starts being triggered, and the recognising by itself affects the reaction: it continues for a short while then dissipates. She notices a great breadth in what has diminished, and notices that the urges that fuelled her behaviour are no longer present as her attachments have reduced. Gillian appears to be in a virtuous circle - she feels more confident as a result of the insight, so her behaviour is different - she is more open with others, more relaxed, and this in turn fuels a further increase in confidence. Gillian reflects on the impulse to fight against what we do not like in ourselves: non-acceptance, and the futility of trying to have control over our lives. This highlights the importance of acceptance as a core practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Brach, 2003). From reflection on the disappearance of behavioural experiences comes the realisation of what was previously subtly present - the

felt sense of bracing against life and the worrying; an example of both the progressive and cyclic nature of insight (Nairn, 2012)

4.2.2 Learning

4.2.2.1 *The importance of Buddhist lineage*

Secular mindfulness works, it really works! What guarantees its success, is the authenticity of the teaching, and we've got the right teachers there to deliver the material from this embodied place. (G1:49) One of the things that the tutors are doing is creating a safe space, allowing space from our own practice of safeness within ourselves and allowing others to join us in that experience, we're not saying to people, "This is how it is". (G1:52)

Other MSc programmes are about teaching people to teach an 8-week course and it's not gone any deeper than that and there's no compassion training. I think mindfulness teachers need a training in compassion even if they're teaching a MBSR course. (G1:55) But then other programmes don't have this lineage behind them that they can tap into and draw strength from in order to face whatever's presenting itself. This is more direct, because we're linking into such eminent teachers, and there's the depth coming through from those teachers. (G1:56,57) When I tap into this lineage my experience changes. I feel stronger and more alert and alive and any insecurity seems to just vanish; that shows me that the insecurity really isn't me anyway. (G1:66)

I think that there is Buddhanature in everybody and particularly on retreat there can be a bit of flash of that. (G1:68) There's a building up of trust, and there's a sense of us all collectively having that in one place. It feels like a big thing. (G1:73) I can't understand why we've not embarked on secular mindfulness before. It makes me sad because I see so much suffering in the world. I can imagine a world where more people were mindful and children were being taught mindfully in schools and then that was how people lived and that would just be so much better. We could just all feel the authentic pain and not have all the suffering piled on top. (G1:74,75)

The Buddha talked about dukkha, this unsatisfactoriness that things are never just as we would quite like them and that how much effort and energy it takes to try and get from how we are to how we think we should be. In our society even now, people feel that they can't just be, they've got to be doing all the time to better themselves and then they get absolutely stressed and collapse and turn to things to make themselves feel better, looking for

happiness out there which the whole of consumerist society is based on. (G1:77)

I am a Dharma practitioner and that supports and holds my practice. When I practise every morning, I feel a change comes over me immediately, a sense of safeness and strength and joy and it just grounds me. I also do that before I teach any sessions. When I do that, it's as if the lineage is teaching through me. (G2:110,111) I just couldn't begin to do what I do if I weren't able to draw on the lineage. Do I feel that connection, that immediate experience with the Dharma is necessary to be able to secularise the Buddhist teachings into something that novices can understand? I don't know, but what I do have a very strong suspicion of, is that there's no way my co-tutors and I would be able to teach to the depth that we teach without it. It's essential really to the integrity of the whole thing. (G2:111,112)

When we first started we didn't mention the 'B' word! It was like the elephant in the room, but now we're very open about where everything comes from. Insight is taught as a philosophy and a psychology, not a religion. Because it's very much based on everyone's own experience, you're not imposing something on anybody, you just say, this is a model, from your experience make of it what you will. (G2:113,116,117)

Stories inspire me to practise – not so much real life stories, but I've always really loved the Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter! Both of those have key characters who give up everything, prepared to give up their lives in order to save everybody and that's like a Bodhisattva. (G3:193,194) If I'm in bed in the morning not wanting to get up and practise, I think, Well, look, Frodo climbed to the top of Mount Doom maybe to his death and you can't even be bothered to get out of bed and do a bit of practice! And it works because all our realities are created through stories, stories to tell ourselves about ourselves, about others and about the world. There's little difference between our stories and fictional stories, neither of them is the absolute truth or reality. (G3:195,196) What impresses me about the hero characters is not that they did what they did, but they did it for everybody. I don't want to be the kind of person that grasped to myself, I want to be the kind of person who would be happy to give things up for others. That's an aspiration and I think the practice can move me towards that gradually. I've got a Griffindor hoody as well! Wear it when I practise. (G3:198)

Secondary analysis:

Whilst Gillian's has been an overtly Buddhist journey, she is now seeing the successful outcome of a 'secular' mindfulness training for non-Buddhists,

despite the tension between secularism and Buddhism as set out in 2.2.2.2. She views this to be the result of the quality of teaching on the MSc programme, which is supported by direct connection with the Kagyu Karma Buddhist lineage. Whilst the MSc programme identifies as secular, there is more overt reference to the Buddhist underpinnings of the teaching in the more recent years of the programme. The experiential nature of Buddhist teachings and the lack of overt dogma is helpful in this regard. Gillian herself benefits from immersion in Buddhist philosophy and ideals (dharma), her connection with eminent Buddhist teachers (sangha) and her Buddhist practices, as well as drawing from her science background to understand emerging neuroscientific evidence, indicative of Wallace's (2007) contemplative science. Somewhat whimsically, Gillian also draws from modern fantasy literature to reflect the essence of the Buddhist Bodhisattva.

4.2.3 Work

4.2.3.1 The effect of teaching on Gillian's personal development

My personal development was partly formed by my teaching practice, and my teaching practice has been leading my own development. (G3:238) On teaching weekends my practice is really stable. I'm practising most of the day on the weekends and you have to stay present because that's my role, holding a space for the participants. (G1:6) There's nothing like teaching insight for experiencing it yourself. You respond to other people's situations and then it resonates within you and then you're able to see more clearly how you are yourself. It's getting stronger all the time. (G1:31) Teaching is just the best way to learn, it's like a crucible for your practice, where you get the really high heat. I think that my practice has progressed as it has done because I've been spending so much time teaching, it just increases my confidence and trust in the whole thing. Running away was my pattern, so experiencing discomfort and distress in my teaching practice, while not been able to run away from it, has been really beneficial. (G1:38,48)

The place where I experience the mind poison of pride the most is in relation to other teachers. I think that's where it kind of has been really interesting to look at. When I'm facilitating a group and then one of the other tutors comes in and makes a point that I've missed, or makes a really valid contribution, I feel this real sense of worthlessness. It's wonderful, because there's nothing

you can do about it. You can't get up and run away or burst into tears. You've just got to sit there and just allow it to be there. (G1:16,17,18) It's been a really brilliant training ground, so excruciatingly awful. Some of the worst experiences of my life have been sitting in front of a group. It's just been horrendous. I've just felt awful. I've felt completely worthless and useless and shouldn't be there and just insignificant, feeling really wrong and bad, but having to sit with those things is really good. (G3:239)

Secondary analysis:

Another virtuous cycle is in the association between practice and teaching. Teaching affords Gillian an unparalleled opportunity to be present with the experience of being triggered. Although she describes profoundly painful experiences (the activation of unresolved psychological states), paradoxically she values this difficulty greatly. Her big insight allows her now to be less controlling in the teaching environment and to be less affected by comparing herself negatively with other teachers.

4.2.3.2 *Gillian's experience of teaching mindfulness*

I must be very ambitious 'cause I just grasped the opportunity to teach with both hands and I haven't let go despite! I used to get migraines a lot when I was teaching, but I would just carry on teaching. There was something in me that desperately wanted it. I don't think that's so strong anymore. I would like to think I do it more for a purer motivation now! (G1:60,61) When I first started teaching on the first retreat, there were lots of long-term practitioners and I thought that they were thinking "She's no long-term practitioner. Why is she here to facilitate these trainings?" so, I did quite a lot of projection. The insecurity was there for a long, long time. It did affect my teaching practice because you're kind of putting on a front, you can't be authentic because you've got this fear inside you. (G1:62,63)

These days, there's no effort required, because there's no defensiveness. The sense of that for me is encapsulated in the poem by Marianne Williamson: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same." You can only do what you can do, no-one's perfect. It's all involuntary process rambling along, you just have to go with

the flow and make the best of it. (G2:122,123,124) The same pattern's in the internal and external environments. It's the whole thing, everything, all connected. What we're practising in our internal environment also pertains to the external environment. Our relationship with ourselves is the same as our relationship with everything else. You can only teach to where your practice is, can't teach beyond that. If you can accept something within yourself unconditionally then you can accept that in another person. If you can't then you can't. You can pretend to, but you can't, not genuinely. (G2:126,127)

Secondary analysis:

Following her big insight, Gillian's relationship with teaching changes. A crucial difference that Gillian notes is that she is no longer defensive and consequently her teaching is more effortless, and she is able to better own her professional authority. This has come about from an ability to let go into the 'rambling' of life whilst maintaining the psychological discipline of refraining from engaging with psychological triggers. Gillian uses her own experience to make sense of the academic theory. She recognises that the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds are essentially the same (Khenchen Thrangu, 2001; Heidegger, 1927/1962).

4.2.4 Relationships

4.2.4.1 Gillian's relationships with her close family

I started doing mindfulness practice when my daughter was about three and I think that if I hadn't started doing mindfulness practice then our relationship would be nowhere as good as it is now. The flashpoints that would have become massive arguments aren't there. When she was at primary school, and she'd make a fuss about homework, before the mindfulness practice that would have been like a red rag to a bull. She's a teenager now and it's a lot easier. Sometimes she is quite bad-tempered, but I very rarely react. Generally, I'm able to respond and say things like, "Well, what's happening now?", "You seem a bit angry" or "If you want someone to help you with your homework, don't shout at them" in a calm way. I think I've got a lot stronger empathy than I used to have so I can probably see things better through her eyes than I previously could. (G1:41,42) Empathy and compassion training comes in when I feel shy and I can be okay with that. I think I'm a lot more accepting with myself, in my thoughts and my feelings and my behaviours but, at the same time, I'm also much more

accepting of other people. I'm much more accepting of my daughter and my husband than I would have been. That's the main thing, this sense of allowing, just allowing everything to move through. (G1:44)

Secondary analysis:

Gillian reflects that mindfulness practice enhances her close relationships by decreasing her reactivity, supportive of Shapiro et al's (1998) claim that mindfulness practice increases empathy. Compassion practice is found useful in combating the reserve that comes with shyness, and is linked by Gillian to acceptance, a feature of self-compassion noted by Neff & Vonk (2009).

4.2.4.2 *In the wider world*

I don't really have much contact with the outside world. I live in a small town, and have one friend there and I'm usually with my husband and daughter and walking the dogs and in the countryside and wandering around. My sister visits a few times a week. My close family are very calm on the whole. It's all very placid compared to what's going on in the rest of the world, So I feel not very well equipped to deal with that now. (G2:152,153,157,158)

I can be in the world, in consumer society with what's on telly and the culture that surrounds us, with the perceptions that I have now, only because I teach with colleagues that have a similar mind view, and can talk about what I think about things and share experience. I don't really have a lot of in-depth contact with the wider world. Obviously I have an in-depth contact with mindfulness course participants, but they come wanting a different view from the one they have. (G1:78,79)

I find it really difficult to read anymore, I feel there's enough reading been done. I do like watching telly. That's what I do to relax, but I'm really careful about what I watch now. If there's anything violent then I tend not to watch it because it's just not what I want to be putting in my head. (G1:80) I don't watch the news very often. I keep in touch with what's going on in the world through a news app. I don't watch any really dreadful news that's on the television. As soon as it comes on, I turn it off because there's no benefit. There's nothing I can do about it so there's no point in getting distressed about it. If there's something I can do about it then I would maybe try to, but some things are beyond my

ability to help anyone. I have a lot of comfort in that mindfulness teaching is my contribution in the world. (G1:81,82)

I have taken a decision not to see certain people in my life. I don't see certain family members and often I feel really bad about this but if it's just causing grief then there's no benefit. If there's no possibility for change, there's no benefit in being involved, though I find it a bit difficult. I do lack tolerance for the social conventions. There's some things I don't accept yet within myself and so I don't accept them in other people, but they're quite extreme people. (G2:158,162)

I'm okay with course participants who often have dreadful things happen, and I can be there with that and be supportive. I do get shaken by it and upset by it, but there's a point to it, there's a benefit to it, because they're practising and you can see that you're supporting people through a process that they're prepared to engage in. (G2:163)

I've only got so much energy, my work's quite tiring and I've got my direct family-life that I want to have. If I choose not to place my energy in other places then that's probably okay too, but I don't know. It feels wrong, but I'm still not able to do anything different. That's what it is at the end of the day, an inability to do anything different, which is fine, 'cause I can only do what I can do. But my relationships with my husband and my daughter are good as ever really, probably better. (G2:164,165)

Secondary analysis:

Gillian gives the impression of choosing carefully how she interacts with the wider world. She limits her exposure to violence and distress whether real life or fictional, as she sees no benefit to this, while enjoying contact with like-minded colleagues and students. She notes that 'enough reading has been done', perhaps demonstrating a shift from the conceptual to the experiential.

Gillian's wider family relationships are not so placid, and her contacts with them are likewise limited by her choosing. Gillian's propensity to empathise with others' distress is the cause of emotional upset for her; she is better able to cope with this when she feels that her involvement is of benefit, as when she is teaching mindfulness skills to course participants. There remain areas of her inner world that she cannot accept and therefore cannot accept in others. Gillian's account is indicative of Fredrickson et al's (2008) broaden and build

theory: Gillian has in herself become more open, accepting and stable in dealing with her own emotional pain; however, her sensitivity to the suffering of other has also increased.

4.2.4.3 *Family and mind poisons*

In terms of mind poisons, I notice resentment. I've had an issue over the summer with a family member. In many ways a lovely woman, but she's very passive-aggressive. Over the last three or four years, the relationship's got worse and it's recently just deteriorated. (G3:206,207)

I'd had enough then because I've tried everything to engage. I tried lovingkindness, I tried Tonglen, and it just seems to be like banging my head against a brick wall. I know I shouldn't, but I get upset and irritated. So I just got to the point where I said, 'Right, she can still come over, she can spend a nice time with my husband and daughter, but I'm going to go out', but then I felt really bad about it. I thought, maybe if I was more tolerant in myself then I would be able to tolerate this. (G3:209,211,212) Maybe, if I have some space for a while then I'll be able to engage in a better way. I got myself into a right mess over it. I have this habit of getting hold of things and then almost obsessing about them, and it's a waste of time. (G3:216)

But what made me come to that decision? Sometimes you can't do anything anymore so you have to stop. It was that kind of a decision really. It's like refraining in the outer world from what causes suffering. It causes suffering for everybody, so yes I've refrained from it. (G3:218,221)

As I meet people in life, I always find that there's one or two people that I feel a bit more guarded in relation to. But when I notice that I try to move into their shoes and say lovingkindness phrases. So, if there is that sense of closing down in relation to someone, I really try having this sense of recognising that and seeing if it's possible to open it up a little bit more, but then obviously the situation with that family member has gone completely the other way. (G3:229,230)

Secondary analysis:

Despite using a range of practices to manage her internal emotions, Gillian resorts to extracting herself from the regular visits by a family member. Gillian likens this to inner refraining from the causes of suffering, making an ethical

choice to disengage that runs contrary to established social convention. It would seem probable that Gillian has drawn on her Buddhist teachings with regards to this decision; avoidance of suffering for self and others being more overtly featured in traditional teachings (Chiesa, 2012).

4.3 Fiona's Narrative

4.3.1 Personal Development

4.3.1.1 Fiona's default mode

In terms of my mindfulness practice, I am quite amazed at how it works and how it manifests in my life. Like just noticing myself before I go in to some of my usual patterns around things, noticing how much more relaxed I am with people, noticing when I feel anxious as well. (F1:2) I didn't realise I was quite an anxious person, so I'm now aware of it most of the time. I notice when my shoulders are up round my ears and I'm tense, or in my job, or just this kind of quite heavy feeling in my body. (F1:3) I notice slight shifts already in just being so much kinder to myself and less judgemental of myself and others. I think the compassion course has brought that up. (F1:7)

I get things intellectually but to really embody it, really get it, that sometimes takes a little bit longer. It's usually a two-step process for me. Here's a classic example of this. My key behaviours are anxiety and very strong self-criticising. Even though intellectually I understood the term 'acceptance', I didn't really get that in here [*gestures to heart area*]. I didn't get it in my heart and body, but now I understand that this anxiety is not going to go away, this anger's not going to go away, this sadness is not going to go away, but it's ok. It's about accepting them. It's not about trying to get rid of them. (F1:8,9)

I did a feed Your Demons exercise where my anger came up and said "I don't want to be ignored. Don't ignore me. Use me, use me appropriately, but use me, I'm not going away" and that really struck home. Before that the acceptance wasn't there, and now this new aha moment is "it's ok, it's ok. It is what it is". (F1:10,11) I experience acceptance as very spacious, just very "wow!" Of course, the irony is that the issue does disappear as soon as you accept it! When you accept it, there's nothing to 'get'. (F1:12)

One of the ways that I've noticed anxiety building in me is because it manifests with food. I self-soothe with food, so I always have this sort of love/hate relationship with food. As a result, I've

now noticed in my body instead of opening the fridge or going, "Oh, I need chocolate" or something, I'll think, "Why is that? What's the reason behind that?" And, sometimes I will still go and have a bar of chocolate, but now I'll notice, "mmm, what actually is it that you really want?" (F1:18)

Ironically, sometimes after I've taught a mindfulness class especially if it's corporate training, I will feel quite anxious. But I get this anxiety whether it goes well or whether it goes badly! I've noticed that a lot more and I'm much more present with people now too. (F1:19) I remember something that really resonated with our class was this 'trust the emergence' thing, to just wait open, you don't have to have all the answers, and something will emerge, so I do trust myself a lot more. (F1:20)

I've noticed an element of social anxiety in my social life which I didn't think I had, 'cause I'm quite loud, quite friendly, but I've noticed it's a bit of an act. I realised "Wow, I didn't really notice that. I always thought I was a really sociable person". Actually I realised I do love to get back home, be in the peace and the silence, maybe almost too much sometimes. (F1:21,22)

I'm becoming so much more aware of my body, the tightness in my throat and chest, tension in my shoulders. I notice all these things now, and I think my shoulders have probably dropped about three inches! It's a subtle underlying thing. I didn't recognise it before. Anxiety is my default mode. I'm a real people pleaser as well, that's all part of the anxiety. (F1:30,36) I totally suffer from perfectionism, but I'm amazed at how laid back I can be now though. If it doesn't go right or if I get it wrong then, you know what, so what? That's actually quite big when I think about it, this letting go of perfection, and I see this with my intimate relationships. I'm scared to be vulnerable, scared to be seen, scared to get involved in case I'm not good enough, not perfect enough. (F1:54,55)

Secondary analysis:

Through the mindfulness and compassion practices that Fiona has so far engaged in, she has been able to recognise her default modes, particularly anxiety and anger, and work with these in such a way that she is more accepting of what she used to push away. Her way of working with her inner demons is first to understand the process intellectually and then to open her heart to the experience, reflective of the experiential nature of the practice which brings insight and transformation (Nairn, 2012). Fiona reflects on how

emotions play out physically in her body, allowing a physical arena in which she can recognise and accept anxiety and self-judgement; the 'grounding' element of mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Nairn, 2010a; Ray, 2014). Fiona recognises as a result of increasing self-knowledge that she had been putting on a front, behind which is an array of more authentic emotions.

4.3.1.2 *Fiona's mindfulness journey*

I did have a bit of a journey with mindfulness. I don't know if I was suffering from depression, not clinically, but I was very down when I started the course and then ended up in a bit of a hole for a while. I thought I would have to stop 'cause I really couldn't handle it, but I'm hard on myself so I persevered, it would be complete failure to give up and I wouldn't allow myself to do that, so I didn't and I'm so glad I didn't 'cause I feel great, really good. (F1:23,24)
We talk on the MSc course about realising how neurotic and messy we are, and that's what happened to me, I almost fell apart. I felt really terribly discombobulated, very depressed, very anxious. There were a few things going on at the time, not least of all menopause, an emotional rollercoaster. Being self-employed in this economic climate was quite a tough thing. Turning fifty, that was a really horrible. I was very anxious and a bit depressed about that. (F1:25,26)

So there was all this stuff going on and at the same time, that's when I choose to sit down and be mindful! But there's probably never a good time to do it. I don't know if that was a particularly bad time, or whether that was always going to be the way, but I really do feel like I've made massive shifts in my psyche and I'm now at the stage that I can start to have fun recognising It! (F1:27,28,29)

I took a month off from practice over Christmas when I was visiting family without thinking about it, and it was a really good thing. I've notice now that when I sit I am better at being mindful. Sometimes if I'm busy, I still ruminate quite a lot, but on the whole I am better. The month off was a great time for consolidation and helped me to recognise how far I've come. I didn't give myself a hard time for it. I just thought, I'll get back into it when I get home. And I did. I got straight back into it, in fact, really quite enjoyed the time away not practising. There was none of my normal routine there and that would normally trigger anxiety for me. But I noticed I was quite okay with that, just being able to go with it, not having to plan anything, not having to know where I'm going and what I'm doing and where I'm going to be, where I'm going to eat and all those sorts of things. It's subtle stuff but you really do

begin to notice it. I do feel just so much more alive. (F1:38,40,41,42)

Without the practices, I don't think I could have got to anywhere close to the sense of positivity and purpose that I now have. I can see overwhelmingly how much better I feel about myself, about my life, about where I'm going with life, the sense of being in the world. I don't think I would ever have got to that without mindfulness practice, without question. And I'm sure it will continue to grow and evolve. I feel much more grounded and centred than before. It has been a really good year. I feel there's a real sense of things coming together for me this year. I almost feel it's my time. I have a clearer sense of purpose, much more positive. I'm poised on a journey of discovery and it feels very good. I'm sure there's a lot more to come. (F2:174,175,190,206)

I feel coherent and congruent with what I'm doing. Before I would always want to please everybody and fear getting it wrong and wonder what will they think of me, but I now realise they'll think what they like anyway and I can't change that, it's my life basically. Imagine having to wait till you're fifty-two to realise that, but better late than never! (F2:209,210)

It's exciting. It's still scary but I feel I'm probably over the biggest hurdle. I can see it in a more sensible way, can see when I'm making things up and I can see when it's true and not true and I can notice it in my body which is a big thing. I can check in with myself and see these little stories I tell myself, the dramas. (F2:212,213) When I talk about my friends who are dramatic, I do think, "well, what is it about me that's attracting that, where's the projection there?" Understanding the force of projection and how it interconnects us, it's the lie between true connection with people. (F2:214)

Mindfulness involves a lot of effort. I do it because I know it's worthwhile. I do it because I know the benefits. I now realise as well it just all begins and ends with me. That's all there is, not that there's not other great things in your life, but it's all about me after all, for the benefit for all beings of course! (F3:311)

Secondary analysis:

Fiona's mindfulness journey has not been easy, as initially her anxiety and depression increased, as predicted in the literature (Malpass et al, 2012; Williams et al, 2011). Over time however, Fiona's experience has become lighter and she now enjoys self-reflection. Evident by the time of the second and third interviews, from being markedly affected by how others view her,

Fiona now recognises that her life is her own and this revelation has freed her from the most intractable of her emotional complexes, affording her a greater sense of agency (as found by Malpass et al, 2012). Like Gillian, Fiona has a new relationship with her bodily intelligence, checking in with her body when making sense of strong emotions.

4.3.1.3 *Fiona's experience of practice*

Once I understood the Undercurrent and Observer intellectually, I started to see it in my practice. Understanding it intellectually helps me feel more trusting of the practice and more trusting of myself. It's hard to describe something that you don't understand yourself. (F2:128,129)

I realise the importance of sitting every day, every single day. I had an aha moment about that and I now sit every day, even if I can only do five minutes. Before it was, "well, if I can't do half-an-hour then it's not worth it", but now every day when I get up I sit. With that commitment, I usually find the time to do at least twenty minutes and it's usually half-an-hour. So, more important to do something than to do a perfect amount of something. (F2:138)

Sometimes, I will just sit and do self-compassion practices, the lovingkindness phrases mostly. I think teaching the practices does make a big difference. It's renewed my commitment to be, to practise. I don't think the sky would cave in if I didn't practise, but I do want to practise. I can't imagine it ever truly leaving me now. It's simply part of my life. (F2:139,141,143,146)

There's still a bit of an undercurrent going on around the striving, if I don't practise then I'll be a bad failure. Yeh, that does drive it. Everything I do is "I've got to get it right, what will they think if I don't get it right?" I see that has settled a lot, definitely in my professional training and coaching that has settled an awful lot. (F2:148,149)

There's something I do feel missing right now. I'm needing something to boost my practice. I'm needing some submersion in practice. I feel at the moment my practice is not as valuable and it's not dedicated. My mind is wandering and I'm letting it ramble a bit, so I now see that regularly I'm needing some input of some sort from outside, I think especially when I'm teaching it to other people. (F3:234,235)

One of the things that I have been working with is trusting myself. That's been one of my themes for the last few months, as I

actually realise I don't trust myself, I don't trust a higher power. It's back to this controlling. So I've really been letting go and trusting that everything's going to work out, but in practice, it's not as easy as that. Sitting today my own personal lovingkindness exercises is, 'May I trust myself', and I notice resistance in my chest and throat. So in my practice I do a little bit focusing on that resistance. (F3:277,278,279)

I get in tune with the notion of shining essences, when I think of that and think of trust, I feel the resistance sensation. I feel that now when I think of trust, so I know I'm not there yet, but I set an intention. The intention is like a trusting of where to go. Another of my kindness phrases is, 'May I accept myself, may I love myself, may I trust myself, may I have a sincere and open heart' and I can listen to myself and can gauge how much I feel these things. There is a work in progress that I don't one hundred percent feel any of them yet. (F3:280,282)

Secondary analysis:

Fiona describes in the second interview how she first gains an intellectual grasp of the teaching and then notices how this appears in her practice. Intellectual understanding allows Fiona to develop trust in the practices. Fiona's perfectionism used to get in the way of her practice, but she now practises every day regardless and recognises how much she wants to maintain this. By the third interview, Fiona realises that her commitment has lessened in its intensity and looks outwards for opportunities to boost her practice, reflective of the importance of the group as found in the Cairns & Murray (2015) meta-analysis and the study by Shonin et al (2014). Fiona gives examples of how she has personalised her practice, using lovingkindness phrases that have meaning for her and bring alive her intentions.

4.3.1.4 The importance of self-compassion

My intention for building self-compassion more fully into my practice is to do my compassionate breathing. That's my soothing breathing and then going to the safe place and either meeting my compassionate guide, or visualising and imaging my compassionate self. I'll go to my safe place and imagine my compassionate self and my guide is there. I've got this perfect

picture of my safe place. I'll do that in my daily sitting and then just when I get out of bed as well. (F1:34)

I've noticed how much I love bed and that's part of anxiety as well, not wanting to get up and face the world. I do actually now allow myself a duvet day if I want it, providing I've got the time and just think, "You know what? I'm just going to hide away from the world today" and then I feel so much more recharged and refreshed. So, lying in bed in the morning notice myself feeling a bit anxious about getting out of bed so doing some soothing breathing in bed and then I get up. (F1:35)

My research project has made me realise how important self-compassion is and I have continued with the self-compassion practices, still using the lovingkindness phrases. I've still been very strong in my practice. (F3:230)

Self-compassion is such a sticking point for an awful lot of people. I've just delivered a self-compassion session to a corporate course, and there's been quite a lot of backlash about people not getting self-compassion and thinking it's too self-absorbing, too selfish, too self-indulgent and it's actually made me realise how even more important that is. (F3:231)

Secondary analysis:

For Fiona, self-compassion practice is central. She has chosen practices that soothe her anxiety. From her own experience of self-compassion, she recognises similar issues for others. Fiona demonstrates growing acceptance of her anxiety, finding self-compassionate means to manage her state. Fiona's experience correlates well with the findings of Neff & Vonk (2009) self-compassion research; self-compassion aligning sympathetically with mindfulness and alleviating ego-reactivity.

4.3.1.5 *Fiona's life journey – seeking love*

This is my story, 52 years old, never been married, serious commitment-phobe. That is worse than social anxiety. It's actual fear of attachment. I recognise in myself this fear, a serious avoidance of commitment, a fearful style of avoidance of intimacy, about not getting involved, being scared to be seen, being scared to be vulnerable. (F1:51,53)

One thing I have done is kind of let go of this need to be with somebody or this real desire to be with somebody. I've got loads of great stuff going on in my life right now. I've always had a great life and it would maybe be nice to be with somebody, but there's time, plenty time. (F1:56) I would be very sad if it didn't happen, but I now know that I can't do anything about it except open my heart. (F2:191,192)

Something I've been working on for myself for the last few months is about receiving, and that links so strongly with self-compassion. That aha moment was probably about three months ago. I read something about learning to receive from yourself and then allowing yourself to receive. I came across a saying about 'allow life to love me' so I pinned it up on my bathroom mirror, where it's still, and I thought, "actually, Fiona, you don't allow life to love you. You don't allow life in." I don't make deep connections with people at all, so that's where I'm going next, opening up to let life in. (F2:195,196,197)

I sometimes sit with that intention when I do my mindful practice and occasionally I'll do lovingkindness phrases. 'May I allow life to love me, may I allow myself to receive life'. That's a big intention, quite profound and deep. The practice is good with that intention. I feel quite expansive. My shoulders are dropping and I really notice my posture opening out. (F2:199,200,201)

I have decided that I am now ready for a relationship. I still get fear when I think of letting somebody in that close, that intimately and giving my heart, but I'm setting the intention. I have definitely opened up to life. I just need to open up to having a man in my life now! I asked the universe and I trust it will happen. I just focus what energy, space and consciousness I need to be for that to happen and I do a little bit of meditating on it after I've done my mindful practice. I know if you set an intention for something it will work out if it's right for you. (F3:286,287,289)

I send the intention out there and just say, "Look, I don't know how to do this so I need your help. I don't know how that's going to happen", but if it's for the best then that's what I want to happen. I can forget about it, trust it will all work out. It's not always that easy but I think the real core of all religions is very sound, but it's more palatable for me to think of trust in the universe. I think whatever the higher power is, the Universe or whatever you want to call it and me I think we're the same. I get that connection. God is in me and I'm in God or whatever you want to call it. (F3:290,291,292,293,296)

Secondary analysis:

Fiona relates a focal life experience: of commitment phobia and her life-long search for a loving relationship. Fiona has a degree of intellectual understanding of how this pattern has come about, and through incorporating self-compassion into her daily practice recognises what is needed to address her fear, i.e. acceptance of vulnerability and expanded trust. This is consistent with Neff et al's (2007) findings that self-compassion correlates with hopefulness and optimism.

4.3.1.6 *Fiona's reflections on insight*

The insights that I have experienced have been gradual. I didn't get through the first five course weekends without crying. I haven't been on retreat without crying yet, but that for me is the release. I actually managed to get through the compassion course without crying. I didn't even feel I needed to actually, which was a bit of a first for me! (F1:31)

It's fun watching yourself. It's fun being able to understand what's going on and being able to choose reactions. I don't always manage that, though. Sometimes I'm off on one before I know it. Like in Yoga because I'm quite self-critical, I judge other people so I'll be looking at somebody next to me and going, "Oh, they're quite good at that", and then I'll notice myself doing it, and going, "Ok, it doesn't matter what they're up to!" so then I just get back into my own practice. I can have a little giggle to myself that I was trying to do it better, no competitiveness there ...much! (F1:32,33)

I'm starting to notice that I've had quite a bit of insight. I wouldn't have really have said I'd got the wisdom part of the course, but, again I did embrace the notion of innate wisdom within the compassion imagery practice. I didn't feel I really got it at the time when it was taught on the MSc. I was still tussling with my own brain in just core mindfulness, so the insight and wisdom stuff kind of went above my head. (F1:75,76)

When I was visualising my compassionate self and when I did the Feeding Your Demons practice, I was able to recognise wisdom in myself. I was able to stay very grounded in myself, which is why I didn't do my usual bursting-into-tears mode. I was able to recognise it for what it is, so I think that's probably something that's starting to develop but only just. (F1:77)

It's a centering, it's this core of wisdom and compassion that's in me, I do feel that quite strongly here in my belly. For me,

wisdom's very much a grounding thing. It's not intellectual, it's a sense. It's a feeling, it's like this core in me that is compassionate wisdom and it's just always there whether or not I choose to remember. I feel it just now as I'm talking about it, I feel quite solid, quite centred, just something that's there. It's kind of hard to explain. I feel that something will develop. There's a kind of knowing, but I feel it in my core rather than up here [indicates head]. I don't feel it up there at all. When we were doing the settling grounding, resting, they talked about wisdom as the body like a mountain and the mind open. I do notice that body. That analogy, like a mountain, solid, secure, stable, grounded, I like that, so I visualise that. (F1:78,79,80,81,82)

I do get moments of insight and moments of wisdom. But I'm not in the right space to intellectualise about it. Maybe a year down the line I'll come back and understand it a little bit better. I can intellectualise things but I've got to feel them, and also I need to be ready to hear the message. It is interesting watching myself and the phases I go through, tiredness and bored and then really engaged. (F2:110,111,112)

Usually I'm an early person, but I was just lying in bed this morning and I thought I just can't be bothered getting up and then it's this complete tussle with "oh you're a failure if you don't go, that's you failed" and "what would they think?" I'll get into "I'll be 'in trouble'", all this sort of stuff that goes rummaging around in my head. My attitude is that I watch it. Sometimes I get caught up in it, but I'm aware of it. I listen to my body a lot more now and just think, "Okay, okay, what's really going on here? Is there some anxiety?" (F2:113,114)

There's definitely still this idea of striving and wanting to be better. There's no question. I don't think that'll ever leave me. I think that's just the way I am. (F2:144)

There's something about coming on retreats here, I really watch my mind and it's all over the place, from this littlest thing. thinking "did so-and-so think I was rude last night?", all this stuff churns round in my head the whole time. I'm at this stage now in the retreat that it's at its peak. I think it's just the way things work I guess, though I'm rolling with it a lot easier than before. (F2:150,151)

Secondary analysis:

Fiona shares how she experienced the MSc course. Fiona internalised the learnings that made sense to her at the time, benefiting particularly from the compassion teaching, less directly so from the insight and wisdom modules; for

Fiona, insights have developed gradually. Fiona comprehends the wisdom teaching through her compassion practice, and is able to recognise the embodied sensory experience of wisdom, which is ungraspable intellectually. Fiona still gets caught up in self-doubt, but copes better with it than before. Course retreat heightens both internal rumination and the benefits of practice for Fiona.

4.3.2 Learning

4.3.2.1 Mindfulness community

It is quite important for me to use group practice to keep connected. We've had a lack of success with secular Sanghas. In my city, there is one that takes place on a regular basis but it's really for people that have used the MBCT course remedially. I didn't feel I connected great with that group. I didn't really feel it was right for me. We set up a Sangha for corporate coaches, that went well for a few weeks and then that's sort of fallen apart because we lost the place that we were meeting. I would quite like to find something regular. It would be nice to have a practice group weekly. I feel that's missing. (F2:156,157,158, 159)

I meet about once every six weeks with a small group of four people from the MSc who live locally, and that's really nice. We started out going through the MBLC, every month we would take turns on leading one session. But the last time, the host said "I bought us a wee bottle of Prosecco!" so it was, "okay we'll have tea and chat first then we'll have a practice then we'll have a glass of wine!" so it did degenerate a little bit! We do always have a good chat and practice. We all sit together and that's important for all of us that we do that, having people that are going through the same as you are. I think it validates my own practice. (F2:159,160,161,162)

What you were describing there about your group, it sounded like the mindfulness practice was an everyday thing, like how a group of friends would meet and they would have tea and then they would go round an art gallery and then they'd go home and have a glass of wine together, that sort of thing? - it is very much a meeting of chums, really is very relaxed. Sometimes we'll talk a lot and practise little and sometimes we practise a lot and talk little. (F2:164)

So very different from the perception that meditation is somehow very po-faced, and has to be taken really seriously? - You're

absolutely right. I think I went through a little phase of being too hard on myself and taking it far too seriously, using my meditation as a coping mechanism, almost to run away. (F2:165)

Secondary analysis:

Fiona is searching for a weekly secular sangha or practice community in her local area, as she recognises that regular group practice enhances her sense of connection and validation, a view shared within the research literature (Frisvold, 2012; Bihari & Mullan, 2014). Fiona meets every six weeks with fellow MSc women participants in a relaxed and informal group that echoes the way women come together socially in other spheres of life, suggesting that practice has become normalised for this group of long-term practitioners.

4.3.3 Work

4.3.3.1 Teaching mindfulness in the corporate world

This year, things have been coming together well. Work is going well and starting running the classes in mindfulness is very exciting. It's almost like I'm not taking life quite so seriously anymore. I have a little bit of anxiety of about getting it right and am I mindful enough as a person to be able to be teaching it. At the beginning of the MSc, I thought "No, I'm not going to teach it!" I couldn't imagine it. I am very serious about embodying mindfulness and being a mindful person and thinking, "Oh, no, I'm not there yet. I'm not good enough yet", so I'm very delighted to be doing it. I know I have all the skills that I need. I am good enough to do it. (F1:39,43,44,45)

My colleague Sue and I led the course together, and I thoroughly enjoyed the teaching. Because I had to go back and learn some of the delivery pieces again, it helps integrate it an awful lot more, so I felt so much more renewed in myself and in my practice with better understanding. Seeing the difference the 8-week course makes for people who had no experience of it, watching them flourish was pretty exciting. (F2:118,119)

While I was delivering the course material, I did experience a sense of being in the moment and trusting the emergence. I just thought "I will do this to the best of my ability, just go with what happens". Some participants I felt were getting it immediately, some not, but I just trust the process. (F2:130,131)

I've discovered it's quite difficult to teach mindfulness in business. We had quite a few dropouts. Those that participated definitely had some successes and the feedback was terrific, but I think sometimes with these feedbacks people say what they think you want to hear. There is a sense that mindfulness is seen as the panacea for all ills and antidote to life, but it's not for the fainthearted, and it sure isn't easy! It's getting across that it is counter-intuitive and that really rocks people's sense of where they're at. (F3:236,237)

I also think in business you do have to be very careful. The process of mindfulness is talked about as being a messy descent into one's own internal environment rather than some altruistic rise up to a state of perfection. I do try to explain that to people. (F3:238,239)

And trying to get people to practise! But we're learning as well. We now start by saying, "Look, this course involves 10 minutes a day practice and you sit here and say, 'Yeh, 10 minutes a day, that's nothing', but trust us, it's hard to find 10 minutes every day, so unless you really are willing to put in an effort, then, please don't sign up". We do it in the best possible way and we get a better grounding in the group. (F3:240)

I find that each course I deliver, I go deeper for myself when I deliver it. That was more marked at the start of teaching the courses, less so recently. Maybe because delivering it for corporate was a bit trickier than I thought it was going to be and there were different issues from when we ran the personal courses. For a start, the business is paying, so I think a lot of people just came along and they forgot that the company is investing in them, so there's not quite the same personal emotional investment. I feel I'm acting on behalf of the business, reminding people. (F3:248,249)

I've got strong integrity so I want to make sure I absolutely do the very best. I think I've maybe gone a little bit back into training mode with the corporate courses. When I delivered the course for the public when they were paying for themselves, I felt I was really embodying it, but with this it feels a little bit back into the businessy side of it. (F3:250,251)

That doesn't necessarily all sit comfortably. There's a little bit of incongruence around mindfulness as well, because the business wants a result, because they're paying for it and that will always be the case with business and mindfulness. So maybe there is an element of striving on my behalf, looking at how best we can best serve the business end. My main responsibility is the individuals in the room, but you still have a responsibility to the business too. (F3:252:253)

What the business is looking for in results is reduced stress, people being able to cope better with work, better relationships at work. And that was all happening, there were some great examples of people trying to be more compassionate towards colleagues. They're maybe doing the lovingkindness phrases to that person before they send an email or before they meet with them. Also examples of people managing their workload, not getting overwhelmed. (F3:254)

But it was different and I have to admit I lost my own practice, a bit disembodied. I do think I still teach with integrity but it's not always easy to sustain embodied teaching in the corporate environment. For me there is a big integrity thing around teaching mindfulness and practising yourself. (F3:256,259)

Secondary analysis:

Perhaps due to her own difficult beginnings, Fiona did not at first think that she could teach mindfulness. Somewhat counter-intuitively, Fiona's less serious engagement with life has freed her up sufficiently to believe that she is good enough to teach others. Once she has co-delivered a course, Fiona recognised how the preparation and experience of delivering a course helps to consolidate her own learning and practice (similar to Gillian's experience), and is ready to incorporate mindfulness teaching into her corporate work. By the third interview, Fiona is engaged in analysing the process and outcomes of teaching mindfulness in the business sector. Reflective of McCown et al's (2010) emphasis on the ethical qualities required of a mindfulness teacher, Fiona is concerned with how she can remain embodied as she teaches, and the challenge that she experiences in maintaining her integrity in the corporate world.

4.3.4 Relationships

4.3.4.1 Friendships and family

In terms of my relationship with my family, I feel that's shifted quite a lot with my parents, particularly. It's not always been the best of relationships there, but I do feel that has turned a corner too. I did Tonglen for my mum recently and felt very comfortable with her when I went to see her. (F1:72)

One thing I find myself not quite sure how to deal with it is my changing relationship with some of my friends. I can imagine them saying, "Oh Fiona's getting a bit boring these days". I've got a couple of friends I've known for a long, long time and I haven't seen much of them this year at all 'cause they're both quite high drama and I just don't have energy for them anymore. I've starting distancing myself from them which I'm sad about in a way, but then maybe that's just right. (F2:167,168)

I liked a good old whinge and gossip, same as everybody, but I just can't be bothered with it anymore. My two friends just love a drama, love a crisis and it's never ever their faults, always everybody else and I think, "Ah I just don't have the energy for that". So it's a little bit deliberate and it's a little bit just happened, just drifted. I'm sad in a way but I think everybody changes and moves on. I suppose that's judging them, it's just that I'm not sure that they're right for me where I am in my life right now. At the same time, I've made new friends as well. (F2:170,171)

Secondary analysis:

Fiona finds that her relationships with friends is changing as a result of her practice; some friendships are deepening, and she is withdrawing from others. She is no longer interested in the high drama, negative mindset and fault finding of some of her old friends. Practice has helped Fiona have a sense of peace and acceptance towards her parents, with whom she has had a troubled relationship. This is in line with findings from Bihari & Mullan (2014) that practitioners can let go of past baggage within their relationships.

4.4 Aidan's Narrative

4.4.1 Personal Development

4.4.1.1 Aidan's life journey

What is alive for me is an ongoing dichotomy of what I am currently aware of and the extent to which I am aware of it, and what I don't yet know. I am currently in a frustrating, but almost peaceful place. There is a sense of 'alrightness' but also a sense of being held back whilst wanting to move forwards. (A1:6,35,36)

I'm experiencing a semi-paradox. I am slightly resentful about having to accept what is present in the moment even though there

is an obvious wisdom in finding peace with what I actually experience; and I want to go deeper down the rabbit hole. I find myself engaging in speculation about the journey and mindfulness is a tool that helps support me in this. (A1:12,19)

I was brought up Catholic, and my mother is a devout practising Catholic. I love that it's a real practice for her. I've been interested in quite a variety of teachings from east and West since I was a teenager in the '80s and '90s; astral projection, out-of-body experience, dream work. For a long time, I've been mostly drawn to Buddhist teachings. I've explored a lot, but Buddhism is what I am most at home with. (A3:383,384,385)

I was introduced to meditation as a teenager. My father was already interested in it, and I bought a book for my dad that I read myself and was inspired by. I began to practise body scan and breath practices on and off. In my early 20s, I did a Vipassana course. My interest in lucid dreaming was a central motivation for engaging with Rob Nairn's teaching and the MSc course material suits what I need at this point in my journey. (A1:74,16, 46)

A powerful motivating factor in my search for truth was the death of my best friend in 1996, when I was around 20 years old. This was the biggest changing moment in my adult life: all my certainty about life was revealed to be fake with no credibility. I realised then that no-one else would have any answers to my unanswerable questions. Through this painful process, I first found myself lost, and then gradually I became more comfortable with an existential unknowing. My previous identity broke up and disappeared, and I recognised that it had all been a show that I had invested in. This was a profound insight that gave me a sense that there was more distance to be travelled. (A1:23,24)

Where I am personally at the moment in life is moving between internal and external. When I am more in the external world, I still meditate and reflect. I am less clear though at the moment where I am on a life trajectory. When my best friend died, I thought 'Oh! that actually happens and nobody actually has a credible answer for that'. Death will happen to me and everyone I know at some ungiven time. Before that, my default mode was just a small, insubstantial thought of 'yeh, of course we're all gonna die'. (A2:132,133,177,178)

So very often I am drawn to death. If I become really aware that I don't know how many more days or seconds I have, and if I really hold that in awareness, it galvanises me towards what I really value rather than the superfluous and the distractions. When I had that insight about death, it certainly deeply changed me. A significant part of me had just disappeared, like a huge part of my world. (A2:179,180,182)

There are different ways up life's mountain, what looks to other people as easy might not be like that for me; I find myself grumbling and resisting. I was asking myself recently what the point was in being mindful; am I expecting relaxation? Insight? How is mindfulness helping me to understand my life? I sat with that dissatisfaction for a bit. I interpret that as a 'dark night' kind of period. Then it changed, and there was more equanimity and I felt more solid and committed again in practice. I was still practising regularly, but there was a part going 'yeh, and?' Then that changed and there wasn't that same disturbance. (A3:330,333,334,335,336)

No journey is straightforward, there's no one clear direction. Part of me would like to know with absolute certainty that every step I take on the path is absolutely correct! But that would be inherently untrue because no-one has ever travelled my path before. No map actually can be the unique territory. (A3:341,350,351)

I haven't taken Buddhist refuge but I would like to take refuge with a teacher I resonate with as long as I don't have to buy into too much! I can get caught in the splinters, not liking some of the old traditions that impinge on our autonomy. I was put off by one type of Vipassana approach that requires the followers to sign up to behaving in certain ways. I don't want to sign up to something that seems like avoidance of behaviour that is uncomfortable to the teacher, like drinking alcohol or masturbation. There's a danger of spiritual bypass in all of that. (A3:386,387,389,390,391)

Secondary analysis:

What is not conveyed in the Narrative Text is that Aidan pauses often and lengthily during the interviews. He appears to be sensing inwardly and waiting for thoughts to arise (reflecting Nairn's (2012) process of observer observing the undercurrent and the observer) searching internally for words to express his inner experience. Whilst I did not actively ask Aidan to 'drop in the question and watching the ripples', this appears to be a technique he is employing during the interviews. This is a technique employed by Nairn/Mindfulness Association, and derives from Gendlin (2003), and is also consistent with Kvale & Brinkmann's (2009) emphasis on self-reflection. Though not taught on the MSc, Aidan has been drawn to the programme in part because of Nairn's interest in lucid dreaming (Nairn, 2002).

Although clearly philosophically inclined as a young person, his spiritual journey began in earnest when he was 20 years old with the death of his best friend. This life event showed clearly for Aidan that his certainty about the 'natural attitude' was false; his previous sense of identity suddenly disappeared and he recognised that there were no answers to his questions. The ground gives way beneath the solid sense of self where Aidan is largely indifferent to death that is a 'small, insubstantial thought' . Aidan appears to have been sufficiently aware and curious to hold open with feeling lost, rather than suppress; he becomes curious about death and imagines that he would prioritise what he values if he knew when he would die. Aidan's inner landscape has three aspects: what he is aware of, the degree of his awareness of what he is aware of, and what he is unaware of, reflective of the observer/undercurrent dynamic (Nairn, 2012). Aidan's sense of striving comes from his desire to become aware of what he is not already aware of, although this is counterindicated by Nairn (2012). There is a temporal aspect to his striving. Aidan looks to an objective standard - is each step "absolutely correct"? - whilst recognising the falsity of that stance - "no-one has travelled my path before". Aidan describes some dark periods in his journey where he questions the relevance of mindfulness, which give way to equanimity and commitment. He thinks that others may not have the same internal resistance that he has, although this is recognised as a common psychological feature (Nairn, 2012; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Gilbert, 2010b).

4.4.1.2 *Aidan's experience of mindfulness and compassion practice*

I reckon that I have to build up strength to consciously know what I essentially know, whether I choose to bring it into consciousness or not. (A1:44)

I have found the compassion training really good in that it has really brought on aspects of truth which to me is love. Although I would not have described myself as overly self-critical previously, I did find in the training a softening and an ease. For me, lovingkindness for others stems from finding my own sense of ease, and extending that out. I sometimes practise on-the-spot Tonglen, really seeing that I am generating space and love. (A1:47,48,57)

However, I have more of a mindfulness practice than a compassion practice. I question whether compassion practice really makes it possible for the practitioner to develop the vital underlying attitude of compassion that makes it a way of being. I see where compassion practice could help the disaffected kids I work with to shift from relentlessly reacting to their threat or drive systems to soothing themselves, and becoming more content. (A1:60,61,69)

I still find myself reacting in a false way when I feel it's expected of me. I don't over-think it, I just take the perspective that it's about being a compassionate mess! (A1:81)

I love that I often find myself saying lovingkindness phrases to strangers. Sometimes it spontaneously occurs and sometimes the intention occurs before the lovingkindness phrase. I might then find myself saying for them: May you be really successful, may you be at ease, may things go well in your world, may you find what you need, may you be loved. (A2:194,197)

I have found doing Tonglen immensely valuable. It has the effect of making something in me settle. Something shifts when I do Tonglen, though it's not part of my 'home-base' of practices. (A2:209,210,212)

The times I have done Tonglen, the sense of high moral ground I operate from goes directly as a result of practice. I did Tonglen once after a fiery email exchange and I still responded to address the situation directly but without that underhand slap that I had intended putting in. I realised that whether my judgement of the other person was right or wrong, I could feel more connected. (A2:242,244)

Tonglen doesn't come to mind as often as I'd like, and I can't always be arsed doing it, but if the thought is there to do it, then I should make time for it, or I will never do it. Part of the reason that I don't do practices like Tonglen very often, is that there are steps to follow, and another reason is that I have resistance because I am on my high moral ground. (A2:243,245,246)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan explores his experience of practice, and identifies at the first interview that he has been more drawn to mindfulness than compassion practice; whilst enjoying the compassion training doubting whether it is sufficient to embed the attitude of compassion in everyday life. Nairn (2010b) identifies compassion as having great transformative energy and Aidan sees that compassion practice

could have an effect on the 'natural attitude'; for himself and his sense of the moral high-ground, for his clients in their threat reactivity. By the second interview, Aidan is using kindness and compassion practices more fluidly and fluently day-to-day. Compassion practices have a greater number of overt steps; Aidan finds this off-putting and as a result uses more complex practices such as Tonglen less frequently, though he notices considerable benefit from them. Similar difficulties in learning and assimilating practices have been noted in other research studies (Williams et al, 2011; Lomas et al, 2015).

4.4.1.3 *Aidan's attitude to practice*

I need a strong motivation to practise because I have two young children. They challenge me to grow but also significantly limit my time available to practise. When the children were really young, there was about a year when I practised only sporadically. I have gained stronger motivation from the mindfulness training. For me, motivation is everything: if I have practices in mind, then they flow through my consciousness. This creates a cycle of affirmation. (A1:49,50,51)

There are so many practices within mindfulness, compassion and insight, that I find myself moving back to a very simple practice, some kind of version of settling, grounding, resting and support, sometimes with a bit of back-tracking, sometimes with lovingkindness practice. (A2:193)

It's hard to go through the steps of more complex practices, hard to conjure up the words and to remember a logical sequence of steps. It feels like an effort, particularly if I feel I am already present in the moment. There's a value, but there is an effort, a degree of doing-ness, even though the doing facilitates sinking into a deeper level of being. You are doing something, following steps. It should be with a lightness, not being attached to the outcome, just doing it and seeing what happens. It does enable a shift in being. For me, intending to take these steps, to say these words or phrases doesn't come entirely naturally. (A2:248,249,250,251)

Practice sometimes takes more than just being in the moment; it involves going back a bit - backtracking to the triggers. And it takes a bit of effort. It's not just being in an amorphous soup where everything is alright. There's a real dynamic balance. (A3:325)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan's motivation to practise has increased as a result of the mindfulness training, and he has required this to stay committed to regular practice. He has identified a core practice – Settling, Grounding, Resting, Support (Mindfulness Association, 2011) - that helps him to centre his practice, though, as mentioned before, he struggles with the effort of applying structure. Aidan's experience suggests that he prefers to be less reliant on structured practice, wishing to remain present in the moment – this concurs with Nairn's (2011c) insight practice instructions.

4.4.1.4 *Aidan's psychological state during meditation*

I want to know what switches on in me that makes me go sleepy sometimes in meditation. I recognise a psychological formula at play but I don't know what it is! A powerful motivation to practise is the sense that there is numb/dead, forgotten, screened off 'information' locked away in my psyche. I get a sense of that from the process of switching into being sleepy during meditation. Regularly, I get overtaken with sleep – up to an hour - during meditation, realising that I am sleeping only when I realise that I am seeing bizarre dream images. I question the value of carrying on meditating when I'm in this sort of state; should I just give up then or is giving up too much like striving for an ideal meditative state? Other times, I do prefer when my awareness and focus is strong, I find it more interesting. (A1:11,17,37,38,39)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan questions the periods of drowsiness experienced during meditation, recognising that something is going on psychologically, but he is frustratingly unaware of what it is, and he gets caught up in thinking about the state, judging it as of lesser value than being awake and aware. Aidan's difficulties maintaining focus during meditation has been noted as a common problem (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Didonna, 2009; Moss et al, 2008).

4.4.1.5 *Connectedness and the breath*

I am sometimes aware of using breath. I notice myself shifting gears, shifting modes. I find myself listening to the silence, rather than fuelling my story. I have a sense of being at peace, just is-ness. When I move into that open place with a felt connectedness to life, I notice that a breath comes more deeply. There is something more delicious about the breath that comes with that sense of connection. A different quality emerges into the breath. Sometimes I do it in meditation, either naturally or intentionally. If I use my breath as a support or anchor, I can make a moment more mindful and sometimes the breath can guide me towards a deeper reflective place. (A2:213,214,215,216,217)

Secondary analysis:

Breath - the process that allows access to what Nairn (2010a) refers to as the intelligence of the body - allows Aidan a strong sensory felt experience, a sense of connectedness, and a shift into 'being' mode. Aidan remarks on the qualitative difference of this state of being, echoing Ray's (2014) position on the centrality of somatic awareness.

4.4.1.6 *Aidan's reflection on insight practice*

In mindfulness practice, I find the support of breath a limitation, a tool that isn't always required. I find myself resisting always going back to the breath; and I recognise that this is where the insight training is going – letting the attention sink down a little bit more. (A1:52)

I love being more practised so that I more automatically see things through a different lens. With things I tend to see in habitual ways, I experiment to see it from a different angle, open to the possibility of experiencing something different. (A1:95,96)

There's a basic awareness that comes from seeing the projection, the masks. But, here's the thing, maybe we can't shed these things before their time. (A2:176,189)

One thing that has been on my mind is the paradox of progressive realisation and the bind of striving. The non-striving part of me can accept that the path to truth is just progressive ongoing acceptance of resting in moment-to-moment experience; having a deeper acceptance of my monkey mind. But insight is a balance between analysis and reflection. The practice has an intent that

goes deeper, to really question the notion of 'I'.
(A3:296,303,319,370)

One thing I like about the Feeding Your Demons practice, is getting to really inhabit my shadow, this demon that goes 'fuck you!', and has all these critical thoughts, rather than being pious and pure. (A3:376,392)

Secondary analysis:

The practice of following the breath has its limitations, as Aidan finds as his practice matures, and he is excited by the new perspectives on the everyday, a stepping outside of the natural attitude. By the second interview, Aidan has started using the insight practices. He wonders if parts of his 'self' will remain or disappear as he experiences insight, and reflects on the temporal nature of insight, that the shedding of masks or layers happens when it is ready to, and cannot be forced. By the third interview, Aidan recognises the paradoxical nature of insight, identifying a balance of analysis and reflection, and an acceptance of the shadow self (Allione, 2008).

4.4.1.7 *Aidan's search for truth*

Although love is a strong guiding influence; for me, truth is the more compelling motivating force, even though I don't know if there is any permanent truth to be found. For me, truth is the opposite of comfortable self-deceiving. On one level, I accept life as it is, but on another level, I don't want to accept that I will be caught in self-deception for life. (A1:25,26,29)

I feel truth physically with the sense of breath, of silence, of waiting; of a sense that I can't fully express in words. I also experience the sense of truth differently at different times. I do have a lingering hope that the clouds of not-knowing are going to part and reveal sudden enlightened understanding! (A1:27)

I think there is a real danger in being a perpetual seeker and expecting truth to be something dramatic or holding an idea of what truth is. I think I do get caught up in that. I realise that I value thoughts because they frame my understanding of the world, but I can't hold on to them, as they keep changing. They are like a

picture frame, they help me see this moment, but they are just one part of experience. (A2: 142,143,146)

It is a lovely feeling when the sense of boundary isn't there, when I can see the visual input as just part of my experience along with the sound, or the quiet, or the space or sensation; when it's all just my experience and I lose that familiar sense of self. This is a deeper truth than just knowing my likes and dislikes. (A2:145)

I want to move away from inauthenticity, fakeness and self-delusion. Authenticity is when something feels real and doesn't have a fake edge to it. It's not trying to kid yourself and others, and not investing in games when they're no longer needed. When I strip away illusion, I go 'aawhh!.....' it's like I get in touch with my skeleton, something core. I recognise not only how much I was kidding myself, but I also recognise that there was an incongruity, a part of me that knew I was deluded. This part for me is inauthenticity. (A2:152,153,155,156,158)

I think we can be authentically inauthentic, when we recognise that we are looking through a lens and can't see more at this time. This is different to not even questioning what is more true. (A2: 159, 160)

There is something that feels very true about death that tends to be ignored, and it slips into the background of awareness. There's equally something that feels deeply true about interbeing, a sense that at some level, there is something in me that relaxes that I wasn't aware of being tense before. Maybe I breathe more easily, maybe my shoulders are a bit more relaxed, probably my eyes too. Some part of me feels less cut off from the world, and that's not just experienced in the body, there's a psychological tension about feeling separate and isolated. (A2:179,198,199)

There is an inner knowing of truth. When I reflect on my meditations, there are times when there is just a knowing of 'this is true, this can't really be questioned'. It's like when you're really in touch with the ground, you don't question it. From the edge or from a partial connection, you might question it, but when I'm really there, there's something that falls away, and a realisation that this was always beneath it all, a sense of recognition; like having been an actor on a stage and then climbing off the stage. This recognition feels unquestionable, like it has always been there. (A3: 357,358,359,360,361)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan is on a search for truth. He examines several concepts of truth, first what truth is not: the opposite of self-delusion, not absolute nor objective, but

struggles to find a conceptual definition for truth. Instead, he describes what it is like to experience truth within himself - this is a recognition that is unquestionable, and appears to have been there all along, just unnoticed. Human experience shapes Aidan's notion of truth; he gives the example of finding the truth in death and in interbeing. There is a somatic perception of truth that is bodily relaxation and a psychosocial element of being connected.

To Aidan, authenticity is the core of true being beneath the mask. Aidan recognises after the event when he has had an inkling that he had been deluded. He describes the partial awareness of the subliminal as 'authentically inauthentic': aware of being deluded, but not of the underlying truth. This corresponds with Nairn's (2011b) account of the sort of experience that precedes insight; a fleeting, partial glimpse of deluded perception.

4.4.1.8 *Exploring the default mode*

I am sometimes blind in my seeing, and I find it easier to see clearly what is going on in other people, but I suspect that my perception is conditioned. I want to know how I construct my universe, and what I myself am holding at bay. One of the few things of real meaning and value for me is the courage to see the comfortable self-deceptions, and to see the extent to which I am conditioned to act them out, even when I don't really believe in them. (A1:8,10,22,28)

I am openly curious and willing to step forward into an exploration of my consciousness, even if the truth may hurt. I have already confronted and have had to let go of a lot in myself. I am able now to be accepting about my activated threat system, it has protected me and countless others through the eons! I find that this depersonalises the reactivity running through me. (A1:5,45)

There are questions that I have been exploring that have been active a long time. I can see the intensity with which I have been searching, and I can sense it too in my body, and by a tear in the eye. I ask myself if I get led to the 'edge' by dissatisfaction or by interest? What's my default mode, the framework that I'm operating with? (A2:130,149)

I use the term 'charge' for what I have energy for at the moment and what I deeply value. It could be that my thoughts are

preoccupied with something that I hold emotion about or have an impulse towards. If I want something to happen, I need to create the conditions and the discipline to support that charge. I need to have an intention like monitoring my health and becoming fitter, and that leads to me being interested and enthusiastic. (A2:169,170,171,173)

I think that we really do operate through default modes that we no longer perceive. We have default modes within our culture, too, that we struggle to protect. When the default mode shifts, does the insight remain? With certain ones of them, it does. There's a basic awareness that comes from seeing the projection. What helps me in gaining insight is the feedback that I get with other people, therapists and teachers. It's a mirror that doesn't mirror back! You think you are looking into a mirror, but you are actually not. There is a whole world out there that isn't just a mirror of me. (A2:175,176,187)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan has already travelled some way on the journey of self-exploration and is clearly committed to it. He values his tendency to be curious but questions whether his main motivation is dissatisfaction rather than curiosity. He recognises that it is easier to see what is going on in others than in himself; there are parts of his psyche that are hidden to him and he strives to reveal them, highly motivated to strip away the deluded perception of his habitual tendencies. There is a strong somatic element to Aidan's striving. He describes an energetic 'charge' that is indicative of a compelling need or desire, to which he must set an intention and follow through with interest and enthusiasm. When insight happens, he experiences this as a revealing of his skeleton, the bodily core. Insight comes with the stripping away of projections: Aidan gains insight through interpersonal therapeutic encounters when the other person does not reflect his projections, thus revealing the projection to be false.

4.4.1.9 *Aidan's reflections on striving*

I am ambivalent towards my urge to strive. I take the warning that goals are the 'hidden reef upon which practice stumbles'. But, even though I might not be ready for it, there is a part of me that tries to arouse wakefulness; that wants answers. I'm afraid that if

I subscribe to the view that there is nothing to be done I might lose the motivation to meditate, but is all my questioning and striving creating something valuable? I sometimes wonder if my drive to search is a dis-ease, and that acting it out just perpetuates it. (A1:20,21,41,101,105)

I see the downside to perpetually striving, and I can also see the value of having goals. It's like there are relative levels of truth where the two points of view can both have value. It's a matter of perspective. Someone came up with a nice analogy that integrates both ideas - in climbing a mountain, you have to have both a view of the top and watch each footstep. In practice, I alternate perspective. While resting and acceptance are great, I don't want to be complacent either. The hunger makes me go and do things. (A2:137,138,139,147)

I strive in lots of different ways and when different parts of me surface. At times, I can get caught in analytical, rational thinking, pushing with my mind to get a grasp of something. I do try to imagine what it would be like if I didn't strive. Pursuing the concept of truth isn't restful. (A3:298,299,300,302)

What's the difference between motivation and striving? Motivation could be the reason that we choose to engage in the search, whereas striving could be when we find ourselves trying really hard. It's a tricky art to hold open a question, and I sometimes ask the question in a non-accepting way that causes mental tension. (A3:307,310,312)

I am accepting the striving, accepting that it's there and part of the method by which I am progressing, even though I am slightly in conflict with it. But no journey is straightforward, there is no one clear direction. (A3:341)

Creating the right conditions for me is about being diligent in striving, and being clear about what I want, and there is an effort in getting up in the morning to practise even when I don't feel like it, and in returning my mind when I would like to continue thinking about something. (A3:355)

Secondary analysis:

Across the nine-month period of the three interviews, Aidan explores a primary default mode - that of striving. Aidan would rather actively seek truth than accept not knowing; this is what he is striving towards. In the first interview, Aidan swings between striving as a valuable state and as a setback. He recognises the impulse driving his striving, and his description of striving as a

disease is suggestive of addiction. Nairn (2010a) would concur; the urge to strive towards change is likely indicative of an unresolved psychological state. By the second interview, Aidan is thinking about striving in relation to goals and having the hunger to achieve his aims. Striving and non-striving are seen not as either/or but as alternating between resting and driving forward. In the third interview, Aidan explores striving more experientially, remarking on the mental tension inherent in striving. He wants to trust and accept the moment, but still cannot let go of his hunger. However, he has become more accepting of striving as his default mode and uses it consciously as a method. However, Kabat-Zinn (2005), Nairn (2010a) and Germer (2009) hold that only through the practice of acceptance will the mind change; striving to achieve change is likely to be counter-productive.

4.4.1.10 Aidan's reflections on acceptance

There's maybe a skilful use and an unskilful use of acceptance. Deep acceptance, like a mother saying 'I will meet that too' strikes me as courageous and wholesome. Embracing the striving part, the demon that says, 'try harder, dammit', is a wise, encompassing acceptance. Complacency, where there is a fatalistic 'Whatever!' could be confused with acceptance, but it ignores any possibility for precision. Delusion has its own momentum; I could easily spend my life on the internet or watching TV. It takes an effort to come back. (A3:314,315,316,356)

Teachers talk about people who sit in a haze instead of meditating or who re-polish the same state rather than investigate it. Resting in the whole of your being with what is known and not known is very different to just letting it all moosh into one amorphous thing. (A3:327,317)

People advise me differently at different times according to what helped them, and I probably vacillate between the attitudes of 'be awake, awake right now!' and 'just chill out, it all happens effortlessly'. (A3:326)

Different teachers say entirely different things! They have different maps and the maps have different gradients, and there's effort needed to follow each path. I find something reassuring about the different messages from different teachers, even though there is also something confusing about it. (A3:344,347,348)

Within the contradictions, at some level, I have to just rest and say I'm doing my best. But I do think that we can work with more precision, we just have to delicately create the right conditions. (A3:353,354)

Secondary analysis:

In counterpoint to his musings on striving, Aidan deconstructs what he means by acceptance: acceptance is not mindless haze but comprises qualities such as courage, precision, wholeness. Aidan seeks the advice - through books and individual contact - of a range of teachers, and accepts that they all have different maps, as does Aidan. What does not come across in the written word of the narrative text is the sense of frustration palpable in the interview situation that Aidan has to being continually in a state of delusion and not finding a ready answer or a pre-determined path.

4.4.2 Relationships

4.4.2.1 Interbeing

I have met some people who see more deeply, more truly into life, such as Amma, the Hugging Saint. She worships the divine in everyone she sees, and I recognise this as a profound level of truth, unlike more conditional, trivial truths that centre around my likes and dislikes. When I think about Amma, I get a shiver, a certain vibration, and a tear in my eye. The ground has gone on me, and my preferences feel little, artificial, wooden and cut off. (A1:30,32,33)

With lovingkindness practice, I have a sense of inter-being: there goes another person with the same essence as me, ideas get stirred up that we're all really just part of the same family of matter, of energy, of ideas, a huge kinship of millions of people all here just for a little blink, all doing the best we can. (A2:195, 196)

I think compassion also entails a certain responsibility that reflects that deeper sense of interconnectedness. With composting for example, there's a sense of interconnectedness where everything is valuable and rich, everything breaks down into something else that nourishes the earth. This exchange is like hugging the elements rather than feeling disconnected. Our Western lifestyle keeps us very disconnected. We press buttons

and stuff happens that we don't have any sense of. That is a very fragile way of being with a high human cost. (A2:204,205,206)

My family is very supportive of my practice. My wife and I have always had a mutual interest in personal growth. My wife has different practices to me. She is into yoga rather than meditation. (A2:219) My practices affect how I am with my wife, and I can bring a sense of perspective into play if I'm having an argument with her. (A1:53,54)

My 6-year old daughter goes to a meditation session for kids in our community, they practise lovingkindness practice and it's lovely! I'm really grateful to the woman who offers the kids sessions. My kids are growing up with being around me while I do meditation. In our household, everyone has a bit of a practice. We do sleepy breaths with the kids at their bedtime, we let go of the day and welcome sleep, we do a bit of body awareness and breath practice. (A2:220,224,225)

When I do the practice of 'looking outside, looking inside' I realise that I draw this boundary between what I am and what I am not, and yet it's all just experience. How we can relieve suffering and what we can actually do in our relationships doesn't seem directly connected to meditation practice. In terms of right livelihood, right living, compassionate action is about what I can do to make a difference in the world, sometimes through bringing my skills into my community, in growing quality food and food security, in teaching teenagers, in human rights activities. There's a path of activism that is slightly different to a path of contemplation. although they influence each other, I wouldn't say they're the same. (A3:362,379,380,381,382)

Secondary analysis:

Whilst Aidan's preferred approach is contemplation and his primary goal is truth, the compassion training has allowed him to nurture in himself what he has long admired in others: the capacity to connect lovingly with others. Through the practice of lovingkindness, he understands the process of self-kindness leading to genuine lovingkindness towards others, and over time, this flourishes into a spontaneous sense of global equanimity. Aidan demonstrates a strong ethic, suggestive of the Buddhist consideration of the effect of self on others (Kudesia & Nyima, 2015; Amaro, 2015).

Aidan lives in a supportive community with his wife and children, where various forms of contemplative practices are practised and encouraged. It would appear that the fact of Aidan practising has a generally supportive influence within his family, and on occasion he will more purposefully utilise a practice to help in a specific situation.

The 'looking outside, looking inside' practice facilitates practitioners to have a direct experience of the constructed boundaries that they draw between the self and other, and this prompts Aidan to reflect on the boundaries that he draws between himself and the community in which he lives. Buddhist literature emphasises the interdependence of self and other (Flanagan, 2011), however Aidan sees differences between the inner practice of contemplation and the outward practice of activism.

4.4.2.2 *Being affected by others*

If my wife and I are having an argument, I've often afterwards reflected that I had gone straight into threat mode even though I intended not to! I've had this happen so often, I now think it's such a boring response to just fight back, to try to win, to do the opposite of hearing the other person. It's not inauthentic so much as natural, but I have a bit of resentment to it because it's what I am growing away from. So I have a greater intention to stop, to open within and to let go of having to win. The fire to defend is still within me, but there's a bit less of the desire to have to win. (A2:227,228,229,230)

One time, I was arguing with my wife, and I saw that she was really defensive about something. I had the choice of getting critical of her, all the usual mutters! And then I asked myself, will I do a Tonglen? And I thought, yes, I will even though I didn't think it was my problem. I did do a short Tonglen, and something shifted. Before, I thought 'it's her problem, not mine, she's the one angry', and then something shifted in that sense of high moral ground-ness, just shifted to a deeper sense of 'whether she's right or wrong, she is angry and that is a really uncomfortable place to be'. It was a shift from pity to compassion where I could genuinely say 'I have been there. That's uncomfortable. If she is in the discomfort that I imagine her to be in, I hope she finds a way out of that soon, to a place of peace and ease; her and myself and all people who suffer anger'. (A2:235,237,238,239,240)

There's a cultural default mode that you've got to be seen to give back, and that is definitely in me. But we all have to receive, and to pretend otherwise is arrogance or pride. This default mode is looser and more flexible than it once was and nowadays I can just say thank you. But at other times, the impulse to give back certainly comes up. (A3: 253,254,255,257)

Focusing on an emotion doesn't necessarily enable me to recognise it. For example, I had a moment of pride walking into work when I was wondering if I came across to people watching me as confident, then I got a bit self-conscious and to get over that, I went to just being mindful of the walking, but congratulating myself for being really mindful! Then I remembered that before I stepped out of the car, I had been thinking that everyone was looking at me rather than being in their own world. And I then thought, maybe other people want me to be looking at them, I'm not the centre of the universe; we're all of us here. (A3: 320,321,322,323,324)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan recognises a number of habitual patterns that arise when he is in relation to others, but he is bored by his conditioned responses/natural attitude, and has a stronger intention to let go of old habits. He notices that as an old behaviour pattern subsides, he has less tolerance to it and this fuels his intention and motivation. Aidan illustrates using three examples of relating to others. He describes skilful on-the-spot use of Tonglen to break into critical rumination: the practice softens him, gets him down from his moral high ground into a compassionate relating. Aidan describes another default mode - always having to give back when he is given to - which he identifies as having a cultural element. His intention is to open up to the joy of simply receiving with thanks, but notices how he puts up barriers e.g. wanting to be seen to give back, and acting aloof. Aidan's third example is of feeling pride when he imagines people think he is confident. He uses backtracking to recall what prompted his prideful emotion (thinking everyone was looking at him) and was then able to generate a sense of equanimity.

4.4.3 Work

4.4.3.1 *The effects of practice on Aidan's work as a psychotherapist*

I was motivated to do the MSc both for personal and professional development. I have a diploma in psychotherapy but don't have a degree level qualification so getting a master's degree would be useful. I work as a counsellor in schools with teenagers in second-chance education. I want to use my learning with the young people I work with, who are sometimes a bit emotionally explosive. I find it refreshing when a client can take a breath and just sit with the charge that they are feeling. This allows the client to park their storyline and explore their impulse to project. This overlaps with mindfulness and compassion practice. (A1:64,65,67,68)

As I've developed through meditation practice, it has changed the way I work with others. When I started psychotherapy training, I stopped what was by then a committed meditation practice. Stopping practice was a good thing at that time, because I was using meditation as a 'spiritual bypass' to detach from my issues; an artificial being alright with everything, where I wasn't able to be present or to value my own strong sense of fear. I used psychotherapy to reconnect gradually to my fear until I could be fine sitting with it. (A1:73,76,77)

I use both psychotherapy and mindfulness approaches with clients. When there's tension, I might suggest to the client that you check how it is in your body and we stay with that feeling for a moment. Or I might suggest that we stay with the breath to separate from the intensity of the story. That teaches the client to self-regulate a bit, working towards containment not overwhelm. (A1:83,84,85,86,89)

I have thought a lot over the years about the similarities and differences between psychotherapy and mindfulness, compassion and insight practices. They are both investigations into the truth. There are huge overlaps and yet areas of difference. The psychotherapy I do is very body centred, we refer back to what we've noticed within the body and give permission, acceptance for that.. More so than in mindfulness, the psychotherapeutic relationship is used to mirror, provoke and evoke the subtle thoughts that we inquire into supportively within the therapy group. With mindfulness, compassion and insight practice, the inquiry happens more in isolation; in psychotherapy, it tends to be in relationship. There's quite a clear overlap, just a different method. Projection is an area of similarity, and Rob's take on insight is almost within the domain of psychotherapy. (A3:364,366,367,368,373)

Secondary analysis:

Aidan has a clear vocational motivation to completing the MSc in Mindfulness Studies for his work with disaffected teenagers. Aidan recognises that his own practice has changed the way that he works with others and he wants to explore overtly teaching mindfulness in his work setting. Personally, he has used psychotherapy to help him address issues such as detachment and fear, and finds that this helps him to be able to meditate with these issues. He uses a similar approach with clients, helping them to manage the intensity of their emotions. Aidan explores the similarities and differences of psychotherapy and mindfulness. Aidan's own psychotherapeutic approach is body based, and in this respect similar to mindfulness. He identifies Nairn's treatment of insight as within a psychotherapeutic frame of reference, and is finding ways to integrate the disciplines.

4.5 James's Narrative

4.5.1 Personal Development

4.5.1.1 James's experience of practice

What is alive for me right now is to do the practice. So that entails motivation, it's all about motivation! That's what's alive for me; reanalysing, revisiting my motivation. And the daily sitting practice of whatever type has to be done in order to create the conditions for us to be embodied in mindfulness so that we can then carry out the training that creates conditions for wisdom. (J1:2,3,4,5)

You don't just do sitting practice just because you get a nice feeling from it. Sometimes we don't get a nice feeling from it, sometimes it's not very pleasant, if it throws up things that are a bit difficult. It's not for instant gratification, not even for delayed gratification. The motivation for me right from the very beginning was this thing about creating the conditions. (J1:6,7,8)

I recognise the conditions once they have been created by the space that I am inhabiting, my ability to maintain awareness within the source. And in order to create the conditions, I do something; I commit to sustained practice. Any in that internal space, I can observe my mind states. I can observe impartially, observe the

energies whilst maintaining an ability to remain disengaged from them. (J1:9,10,11)

There's quite a complex set of things going on. It feels simpler experiencing it than it is saying it. I mean when I feel it, I feel it and I know it. I feel it in my body, here, in the belly. I also notice behavioural cues. I'll feel calmer and I'll appear calmer. I talk slower, I experience a broader clearer range of awareness both internally and externally, awareness of what is going on around, the people and their responses, that sort of thing. And then internally it can move broad and narrow across a number of different dimensions – the physical, the physiological; the muscular, the skeletal, the organs, and then the emotions, and then the mind, the mind state and the process of the mind. From that space I notice that attentive listening happens, it's not an effort and I'll be ok with silence. I'm trusting that embodiment, that space. Knowing is the body sensing. (J1:12,13,14,15)

When I am attentively listening, there is less thinking. It's a feeling of relaxed attention to what is being said in the absence of any thinking about anything, not thinking about what one will say next. At the end of the listening when there is silence that's when I'm doing the thinking. (J1:16,17)

There is no experience of time. There's a soft awareness, there's not a rush, it feels very 'present moment', a comfortableness. I'm less aware of time passing, I'm just aware of being in it. When I'm in a distracted state of mind, then I'm more aware of time passing. In a mindful space, there's less awareness of time passing relative to a point where something might finish, or whether it's started. It just is, you're just in it, so less relative time. (J1:18,19) That feels really strong and experiential; a process of recalling, remembering, reflecting, reviewing - and not just mentally, but with the body. (J1:20)

Secondary analysis:

James sets his highly inquiring mind to the question of what is alive for him, and in essence it is the undertaking of practice. His motivation is strong and straightforward - to create the conditions for insight and wisdom to arise - and the method is practice. James uses internal mental, bodily and behavioural cues to keep himself on track, and is highly fluent in their observation. His elegant and rich description of embodied awareness resonates with the various theoretical accounts (Nairn, 2010a; McCown et al, 2010; Mindfulness

Association, 2011; Ray, 2014). James notes that his sense of time is altered when in practice, due to being in-time in present moment awareness.

4.5.1.2 *The importance of embodiment*

When I got into meditation practice originally, I did know that my abilities to hear and listen and to take note of my body's intelligence were fairly weak. My background is in physical performance and the awareness that we use there is very much a kinaesthetic, spatial awareness; the awareness of limb and muscles in our body in the present moment in time and the relationship of where they are in space and the direction and speed that they are moving relative to each other and relative to the space that one is in. I've got a very developed sense of that but, of course, the energy that I inhabit in mindfulness is a different type of energy. (J1:41,42,44)

Mindful awareness is of our life energy, the force of life within us. It's a different league of awareness. In sport, it's awareness of one's own physicality. It's more mechanistic, more to do with musculature, with knowing where and what you are doing, related to gross movement patterns, skill acquisition, what we call often in sport a physical schema. (J1:45,47)

In my coaching work, I have been introducing ways to be connected to that life energy as well as with the other more physical energy. (J1:49)

Then there's emotional energy, the heart energy, what you find at the moment just before you want to cry, or just the moment just as you're laughing, that energy that wells up in you, that you know you can't do anything about. (J1:53,54)

What I found interesting in my own sporting performance is doing the activity at a time when I'm embodying more mindfulness. It's really interesting to be aware of the source energy and at the same time you've got a million different fine muscle movements going on to perform the activity. This is a field in sports that athletes call the zone, this internal awareness of the source energy which provides the clarity of the present moment and therefore it feels like time isn't moving. (J1:56,58,59)

When there's an awareness of the source in skiing, there is a sense of connection with the earth, with the mountain. A strong sense of connectivity with the terrain that one is moving over. It's being alive, being connected to one's self, the embodied energy. (J1:61,62)

What's interesting is that somebody could be performing in one condition and there's a connectivity, but in another condition, the connectivity's lost. I ask: "Where's it gone?" "Well, the slope is too steep". Yes, but the steepness doesn't take it away so I get into discussion with them: "what were you feeling?, what were you thinking?" "Well, I was blowing scared out of my wits." Ah, oh, so that's what breaks the connection. It's an emotion. That's the same stuff that we've been training for and practising. It's exactly the same thing, just induced by something else. So I have found in the last few years that playing with this actually has been quite useful training. (J1:63)

Secondary analysis:

Transformative change in James's bodily understanding is a central theme. James is a sportsperson and coach but prior to the MSc had a partial kinaesthetic awareness and relationship to his physicality. As a result of his mindfulness practice, James has experienced a unique set of insights in relation to embodied awareness. What he describes now is an energetic relationship to himself in the world that goes beyond the merely physical; an energy that is sensed in the liminal spaces when experiencing emotion and this is what James refers to as an embodied space. This awareness has radically altered James's own experience and his coaching approach.

4.5.1.3 James's life journey and the middle path

What's alive for me is that the middle road still eludes me. I'm seeking the middle road through practice, an openness of just being where I am with a non-striving, non-fixing approach to seeking change. But when I'm in places where I'm less able to feel okay, then I'm also less able to tolerate not finding the middle road. I become anxious, worried and stressful about it and beat myself up about it and tell myself that I lack discipline and direction. There's a lot of doubt. (J2:96,98,99,100)

I'll recognise the middle road when I am there, it's an inner place. It's being the man, the person I know that I can become, remembering my essence, my spirit energy, my chi, my life energy, seeing the whole of me. (J2:101,102,103)

This last year, there's been much more development of clarity. Seeing the messy stuff - my behaviour, my speech, my actions,

my attitudes, my intentions, my motivation - and gaining a much clearer vision and connection to my higher self, to what I would regard is who I am. These two seeing, they're connected by the feeling of them and the seeing of who I am and who I am not. I've been very stressed, which has been good for the experiment, better than if I'd been in a serene place, because it triggers me. (J2:104,105,106,107,109)

The movement between the unconscious and the conscious through the subliminal, hm!, is delicious. It's not comfortable of course, but to be able to see it and feel it happening is delicious. The deliciousness is realising, recognising, knowing the experience and maintaining an element of distance from it. I'm able to be holding painful stuff because I trust the process of dissolving and of holding and noticing. The holding is the delicious bit. (J2:109,110,111,112)

I don't know how effective I am at looking at experience from the inside, because I'll never have a comparator. I say to my students, they're experts in their thing, no-one else is. But I think at times I'm not an expert in my own feelings, and I don't have the words to describe them. (J2:113,114,115,116)

I get glimpses of how the universe is, an openness, aligning one's own energy with the universal energy. (J2:119,120)

Sometimes I look back on my life and think, well, things have transpired but they weren't goals. I'm completely process orientated which in professional life is a weakness because nothing really gets done. That's triggered powerful sadness that I feel clearly. I have real sense of failure, the difference between who I am now and who I would have thought I would have been now. In the last year, there's been a lot of self-doubt, less confidence and self-assurance. (J2:121,122,123,124)

There seems to be a constant awareness of that in waking hours, in the undercurrent and the observer. I'm switched on all the time, but that's how I want it. In full awareness of the higher self, that's a massively powerful learning moment. I've been able to stay with that a little bit, although it's painful. If you're doing something that you don't want to do, being someone you don't want to be, thinking things that you don't want to think. In your deeper self that's not conducive to becoming the person that you can be in total wholeness. (J2:132,133,134,135,136)

There's been some great times in the last twelve months that have been very alive. And I can see, feel, experience myself in it when I'm in it, altogether as a whole. I'm seeing the undercurrent, what I want and what I don't want, the patterns. I think I've been able to let go of engaging with the question, 'Why?' and stay with the question of 'What?' I don't know where the doubt and the lack

of self-confidence really originates, but I'm suspecting that it could originate in the area of the 'Why?' Getting into the subliminal, the parts of the personality that I can't see, it makes me feel broken. It makes me feel like there must be something I have to fix there. I can't quite see it, I can't quite feel it, but I know there's something there. (J2:137,138,139,142,143,144)

Secondary analysis:

James's experience of living is far from the cultural norm. In the second interview, James describes his intense desire to achieve the 'middle road' – a non-striving openness - and his bittersweet experience as this eludes him. James's experience of the middle road is acutely sensory, and he is tantalised by its deliciousness at the same time as he is frustrated by its fleeting presence. James's exposure to what is arising from his subliminal mind results in him feeling that there is something wrong that requires fixing, indicating that he is not fully accepting of himself.

4.5.2 Learning

4.5.2.1 Having faith in the training programme

I am fortunate to be in such a training, very special, feels very unique, feels safe and secure. Over the last year, I've been practising the things that we were told about so that I could try to learn them from my experience. I have had no feedback from anyone in the meantime, so I'm enjoying linking in on this retreat. I've been confused and sometimes illuminated, sometimes I didn't know what the hell was going on, at times I thought I'd lost the plot. It's a huge massive training with difficult emotions in there. (J1:22,23,25)

At times I've wondered if I'm doing the right thing, but I had faith in the training plan, where it had come from, the pedigree of the people that have created it, the lineage from which they take it from, and faith in that they wouldn't knowingly be suggesting training that could bring harm. (J1:26)

I'd been practising some meditation and mindfulness, and I went to some Buddhist retreats at Samye Ling a few years ago so I'd say I'd probably read quite a lot, rather than sat and practised every day for the last ten years. Up until four years ago I certainly

wasn't doing that. I took refuge at Samye Ling and read a lot about Buddhism and Buddhist psychology, over the years between those retreats and the time of the MSc. (J1:29,36,37)

My initial motivation to do the MSc was probably ninety-nine percent personal. There was a vague sort of 'what's this mindfulness in the professional context' but, initially it was personal. I have always had a very strong willingness to inquire into self since I was a little lad. (J1:35,39)

The course content appeared at the time very well thought out, almost too logical for such a topic that is not logical! What was said seemed to flow one point into another, and it was built up so well, it energised and excited me. I really did quite like the heady aspect. It created a real energy in me to pay attention to what was being said and I was quite earnest to capture the teaching, and then wanting to inquire further. I was attracted to the framework of training that didn't seem to ask me to have faith; the approach is try this try see what happens, and feedback on it. it's opened up a whole other kind of intelligence, and it was the rigorous daily sitting practice that has brought that about. (J1:30,33,34,38,40,41)

Secondary analysis:

The first interview takes place at the end of a retreat which prompts James to reflect on his learning journey. James's motivation was personal rather than professional and he was drawn to the MSc programme because of the strong Buddhist lineage of the tutors, particularly Rob Nairn, and the validity of the course programme. This allowed James to have faith in the programme and this has built through the years of practice.

4.5.3 Work

4.5.3.1 Mindful learning in sport

What I continually come back to in my planning and delivery is the question, "Is this moving the learner into a place where their awareness of what is happening when it's happening without preference is increased?" If the answer is 'yes', I think, "right, ok, I'm on the right track towards mindful learning". If it's not, then I stop doing it and do something else. (J1:67)

The traditional feedback model doesn't move people into mindful learning because it doesn't do anything to help them become aware of what was happening, when it was happening. It gives them some information about what happened after it happened, which is unlikely will feed into an awareness of knowing what's happening when it's happening. We have to work in a different way. (J1:68)

The learner will express in their speech and non-verbally indicators of their experience. "Oh, I really felt that pressure or this or that insight" and there'll be an absence of them making any running commentary after performance – that's the 'without preference' bit. Like "Aaww, that was terrible, every time I made a turn I was crap". Being without preference, their speech becomes much more descriptive, less self-critical. They show signs of seeking exploration, so when I say to them something like, "What would happen if we tried that in this situation?" then they have some energy, some eagerness to do and try it and they come back and say, "This is what happened, or that happened", not "Oh, that feels better now ". (J1:70,71,72,73)

I now also teach mindfulness courses at university and for the public, it's been fairly intense. I'm very much alive in that process. I enjoy it, I feel I can do it. (J2:117,127,130)

Now that my professional work in teaching, training and coaching has moved into mindful learning, I think that has moved me into a place in my whole life where the difference between me when I'm working and when I'm living is, there is no difference. I really feel that. It's just me being me because it's within a whole sphere of simply noticing and being mindful. (J2:140,141)

Secondary analysis:

James's approach to coaching utilises Nairn's (2010a) definition of mindfulness as evidence of embodied awareness. James inquires into his students' experience, watchful for verbal indicators of analysis or criticism, picking up on curiosity and mindful awareness. In addition to sports coaching, James now teaches mindfulness. He reflects that his mindfulness practice and day-to-day life are synonymous.

4.5.4 Relationships

4.5.4.1 *Being in the world*

I've recognised that fear is a major and underpinning motivator to my existence, the fear of self. There's been a pull over the last year, as I've experienced internal feelings so powerfully. There's a lot of stress and worry and then deep compassion.

This last year what's been very alive is becoming very 'heart'. My heart feels wide open when I see what I would label as suffering, to the extent where I've tried to stop, I can't seem to and it upsets me. It upsets me to see such suffering. When I see things going on in the world, I feel exposed to the evil, the killing, all the conflicts, people without homes, without food; it really upsets me, it really upsets me I just lose hope about society. What the hell can a bunch of us sitting on frigging cushions do? There's a great sense of hopelessness oh, this is really upsetting. (J2:150,151,152,155,156)

Whenever in my life when everything's got tough then I've used hope to move through it, so, it's almost like the hope is the antidote to the present moment pain. My sense of hopelessness comes from the disbelief that humans can be so uncompassionate to each other, can do such terrible things. I've always had the view that everyone has potential and that people can move into achieving whether it be in sport or in life. We know that there's the potentiality in us for the worst, but we hope for the best. (J2:159,161,162,163)

Being alive to that suffering has made me doubt my ability to live in this society. I've worked in other countries, seen society and communities that often disgust me, the futility of how people live and their values. I'm a keen observer of that and it creates challenges for me because I see people's motivations through observing behaviour. I do it all the time. I'm less capable of dealing with the dissonance that that creates in me. So this is a problem for me in living in society because there's so much bullshit, so much. (J2:164,165,166,167,168)

So then when hope comes in, it's great, get out there and help people to get to know themselves a bit better, teaching people to meditate and to enquire and reflect and maybe a few people will become a bit more awake. But then what kicks in is the question, "Who do you think you are, James? You cannot do that and anyway, you're probably wrong and the society that we have is what we have and that's what we have to live in". There's a big dissonance there. (J2:169,170)

It's related to the question of what's my purpose. Not only who am I, but why am I here? I am getting a sense that I need to do something about these things. Maybe that's triggering me to get so upset. At a conscious level I'm clear I have no capabilities to do anything worthwhile about it and so at a self-compassionate level, I feel I need to take care of myself to minimise the pain. It causes me great distress, I don't know what to do about the suffering of others. It's disturbing. I don't know what to do about my own suffering, get back on the cushion and it'll be okay? (J2:185,186,187,193)

I do get a sense of not quite belonging. I've never really belonged. I never felt that sense of belonging anywhere. After my best mate Dave died earlier this year, what I've come to realise is that he knew all about me to a range and depth that no-one else did. He was the only one that did. We've shared things in the last thirty years, and the pain for me around his dying was a sense of aloneness, that the person that knows you fully is gone. That realisation came as a surprise to me in the grieving actually. (J2:194,195,198,199)

Secondary analysis:

James's practice of being open and constantly aware has resulted in him becoming extremely strongly affected by the world around him triggered by the recent death of his best friend. As he relates his experience, he becomes unexpectedly profoundly emotional, and does not censor his emotional reactivity. Researcher and participant inquire into the space that is created (further described in 5.2). James's grief overwhelms him, spilling over into his relationship with all suffering beings and his sense of dislocation from the world. James's urge to alleviate suffering reflects the definition of compassion: of not only seeing the suffering, but having a deep desire to alleviate it (cf Gilbert, 2010a); although he has doubts about his capacity to contain his emotional response to suffering. He notes that he needs the balance of self-compassion in order to take care of himself in his pain. This accords with Neff & Vonk's (2009) assertion of the value of self-compassion in times of difficulty.

4.6 Louise's Narrative

4.6.1 *Personal Development*

4.6.1.1 *Burnland*

I was burned when I was twenty, and turned twenty-one in the hospital. Sixty-five percent of my body was third-degree burnt and my friend Angela was eighty-five percent burnt and she lived for seven weeks and then she passed away and there was another boy, John, who was seventy-five percent burnt. Someone threw petrol on a campfire and it exploded. I was fortunate because the guy who did it saw me go up in flames so he put me out, where the other two he didn't. Angela dropped and rolled, and my friend who was seventy-five percent burnt just ran and dropped onto her, she was his girlfriend. (L1:4,5)

For five years afterwards it was a very intense situation. From the time I was burned - I call it Burnland and maybe that's a little bit of my own disassociation from the event - there was a two year process of physical healing. I was twenty-three then and I didn't receive any therapies to help me psychologically, so I put a backpack on and I went travelling for two years. (L1:6,7)

At the end of the two years, I went to India and I met my husband there and things went just boom, boom, boom, marriage, pregnancy, three babies and I moved to Ireland. It wasn't until my life slowed down and I was settling into the calm and all my kids had started school that my post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms kicked in, so that is how I came to be involved in mindfulness. (L1:9,10)

Doctors suggested going on drugs at first and I said 'No, I want to try to overcome it myself', so I taught myself, learned how to meditate at a Buddhist centre and then I just kept hearing about mindfulness and just naturally I started doing retreats on mindfulness. I didn't do the eight-week course or any structured learning, it was all self-driven. (L1:11)

After a while of practising mindfulness, I started to feel better so I stopped and the PTSD kicked back in again. I thought I was dying. In retrospect, I realise now that I had been fighting with it for the whole time, but it became acute to the point where I couldn't move, couldn't get out of bed. I had travelled to Canada and the trip back seemed to kick it all off. I had to go home to Ireland because my children were all expecting me but my mother-in-law had to travel out and fly me home because I couldn't travel without someone with me. I'm a fiercely independent woman who has travelled the world and all of a

sudden my mother-in-law is flying me home cause I can't cope. (L1:12,13,14,55)

I did go on anti-anxiety drugs for six months and they helped immensely. They gave me a break from the struggle and in that six months I went back into mindfulness and I started practising regularly again and attending retreats and then came off the drugs and so that is what has brought me up to here. (L1:16)

My trauma's not about the scars, it's more associated with the fact that I nearly died. I received my last rites in hospital. The priest came. I remember all of that, so now I see death in everything. At the time when I was burned, the survival instinct stopped me in my tracks and said, "You're not going to die. Stop this.", whereas now years later I have the profound realisation that "Oh my God, I nearly died". So that is more my trauma than my scars, despite the physical pain having been excruciating. I can't relate my mindfulness practice to the original event because I'm not there anymore. Right now I am working with the death thing. (L1:49)

I have avoided the burns community since the accident, but I am going to a burns survivor conference in my homeland soon of my own volition! I am very affected by seeing pictures on the website, I'm not sure why. Perhaps because of my aversion to it and it's so blatantly in your face saying "Look at me, I'm a burn survivor". Because my face isn't scarred, it's not always noticeable so there's also that "Oh my God, I don't look like you so do I qualify?" John who was burned with me was all frontal burns, and I have some apprehension at the thought of seeing him again. He's not married, still lives in his hometown, has it affected him more than me? (L1:53,54)

'Burns survivor' is a label that was drilled into you in the hospital, but it doesn't mean a whole lot to me. You're told "you're a survivor, you're not a victim", but people still go "Oh, she's a burn survivor, shit, poor her". I don't want the "poor her", there's no need for it. (L1:58,59)

But me going back into that world is me choosing that label. There is a fear in imagining us all altogether talking about our woes, it's been why I've been avoiding it. I did go to one burns support meeting once when I was first burned and I thought it was ridiculous, because I wasn't ready for it. But I now see this beautiful, wonderful community emailing me asking me to join them. (L1:60,62)

One person has done mindfulness already and he claims it has saved his sanity, so I don't know what my hesitation is about. I'll just go, and be there with all the people and see how I feel and where I fit in and how it works. I'm not afraid of it. I wouldn't change it for the world, definitely not! I see benefits and the

richness of the experience for me. It's been pretty incredible and I'm feeling a little bit overwhelmed because it feels like things are happening. (L1:63,64)

I'll be forty this year so it's been twenty years since the accident. And the pain is still there, especially when I think about Angela who died. I don't know if you ever lose that pain. And there's a stigma attached to being a burn survivor, you're on the fringes of society, few people experience being burned, and there's a victim feeling. That's why I think that they pushed the 'burn survivor' label in the hospital so much; "You're a burn survivor, Louise, you're a burn survivor, Louise, you're a burn survivor" and you leave there going "I'm a burn survivor" even though you don't feel like one all the time. You don't ever have the life back that you had before, it's always going to be after the burn, so you have to create new meanings and a new self from the old self. It is an ongoing process and I think that's why sometimes post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms are constantly coming up. (L1:79,80,81,82,85)

Secondary analysis:

Louise experienced a life changing trauma aged twenty, and whilst she coped through the medical treatment and the physical aftermath of a life-threatening burns accident by leading an active life, it was only after life settled down that severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was activated. The nature of the extreme anxiety and panic was the realisation that she nearly died. Her experience of PTSD motivated Louise to take up mindfulness. Louise initially viewed mindfulness practice as a short term treatment for PTSD, but quickly realised with following the resurgence of her symptoms that mindfulness was effective only as a long term practice. It is clear from what Louise expresses in the first interview that she does not relate to the label of burns survivor; in fact she has eschewed contact with the burns community since she left hospital. However, she is contemplating attending a national burns survivor conference, and is aware that she is likely to be greatly affected by being present with a community of burns survivors, including people who were burned along with her and those who cared for her at that time.

4.6.1.2 *Working the edge*

It has been an intense two months of compassion practices as I've had to deal with all the memories, all the emotion behind what has happened to me. I've been journaling about it and I know which practices have helped me and which have been not as effective. At this moment I'm trying to find my balance at the edge of extreme emotion and pain. There've been tears and moments of anger, but I'm not in distress. I'm playing with the edge because I'm going to be really be immersed in it at the burn survivor conference. (L1:24,25)

Working the edge of all of this has been the most profound of all my mindfulness experiences. The edge throws things at me, like dreams of my friend who died, or people from the accident. Sometimes when I go into a Circle of Allies practice, Cara, my old Occupational Therapist, will show up. There've been sometimes that I've had to stop because it's just too much, but then I'm able to acknowledge that I'm just not ready and I don't force it. I recognise straightaway from the tightness in my heart when I can't surrender to it, so I don't push it. (L1:26,27,28,29,30,31)

And there's other times that, you know, I cry and cry and cry and cry because something will come up, thinking about Angela. I'm not distressed by it, but I have had moments of distress. There is a feeling of a black ball inside my stomach at the moment that some days is worse than others and I know it is all tied up in returning back into the fold as a burn survivor. I've been going along for so long with the attitude of "I'm just a girl who's got some scars, I just had an accident. I'm not one of them." Now I can talk about it and say, "I'm researching it", but I'm not fully yet accepting that I'm a burn survivor. (L1:32,33,34,35)

Last time I talked about being reluctant to be labelled a burns survivor, but things have changed now. I am comfortable with being called a burns survivor now. I was there at the burns conference with the community of burns survivors and I pretty much had to forget about the edge! Part it was working with the pain that comes with the memories of my accident. At the conference I was having to listen to people tell their story, and things were coming back up for me. They had a panel of family member talk about their experience of being a burns survivor because, even though they're not burnt, they survived the burns too. It was heart-wrenching, terribly sad, and everything that my friends and family have gone through with me. (L2:130,131,132,133)

I was able to feel it all come up, able to let it blow its way out. I was in a safe place to let that happen. I felt these memories

physically in my heart and that pain and that hurt and the trauma flip up and flow out with my tears. (L2:134)

I'm still being with what happened. It's not in the forefront of my mind. I'm not ruminating or anything like this, but I'm waiting for it to emerge as it's meant to emerge without an artificial hastiness. I feel that it deserves that. What happened to me all those years ago was a heavy, heavy experience and it's part of my makeup now. (L3:180,182)

It's this huge thing inside me, like a baby that needs to be minded and cared for and respected. Before if I started to have flashbacks or a bit of anxiety, I needed it to stop. It's less threatening but I'm not totally through the resistance but I'm now able to say, "Oh there it is, that's okay" and I use kind words towards it. Now more so I see it as this kind of silent giant that's sitting beside me. I'm not always aware of it, but as I'm talking to you right now, I can feel a sensation, like a secret companion sitting beside me that no-one else can see. (L3:186,187,188,201,202)

I'm not in an active phase of PTSD but I have these quiverings of anxiety every so often, but they don't rule my life. I'm feeling pretty in control at the moment. I practise with saying to myself, "you don't have to fight this, just let it be, it's just those thoughts again, nothing more than that". (L3:237,238)

Secondary analysis:

The second interview takes place just after the burns conference, and Louise is now fully accepting of her identity as a burns survivor. The 'edge' that she had experienced - am I or am I not? - is no longer a feature. She has a greater awareness of the gestalt of being burned; the interdependency and interconnection with others. The experience is working as a catalyst on Louise and she is trusting that what needs to emerge will do so in its own time. Her conceptualisation of the PTSD has changed - when once it was an impenetrable black ball, it is now both a baby and a silent giant, both manifestations there to be related to.

Louise's practice is centred around 'working the edge' of being a burns survivor. An example of what Levine (2010) describes as titration, 'working the edge' is a process used in mindfulness practice where the practitioner sustains gentle immersion in the difficulty, withdrawing before being overwhelmed, to

reimmerse herself once more. Louise describes the process as 'playing' psychologically with the edge in preparation for the triggers that will arise being physically present at the burns conference. Working the edge in practice elicits dreams, emergences from the unconscious. The edge resists, but Louise works skilfully to come to a place of surrender, where resistance falls away without effort. Louise's skill comes in no small part from her ability to be aware bodily of emotions arising. The extrinsic intention of doing research into trauma survival gives way to Louise's intrinsic emotional experience of identifying with what it means to being a burns survivor.

4.6.1.3 *Louise's experience of compassion and insight practices*

I've been doing compassion practices regularly, six days a week at least. I've had to do them because of the acute situation. Some practices that are more effective than others for me. The imagery practices - a safe place, safe person or image - are not as helpful. They are more like escapism and I've been escaping in my imagination for a long time. (L1:41,42)

The 'softening, soothing and allowing' practice is really the one that I am able to hold my balance with. I can feel the black ball of angst and am touching it - feels good and soothing it that way is a lot more effective for me. It's hard work, but it's enriching work and it's needed just for my own personal experience. (L1:43,45,47)

I've been using my journal a little bit more. Before, I just journaled about the meditation practices but now I include accident-related musings into my journal along with my daily practices. (L1:46)

A while ago, I did a weekend on compassion in Ireland and it was three days of strictly lovingkindness, nothing else. But that just touches the tip of the iceberg. Without this Mindfulness Association course I would not have the tools. These compassion and mindfulness practices are making it possible to be present and not be worrying about that first day at the burn survivor conference. All of this training is empowering me just to be able to experience it. (L1:74,75)

The compassionate break practice was huge for me getting through the anxiety of the conference. Coming up to the flight over to the conference, I felt that sick feeling in my tummy, and I practised just rubbing my stomach and acknowledging, 'okay, it's here, it's okay. There's nothing bad that's happening, just

happening in my thoughts' and through that I was able not to attach any story to what was happening. I was able just to witness that it was coming up in my body and notice the sensation, and be okay that it was there. With the insight training, I really notice the habitual tendency of how I regularly react and that little gap in between the stimulus and reaction. (L2:118,119,121)

I feel good now. I feel that there's a light illuminating my life path because I'm able to go with the flow. Because I'm able more not be so attached to what I expect to happen, or what I want to happen or don't want to happen, I feel a definite ease and an illumination and less resisting, it feels like that everything that has been happening is meant to happen. I don't feel any kind of inner struggle, which feels pretty fantastic. (L2:142,143)

Through the experience of being at the conference, I was doing a lot of just regular 'settling grounding, rest and support', regular sitting meditation and a lot of compassion. It's the compassion that has transformed the situation for me, definitely. Of the compassion practices I still like the 'softening, soothing, allowing' and the 'compassionate break' and even sometimes I just need to rub my arms and be okay, just a small gesture like that, expressing the compassionate attitude. (L3:194,196)

I've also been doing the 'resting in the midst of my experience' insight practice which is just a beautiful practice. It has been just as transforming as the compassion practices. When I do the 'resting in the midst', it's beautiful because I'm completely unattached. Somehow I'm able to centre and be grounded and embodied in my coming home to myself, even as things are happening around, sounds, thoughts or whatever. It's a deep rest and I've been really enjoying it. (L3:195,197)

I started doing the 'observing the observer' practice before I was taught it. The practice is when you switch focus turning 180 degrees to observe the observer. I found myself quite rigid in the turning. I didn't really have a lot of thoughts because I was so tightly holding on to the observer and it slowly has softened though it hasn't been as transformative for me as the 'resting in the midst'. I like the compassion and resting practices best, they're all real nurturing practices and I feel for any kind of everyday suffering or anything, you need to be nurtured and accepted, don't you? (L3:198,199,200)

What I did take from the insight teaching is that my experience doesn't have to be this way, which is really the core essence. It's just our subliminal reflex that says it has to be this way. So when I get the quiverings, I'm able to apply my compassion practice and acceptance, and then there doesn't have to be a struggle against

it. You don't have to get rid of it. It's just here. It's my big, silent giant. It's just talking a bit loudly now. It's not so silent! (L3:240)

It's completely transformed my experience as I haven't had any big acute phases of anxiety like I did before. Since the compassion and the insight modules, I've just been allowing it and in that allowing, it has been settling and I haven't had the need to strive, the 'I gotta do that, I gotta do this', that's all kind of settling in now, which is good. (L3:241)

There's much less of a need-to-know, less clinging because of my practice. I'm feeling more settled. A striving mind is not going to get things done any quicker, it's just going to stress me out and so I really am taking things one step at a time and allowing the process to just proceed now, rather than try to imagine. Who knows what I'm gonna be doing? Having the trust in acknowledging 'I don't know'. (L3:242)

It's interesting all this playing that we're doing with our minds, it really is quite deep psychology. I'm not talking about the theory, but just the whole experiential thing. It's magnificent. (L3:262)

I'm a pretty imaginative person, sometimes when I'm meditating, I can sense the thoughts almost, though if I try to focus on them they dissipate. I'm in my body and they're just there hovering around my brow level. It is a felt sense. It's a very, very subtle sensation. Although we start off recognising thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations, you come to find through separation from the undercurrent that they are not distinct things. (L3:264,265,266,267)

Secondary analysis:

At the time of the first interview, Louise had undertaken the compassion module of the MSc programme and had been testing out which practices best nourish her. She values the set of 'tools' she has been given and finds benefit in regular practice. From the range of compassion practices, Louise finds the best fit with the body oriented practice that allow her to touch onto her anxiety. This has a paradoxical soothing quality. The practices help keep her grounded and present, and to manage her anxiety of what is yet to come. By the second interview, Louise describes the destabilising effect of recent life events and reflects on how supportive her compassion and, now, insight practices were for her. By the third interview, Louise describes her insight practice in more detail, preferring those that nurture her through 'everyday suffering'. Louise's

experience can broadly be summarised as an opening and allowing; accepting and settling. Striving has lessened as Louise understands that striving 'doesn't get things done any quicker' and she can now feel good in going with the flow; this reflects the interrelatedness of non-striving, acceptance and letting go, three of Kabat-Zinn's (2005) seven pillars of mindfulness.

4.6.2 Relationships

4.6.2.1 Experiencing compassion and resilience within the burns community

I feel enlivened when I talk to Cara, my old therapist and hear her enthusiasm, support and love for me. I'm not part of her life anymore, but yet she still feels compassion for me. I've had moments doing 'circle of allies' practice that I genuinely felt lifted by seeing everyone who loves me come around and support me and only wish me well when I was burned. There's a beauty in that. Not everyone has that. I'm lucky I've a strong family, I've strong friends, strong people around me and I have felt genuinely adored in that place when I was nearly dying. (L1:68,69,70)

And so it would feel really good to go back there and do some good for those people who have done so much for me. There is a huge part of me that would love to be doing that but before I can, I have to go back inside and do a little bit of work, I have to face it a bit more than just phone calls from across the ocean. In preparation then for that enormous re-engagement with something that was such a big part of my past, there's nothing that could prepare me better than this course and the practices. (L1:71,72,73)

But yet there's this wonderful resilience that comes up with the experience of being burnt. It's almost like Bodhichitta, like a force that's in you, if you choose to exercise that muscle. You choose to help others or you choose not let the wounds get the best of you. It's an ongoing thing to move from the attitude of 'poor burn survivor'. (L1:86)

People who have been burned who have that resilience speak about the compassion they have for other people. They might talk about how they're on the beach and they're wearing a bathing suit and they feel terrible for the people around them because they have no understanding of being burnt, rather than "Look at that jerk who's looking at me". It's a different perspective. It's a compassionate perspective. (L1:87)

Burn survivors often have to reassure those around them that they are okay. There is a stigma attached to burns. It's "Oh my God, they have seen Medusa. How can I cope with that idea of what that person has been through?" There's a disconnect, so I'm always reassuring people. (L1:88,89)

Secondary analysis:

Louise talks about a type of resilience that she has noticed in herself and other burns survivors - a transcendence of the 'poor you' mentality towards an encompassing Bodhichitta compassion towards those who pity. What has supported Louise in her transformation has been the practices that she has learned on the MSc course. Louise is motivated to do good for others, reflective of the ethical Buddhist perspective foregrounded by Shapiro et al (2006).

4.6.2.2 *Changing relationships*

I've had definite moments of insight. Here in my homeland I have a lot of close friends. One of them can be quite hard to deal with regularly, she's very opinionated and she likes things her own way and she usually puts a lot of pressure on me to spend time with her on her own. We had arranged to meet up with some other people to go for a meal and she took great exception to me inviting one of the people over beforehand. I realised that my normal reaction would be to say 'get off of it' but I noticed that I was just able to react differently and rather than have a combustible moment, I was able to just make it better. I wasn't thinking about what I had to do to make it better. I just did it, it wasn't a premeditated thing. I just came to her with a new attitude (L2:122,123,124)

At the time I wasn't thinking, this is from my insight training. I just noticed later that night when I went home that there was a shift in my own idea of how to deal with the situation. I could feel that it was definitely a result of the insight training. (L2:125)

Usually I would have all sorts of judgements and it would put me in a bad mood, but I was able not to get tangled up in it. I noticed that my reactions were definitely different and it wasn't premeditated. (L2:126,127)

My friend did respond to me differently, and to the other friend. The two of them have a difficult dynamic, but they ended up spending most time talking to one another at the dinner table. The

two of them were conversing a lot and enjoying themselves while I was talking to some of the other people at the table, so it did change the dynamic. (L2:128,129)

Secondary analysis:

Louise explores how her habitual ways of relating to a difficult friend has changed as a result of her insight journey. She noticed after the event how she refrained from the habitual dynamic with her friend, and that this new way of relating affected the wider dynamic within her friendship group, reflective of recent qualitative research findings showing changes in interrelationships that include greater equanimity and empathy (Yarnell & Neff, 2013; Bihari & Mullen, 2014).

4.6.2.3 *Seeking spiritual interconnection*

The trauma almost got to me, do you know what I mean? It's part of me, and it's shaped me and it's sent me on this path, which is a spiritual path for me. It's not just about managing traumatic symptoms. It did start off that way but it is so much more. It is such a way of life and it's such a spiritual experience and still is. (L3:203,204)

But there is the whole Buddhist thing about mindfulness. I've been raised a Roman Catholic and I'm drawn to stories, archetypal images. I have an inner struggle as I feel I need some kind of devotional practice, but I cannot fully engage in a Buddhist devotional practice, because I'm indoctrinated into a different religion, even though I do not and cannot subscribe to Catholicism. So I'm struggling to find my place and I need to let go of it. I know I need to surrender and just let it rest, but that's something I do struggle with. (L3:205,206,207,208)

My experience turned quite quickly from something that was about managing anxiety to a spiritual one. For me, that was experiencing the present moment. There's divinity in the present moment everywhere. Like sitting in my garden meditating I feel at one with everything and that is Heaven on earth. I feel like I have discovered and finally understand that I'm not separate from God. It's all here. It's all part of it. (L3:209,210,211,212)

I wish I had some kind of supportive spiritual community to talk to. I have no trouble with my own personal devotional practices at

home in my garden or at my altar in my house. But I am feeling something's missing. (L3:217) It's such a personal, spiritual journey that I want to share it with somebody and it's a bit hard. But that's just something I have to sit with and I'm sure it will come to peace at some point, but it has been one of my inner conflicts and what some of my striving has been about. (L3:219) I'm still trying to bridge the divide, I just haven't figured it out yet. (L3:288)

I'm feeling more comfortable with being part of the burns survivor community, but I don't see the burns survivor community as a defining community. A spiritual community for me would be more defining than the label of burns survivor. (L3:223,225,226) Really what's at the forefront of my practice right now is the spiritual pulse. It really is a devotional spiritual thing for me. (L3:297)

Secondary analysis:

By the third interview, Louise talks of her search for a spiritual identity that will support her life practice; this is now more of a priority than her research journey. Although open to and appreciative of the overt Buddhist origins of the mindfulness, compassion and insight practices that have so well supported her, Louise's religious upbringing indoctrinated her into a very different spiritual tradition, thus she feels somewhat torn and unsatisfied. Whilst Louise finds the divine in her own practices, she seeks affirmation and belonging within a community that reflects Louise's authentic spiritual identity; a fundamental human need as identified in a range of literature (Epstein, 1995; Rybak & Russell-Chapin, 1998; Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

4.6.3 Work

4.6.3.1 Working for a mindfulness organisation

Since I started work recently for a mindfulness organisation, my life has changed. It's a bit strange, as I'm still a student and yet I'm in a teacher role too, separated from the students. The new job is so fresh and I've no idea where it's going or what I'm doing 'cause there's so many different things I do. The job is my first post-degree job. With my boss, sometimes that's a bit hard for me, because sometimes you start over-analysing like, did I say the right thing? My practice has definitely helped in that, a hundred percent. I've been able to think, 'okay, just bring it all

back. What's going on here? Nothing crazy's going on here. It's okay'. The practice has kept my anxiety level in control about all those different roles that I am negotiating. (L3:244,245,246,247,248)

Work is enhancing my practice because I'm having to think about what I will write about for my organisation's online posts. I find myself of an evening sitting outside and watching the swallows in the sky and turning it into a mindfulness exercise for my job. I created a blog on the mindfulness organisation's website, so I just start thinking more mindfully in my day-to-day life, to notice the moments more so that I can write about them. I'm having to be more present. I'm having to really, really embody mindfulness, it's infiltrated everything. It is a calling almost, it's my life work and I'm really fortunate that I'm getting paid to do it, because not everyone has that. I'm in a good place right now and I'm feeling really good. (L3:250,253,254,255)

Secondary analysis:

Like other research participants, Louise sought work within the field of mindfulness. Louise's job is providing a further opportunity to practise, and her practice is supporting her in her anxiety about her new job. Louise reflects on the holistic impact of her commitment and practice, it imbues her life and has become part of her embodied day-to-day experience, reflective of a reorientation of self to the world (Ray, 2014).

4.7 Patricia's Narrative

4.7.1 Learning

4.7.1.1 Why mindfulness

I've been reading books about meditation and mindfulness for twenty years. Meditation has never left me all that time. Even though my practice would ebb and flow over the years, I could never drop it, never drop it. (P1:12,21,27)

I'm not sure why it's now for the MSc. I think I was just wandering around looking for something interesting to do. and I decided what I was looking for was intellectual challenge, framework and like-minded people. (P1:23,25)

I've found the quality of the teaching very good. The personal humanity of it. There's a sense of equality from the tutors, we're all thinking adults. In a lot of educational situations, there's a defensiveness in the tutors. I don't feel that here. There's a feeling of equality, an openness and preparedness to be almost vulnerable, although still with the authority of running the course. (P1:42,44,45,48)

From where I was at the beginning to where I am now, my path has been astronomic, straight up, because I have found a learning path that suits me personally, but also has been fundamentally delivering the goods in that the insights come thick and fast. Insights pop up for me very rarely when I'm meditating but will come up at other times. (P1:49,83)

It's certainly delivering results for me personally. My approach to life is very different from how it was. It's all less frightening. One of the reasons for wanting to pursue the whole mindfulness thing was an awareness that there are quite a few what I think of as dungeons, deep down, with big locks and every now and again things will pop out. (P1:54,55)

One of the reasons for coming on the programme was to be part of a group of like-minded people. Even though I kept buying books on meditation, I needed to join in some secular classes. Mindfulness is so much richer when you can bounce ideas off someone else. You can get very caught up in your own ideas, caught up in loops of thinking and monkey mind, so to have other people to talk to is great and other input and the guidance of the formal structure of the course. (P1:110,112,122)

A friend on the course talks about how he doesn't feel a need to do anything with the course, because it's just been good enough and it's changed him, and I really recognise that. In changing me, my compassion with other people has grown. Before the course, I never felt like I was enough because I was only as good as what I do in material terms, not who I just am. This course really has changed my life, It just all builds on itself. It's just fantastic. (P2:207,208,209)

Secondary analysis:

A long standing interest in contemplative practice led Patricia to mindfulness meditation, and in time, she sought a formal learning environment that included a learning community. Patricia values the balance of vulnerability and authority that the tutor group embodies, reflective of Shonin et al's (2014) findings that

the authenticity of facilitators was essential to the efficacy of course teaching. Teacher authenticity has been central to the acceptability of the course content for Patricia. The course has been of immediate and significant benefit in the form of a series of insights that result from Patricia's exploration of the "dungeons" of her psyche. She is clear that the course has fundamentally changed her life. She does not have to consciously apply what she has learned; the effects simply manifest; a hallmark feature of insight (Nairn, 2012).

Belonging to a secular community of 'like-minded people' is important - this is apparent in Patricia's motivation for enrolling on the MSc course, and is reflected in the loss she feels later when she leaves the programme. She values both the richness that sharing affords and the clarity that comes from reflecting the perspectives of others.

4.7.2 Personal Development

4.7.2.1 Patricia's experience of mindfulness practice

Because of my chronic fatigue I just get so tired. I know practice is supposed to be restorative and relaxing but actually it's damned hard work. It takes focus and when I'm really tired it's quite difficult, so practice drops off a bit. (P1:6)

The great thing about mindfulness is you do it yourself, because for all manner of reasons you can't rely on therapies that involve other people. The cost is enormous, the intensity of the invasion is demanding whereas, with mindfulness you do just what you can do and if you need to, you pull back and on some days you move forward. (P1:61) if you can't cope with something, you haven't got somebody rootling around in your innards pulling things out and saying 'Have a look at this?' If you don't want to look at something, then you get things like my boredom that I had in meditation which is 'Go away, go away, I don't want to deal with this at the moment'. (P2:249,250)

My method of working with myself is just keep on taking the meditation! (P1:88)

Mindfulness is very different to previous meditation, and the fundamental difference is the concept of 'without preference'. Before I understood that, I was striving. If I do it right, everything will be lovely because there is a right, I just haven't found it yet so

I just have to work harder. The understanding took me from my life-long conditioning that everything, the whole world, can be fixed cognitively. It opened up the whole idea of just being and that being is ok. Surely not! Being's never been ok before – ever! The WASP kind of thing, your worth is what you do. It's been hugely liberating. (P1:28,29,32,35,36,37)

I want very much to embed and formalise the next stage of mindfulness learning. If I have to be totally self-motivated, things tend to wind down dynamically. Things don't go in a straight line and I tend to let them drop and then look back and think, 'Oh, what have I lost?' So that's no good. (P3:339,340)

Secondary analysis:

Patricia compares her experience of mindfulness meditation to therapy: she is enthusiastic about self-therapy and correspondingly critical of therapy-by-other which she experiences as invasive of her inner world. Patricia feels the need to 'pace' herself (suffering from chronic fatigue, she cannot keep up with the normal pace of life). According to Nairn (2012), the subliminal mind mediates between the subconscious and the conscious, arising as conceptual and non-conceptual awareness. Patricia is learning to read her subliminal messages: boredom is a sign that she is not ready to deal with suppressed psychological material. Nairn (2010a) considers force to be an aggressive internal attack; for Patricia, pacing also relates to not forcing herself to deal with what she has suppressed. Patricia is concerned with finding a balance in her practice between going at her own pace, independently and reaching out to external influences to motivate her.

'Without preference' refers to beyond like or dislike, and is part of Nairn's definition of mindfulness. Patricia compares her understanding of 'without preference' with her cultural default mode of undertaking hard cognitive thinking to 'fix' what does not fit with her ideal self.

4.7.2.2 *Body practice, compassion and being whole*

The emphasis on the body practice in mindfulness has made a difference. I used to not be bothered by that silly body scan stuff because it's only about relaxing. I didn't really believe that anything's relevant if it wasn't cerebral. How I managed to get away with that conflict for years, goodness only knows but I did! There's a long way to go in terms of recognising emotion in the body but I'm beginning to. (P1:63,64,65,66)

Investigating using the RAIN practice, I think "Oh, my goodness, this is strange. I feel I have this great cavity in me!" that's very informative. I've always accepted that we all hold tension in our bodies, but somehow it's easy to block the bits that aren't convenient at the time. I'm becoming more familiar and more accepting of what seems paradoxical. There's a surprise in finding these things coming up that I've been spending so much time pretending didn't exist! (P1:67,68,69)

But I couldn't quite make the next link, probably a fear of losing cognitive control. Through practice, you cut off the complex at its roots and you don't even have to go through the conscious layer. You can bypass the conscious, how exciting is that, and how strange and contradictory almost. Very scary because there is no control. But the difference is that it's all within myself and nobody else is doing it to me. I'm allowing it because it is all within me. (P1:72,73,75,76)

I don't give up control easily. I need to know who I am and where I am, but here I am quite happily finding out exciting things about myself. I'm not worrying about what other people might say about me. (P1:77,78)

The thing I want to work on most is that I have an unhealthy relationship to food in that I comfort eat when I'm stressed, when I'm tired, when I'm upset, I eat carbohydrate, biscuits, the classic stuff. So, how do I work on things like that? Well, the trouble is, of course, that's a great sense of striving because it's something I want to change and so I probably can't - that is a paradox. (P1:85,86)

I am content with the idea of not putting myself on some ridiculous diet that will never work. I've become a lot more measured a lot less hard on myself, but I'm still looking for the magic bullet, magic fix and I know I won't get it. Even, actually, that realisation is helpful. (P1:87,90,96)

My approach to sorting stuff now involves compassion, being more realistic, not being prey to commercial nonsense. I think because once you realise that the answers are within yourself,

there's no point in catapulting yourself into these situations that half of you knows are fake before you've even started. (P1:99,100)

Going back to childhood, being the third child who was a sort of add-on, I did always feel a bit of a loner, but I just never quite found the right place to be. And I now feel whole in a way that I probably never ever did actually. Never did. (P1:119,120)

Secondary analysis:

McCown et al (2010) references the widely used triangle of mindfulness (bodily sensation, emotion and thoughts). Before taking up mindfulness practice, Patricia had not fully realised the centrality of embodied practice dismissing it as merely relaxation compared to the more culturally acceptable contemplative aspect of meditation. Patricia remarks on the duration that she was in denial about the body's importance. The RAIN practice helped Patricia to experience viscerally a cavity within herself and to welcome this experience neutrally as "informative". Driven by her egocentric preference system (habitual reactivity of self), Patricia has tried to fix cognitively what she cannot accept in herself and to keep control of the process while doing so. The paradox of transformation through non-conceptual direct experience is exciting to Patricia, and she marvels at what is revealing itself to her. There is an element of fear inherent in the practice of disengaging the cognitive mind. Nairn (2011a) suggests that the non-rational is so alien to us, we fear it and this can derail practice. Cohen (2006) draws out the distinction between control which has a narrow focus and the state of attention which is more open to the flow of perceptual experience. Patricia manages her inclination for control by understanding that no-one else is controlling her and she can exercise choice in when to let go of control and enter a wider state of awareness. Patricia is rejecting external influences (from individuals and commercialisation) for answers, though her temptation to revert to her habitual mode is evident: she references her search for a "magic bullet", and indicates that she partially buys into it when she states that "half of her" knows that commercial nonsense is fake. Patricia recognises that striving to change her eating patterns is counterproductive, and is now adopting a more self-compassionate approach. Patricia is somewhat aware of touching a self-

compassion in herself, though this is not yet accessible consciously. Through her practice, Patricia is experiencing 'wholeness' for the first time in her life.

4.7.2.3 *Practising when it's not going well*

I am practising, but It is not going so well because I am having preferences and being judgemental. There was a time when I found it nurturing and enjoyable and now it's not, which I am deeming to be "not good and a failure" which saying it I now recognise as nonsense! What it probably means is I'm moving on to some other stage of something. (P3:344,345)

For months, I've felt constantly distracted and I don't ever feel that sense of depth and solidity, my mind is in my head a lot and it's whizzing, and it won't go down in my body and it's just not enjoyable and therefore I've been labelling it as not being good, which is just great because at least I recognise what I'm doing! (P3:346)

Before this dip, my strategy to help unblock the blocks would have been to go back to the recordings of led meditations. But recently I haven't been doing that which actually is probably more significant than I give it credit for. I have been just sitting for half-an-hour regardless, however hard it is. Work through rather than take the easy option. (P3:347,348)

My motivation is that I want to get back on track. If I start reverting to the easy version and let the practice get smaller and shorter and easier and lighter, I might end up with nothing. Damn it, I'm not going to do that, I'm going to stick with a proper half-hour of open meditation and let it be whatever it is. Working the edge, knowing that the best way is through the middle. I've got to keep going, because I don't want to stop. (P3:350,351,352)

Secondary analysis:

A common theme of mindfulness training is dealing with less than perfect experiences of practising and increasing tolerance for 'negative' emotions (Hamilton et al, 2006). Here, Patricia expresses her dislike of what is coming up in practice, but as she recalls she recognises that she is equating 'not nurturing and enjoyable' with 'failure'. As she voices her reflection in the third interview, she recognises the lack of sense of this, and that her discomfort may indeed be

an indication of moving through a subliminal emotional complex. Her practice has matured to the extent that she no longer relies on guided practice when the going gets tough; instead simply sitting with whatever difficulties arise, recognising that she must go through the difficulty, not avoid it. Acceptance of what we most dislike or fear is a key element of practice, leading to wholeness (Brach, 2003).

4.7.2.4 *The dungeons*

Things pop out of the dungeons in my psyche and I become very angry. Like I'm standing next to an alter ego. It's a scary feeling. Maybe once every year something triggers vicious anger and I hate that. (P1:55,56,57)

But with the RAIN practice, I've accessed all sorts of people living down somewhere viscerally, who come out and say a bit and then maybe they go back, maybe they don't. There's a lot of stuff from my childhood which I always wanted to sort out and it's not sorted yet, but it's wonderful to feel you can work with foreigners from within you, things that seemed contradictory that are becoming more congruent. (P1:58,59)

One thing I am struggling with is 'not doing well'. I'm not very good at not doing well. My second course assignment was absolutely slammed, relatively speaking. I won't enjoy writing the third assignment so much because of feeling defensive and anxious after the second one. (P1:130,136)

This is a dungeon with the locks on that says you've got to do it right, you've got to please people. If you're criticised then you should run away and cry because that's what proper people do. But part of me is thinking, just do what I believe is right for me. I have a choice whether to write from the heart or try to please others. (P1:137,138)

These dungeons are the kind of stuff you can address in mindfulness with yourself at your own pace and what I think is so amazing is the fact that it's non-cognitive and I'm not trying to force myself to turn into somebody different. If I decide I want to choose to adapt my writing style that's different from feeling a pressure from somewhere fifty years ago that's saying "Now, come along, you've got to do it right". It's making a free choice. (P1:139,141)

Secondary analysis:

In this first interview, Patricia describes her inner psyche as a dungeon, evoking a dreadful place full of frightening people, appearing as separate from herself, as "alter-ego" or "foreigner" with their origins in her childhood. The unbidden emotion of anger, an energetic habitual reflex or mind poison, is unwanted and she has the urge to prevent it from happening. Contrasted to this is her experience of an insight practice (RAIN) which allows her a more spacious and neutral access to what yet remains foreign, where she converses with these aspects of herself. She recognises, and wonders at, the contradiction inherent in her being able to accept the unacceptable in herself.

A specific experience - getting a mediocre mark for an assignment - has triggered in Patricia a lifelong habitual pattern of experiencing being judged and an underlying belief that she has to do things right which will result in others being pleased with her. Patricia has some degree of insight into this, identifying it as "one of the dungeons", although she still feels the hook. She recognises that she has a choice as to how she acts and where she acts from - a fifty year old pressure or a newly recognised sense of congruence.

4.7.2.5 *Patricia's big insight*

My practice has led to some insights about the way I view the whole of my life, which is as momentous as it sounds. I now realise that the whole of my decision-making process in my life has been led by the culture I grew up in, which has led to a sense of there being some kind of judgement – which I now realise is fictitious - being made about what I do, some kind of person standing behind my shoulders watching and judging. (P2:165,166)

It's the process of mindfulness, not just growing up, that has led to this recognition. I woke up one morning recently thinking, "My goodness, I'm not being judged! I don't need to consider some objective person has judge of my work and judge of the decisions that I make". There are relationships in my life, and of course, they involve compromise and negotiation, but I realise now that actually I am master of my own destiny. (P2:169,170)

I said to my husband, "So, so there's nobody else going to be making those judgements?" And he said, "Only the grim reaper!" and I said, "Yeh, that means that from this day to the end of my

life I feel I have a different relationship with my own future". (P2:173)

There was the big moment of insight, that stayed with me and deepened, but there is also the death rattle of the conditioning that's still there. I have to keep remembering because I go back to my default setting which is thinking "Hang on, what am I supposed to be doing?" but it is deepening because I'm beginning to recognise all the areas of my life where I don't have to try and second-guess some other force. (P2:176,177,185)

My energy's been getting better since that insight because there's such a weight taken off. It actually feels like a physical weight taken off. The muscle tension which I usually find when I am meditating, I've been thinking "Where's the tension, where's the tension?" (P2:184)

You have to make a new sheep track and it takes time for it to deepen and time for it to become easily available and it's hard work to start with and at the least provocation you'll slip back into the old sheep track, but gradually you will deepen the new one until you can choose to go along that one. The old sheep tracks will always be there. You may well slip back into them, but the new ones will also exist and so as you regain your strength you will be able to head off in the direction you want to head. (P2:186)

The deepening of the insight is in finding that I can bring it back to mind. I can revert to it at will and I can feel it. (P2:188)

Before the insight, I had been doing more open awareness practices. I suppose I had done a few insight practices but not to the exclusion of anything else. I had been practising in the scheme of things more than I had been a while ago, but I do think the insight journey is incremental. (P2:248)

Remembering the insight literally brings it back to the body. It has the same physical effect as a flood of wellbeing, a sort of whoosh sense of ahhhh! That, if you come in from the rain and the cold and you come into the warm when you feel a physical sensation of release, that is the feeling that I get. It's immediate again. (P2:189,191)

The awareness of it triggers the whole body release. I don't have to search cognitively, no, it's visceral and that's why I'm convinced that it is part of my mindfulness practice rather than some kind of cognitive thing. I recognise that whole body experience as part of mindfulness and compassion practice. (P2:192,193)

Secondary analysis:

Five months later, Patricia relates a recent experience of an insight into 'being judged'. The sense of hookedness has gone, she recognises the delusion ("fictitious judgement"). The insight was sudden (one morning on awakening) and unconnected in time to a specific period of practice, though she believes that it resulted from the process of practice more generally. This is consistent with Nairn's (2012) contention that practice creates the conditions for insight, rather than causing it directly. The insight displays itself in the recognition "My goodness, I'm not being judged!" Nairn (2012) holds that insight operates across a spectrum, liberating us partially or more fully from the delusion that 'it should be like this'. This is borne out by Patricia's experience: the insight has remained and deepened, but Patricia is also experiencing the pull of habit, what she describes as her default setting. Patricia experiences tension and weight no longer being present in her body. This concurs with the notion of the interconnectedness of body and mind (Nairn, 2010a) and the profound physical changes that come about when trauma is released (Levine, 2010). The insight has resulted in Patricia's general energy levels improving.

Patricia reflects further on her experience of the default mode which she recognises as residual - "the death rattle of the conditioning". Nairn (2012) refers to the playing out of the undercurrent as an 'echo' of what has already happened and asserting that the practitioner can only watch the energetic message play out. Patricia reinforces this for herself by drawing on a metaphor of sheep tracks that helps her to work in a practical way with her experience of slipping into habitual thinking patterns. However, Patricia no longer is slave to habit; she can revert to her insight at will, bringing it back to mind through the physical "remembering"; she feels it in her body as liquid and warm and as immediately releasing. Patricia associates this type of inner physical experience with similar sensations she has experienced in the context of mindfulness and compassion practice. The physicality of the experience has taken Patricia from a cognitive belief in the interconnectedness of mind and body to a deeper knowing.

4.7.2.6 *Making new sheep tracks in the world*

I'm just nothing like as anxious about the future or driven so much as I used to be. That's why I got chronic fatigue in the first place, I'm sure. (P2:206,216)

The 'doing' is not required to stand alone in the way that it was. It had to be external and objective and separate almost. It sounds like an impossibility, yet that's what I was striving for. When I do something now, it comes from a place of congruence within me. I'm doing a lot less, which is why my energy's improving. Life is getting easier by the day because the weight's gone. (P2:211,212,257)

One of the things I've struggled with for as long as I can remember, is that when I do have time which isn't allocated, I never know what to do with it. What I'd want is just to see what happens, but there's a struggle going on back and forth between 'I really want to' and 'I really should'. (P2:212,214)

But recently, I'm starting to do that kind of thing. I even turned on the TV at lunchtime. Didn't eat my lunch mindfully, mouthful by mouthful in peace and quiet, I watched the Olympics. To have the TV on during the day, that's very naughty. I should at least have 'flu if not something worse! (P2:215)

I don't do boredom very well but I may well experiment with boredom now because I recognise that it has a value in that it is likely to be masking something. 'One shouldn't be bored', my upbringing says, 'Thou shalt find something useful to do'. 'Thou shalt end up cleaning the skirting boards if everything else is done'. Boredom is uncomfortable. (P2:219,220)

I'm able to entertain different fancies and play a little bit. There's a playfulness to my life. Isn't it desperately sad that that's been hammered down by something fictitious for so long? (P2:228,229)

Part of the deepening of the insight is that flights of fancy can come in and I'll look at them and see how I feel and then I'll let them go. I don't feel any great compunction to make a decision and stick with it, to validate and justify constantly. For what!?! (P2:232)

It's not that seriousness has gone out of decision-making. There's a seriousness in all the future potentials, but the gravitas, that sort of weight has gone, that leded commitment and obligation has gone. When nothing else needs to change, it opens up an awareness of more possibilities. (P2:234,235)

I am ready to accept myself when a part of me is preparing to let go. The thought has gone of "you've got to keep going because

that's what real people do". Now, so much more accepting. (P2:239,245)

The non-cognitive nature of it still astonishes me, the cutting of the roots. It sort of happens almost by itself. I can't make head nor tail of it! It seems like magic, that all I do is sit there, sit there shifting my attention from what I'm going to do tomorrow; or when I'm going to get round to decorating the house; and then [snap fingers] stuff happens. (P2:253,254)

Turning around expecting to find this spectre on my shoulder and it isn't there. To have that kind of change happen without any kind of intellectual striving is just astonishing and wonderful and long may it continue! (P2:255)

I'm very lucky in my relationship with husband as I'm able to talk about these insights with him. My husband doesn't seem to have any interest in doing meditation but he is fascinated by the whole subject. He has a visceral understanding of it all, so he's very interested in what I have to say and seems endlessly patient in listening to me rambling on about what I'm getting from it. (P2:258,259,260)

I still very much depend on people, other people's goodwill and other people's good impression of me. I still try to please a lot, but I think most people do. It's interaction wanting to be with people and share my experience of mindfulness leads to me selecting to be with people who are not going to be particularly brutal, hopefully. But I've not been thinking, "Ah, what will they think of me?" I have faith in my own capacity to make a valid choice. (P3:307,308)

Choosing the not-so-worn sheep track and not keeping looking at the other one. But deciding what the value is in the one you're on, because forging new ground on principle doesn't have much intrinsic value, but choosing a new track because the old one no longer serves you is valuable. My new sheep track is a strong one for me. (P3:309,310)

Secondary analysis:

A sense of a stillness in Patricia is for her reflective of a reduction in anxiety, and prompts her to explore her experience of striving and acceptance. Driven by 'shoulds', Patricia felt guilty about resting, enjoying and indulging her wants. Her release from feeling judged allows her a hitherto unexperienced playfulness and openness to what life has to offer now and in the future. Her sense of being

weighed down has gone. Whilst her husband does not share her interest in meditation, his role as a supportive and patient confidante has been significant to Patricia, allowing her to explore her emerging insights without censure. Four months on, the big insight has matured into a new and stronger inner path; she has faith in her own value judgements and she chooses with whom to associate. Contrasting her previously held underlying belief that psychological change takes cognitive effort, Patricia describes the effect of 'cutting of the roots' as magical; signifying the transformative nature of insight (Nairn, 2011c; Moran, 2012).

4.7.2.7 *Reflecting on life's challenges and growing older*

I've been quite good, I think for most of my life, at not being self-pitying and being quite an optimist and being quite kind to myself in terms of my aspirations. I don't feel that I should have become a professor or a significant business woman. I would love to have been a better parent, but I think most parents would say that. I've been quite okay at saying 'You did your best.' It has always been this blasted spectre of feeling judged which clearly was in there somewhere. (P2:240,241,242)

Now that I'm in my sixties, I am effectively a retired person doing a lot more of what I want to do and not going out looking for the next job, but was still thinking "This can't be right. This can't be allowed!". (P2:243)

Since I had my big insight there have been fundamental changes, but they haven't followed in a linear way. It has dissipated. It has spread laterally into the way I view things and the way I respond to things. It's like learning to drive, you wouldn't necessarily go on to do advanced driving, but it would change qualities in the whole of your life because of the access to other things. You can choose when and where to do things. That is how it feels. There continues to be a deepening of self-knowledge and understanding. (P3:300,301,302)

I've been able to make a big choice which is not to do the third year of the course. I expected to be in anguish and torment and to want to change my mind, but I find I am not at all. I think that is underpinned by that original insight that I can choose and that my choice is valid. (P3:303,304,305)

Practice has been very difficult. I have felt in a state of loss and grieving and my chronic fatigue has really kicked me. I was trying not to panic, but I did panic a lot. A fatigue dip is generally triggered by some emotional excess, and in this case it was a combination of doing one of the course modules which took a lot of emotional energy, and also the decision not to continue with something that has proved so life-changing, which felt like a throwing away. Logically it isn't, but at a gut level it's a different kind of thing. (P3:312,342)

While I recognise that there is value in experiencing that grief and loss, I'm rushing about finding all manner of lovely things to take over, which is very much my default position, because I do like to have lots of interesting things going on in my life. Diverting myself from the loss and the grief is an old sheep track, but not necessarily a bad one. That's the way I cope, to be busy and to find interesting things to do. (P3:317,318)

I grew up in a very small village and I think I have a fear of becoming small-minded. I have a fear of my world getting smaller because I'm getting older, because I do see it in quite a lot of people that I come across in various areas of life, that they start to shut out possibilities. In the 1980s, I was very inspired by a woman in her eighties who used to volunteer for a helpline. I just thought, I want to be like you, so there's a lot of pride wanting to create the self that I choose. I have huge enthusiasm for the next decade of my life. (P3:329,330,332)

It's a huge change in attitude for me, to be able to give up the course and not be afraid of not achieving, of thinking myself a failure. Practice helps an awful lot with that, the self-compassion of enjoying each day and not being hard on yourself and the authenticity of being able to go out and get what you want, as long as it's not hurting anybody else. It's a real acceptance of me as a human being in this world, and a human being who physiologically is starting to fail in various ways and will continue to fail, hanging on to the bits that I have some control over, like my attitude to life. (P3:406,417,418)

Secondary analysis:

Patricia reflects on her relationship to her life; offering observations on her behaviour, motivations and experiences in the wake of her big insight. She describes her default mode - optimistic, her preferences - to have been a better parent, and references the underlying hook of feeling judged that coloured all of her life. Four months later, she revisits her inner landscape post-big insight. The

impact of the big insight has been qualitative rather than quantitative, creating a deepening of self-awareness and greater ability to choose. Patricia is in her early sixties, and is examining with curiosity and enthusiasm alternatives to life becoming smaller and of lessening value. She is motivated by her memory of an older woman she knew when she was younger. A choice that Patricia has made, and is working through, is that she is leaving the course after the second year. Patricia's motivation is to free herself up to enjoy her retirement. Quitting would have been unthinkable prior to the big insight - she would have felt unbearably a failure - and it is even now proving very tough. Patricia is experiencing a great upsurge of loss, grief and fatigue. She diverts herself from this at times, but remarks on how her practice supports her in this transition - self-compassion allows her the freedom to enjoy each day, authenticity allows her to exercise choice, and acceptance the ability to look forward without fear.

4.7.3 Work

4.7.3.1 Chronic fatigue, working and mindfulness

I've had chronic fatigue for about twenty years. The illness is to do with stresses, for me, bereavement and divorce and then I became physically ill. With my chronic fatigue, I would go for any therapy, I was so desperate and wanted my career back, I've lost two or three jobs and just could never do things again. I used to try anything. But therapy never meant anything because it always involved people doing things to you. (P1:71,74,91,92)

I'm at about sixty percent of what I was before, although I'm also now twenty years older. I am much more tired than my peers and I recognise specific symptoms. I have coping strategies that aren't particularly helpful, like running on adrenaline. (P1:93,94)

Over the last twenty years, I've worked part-time for a lot of the time. I had a full-time job as a training manager. That was the first job I had to lose and then I got another training job only to lose that one and since then I've not tried to work full-time. The most has probably been four days a week but that was not good for me and I would crash regularly. (P1:103)

I really want to being able to turn the course into some work. As an adult education teacher of social care for nearly thirty years,

I've had knowledge to offer students, but leading mindfulness is very different. (P1:5,8)

There's one local mindfulness organisation where I live and I approached them and asked to volunteer with them, just because I wanted to be around people and that has morphed into more work running drop-in groups and a mindfulness for carers short course. A part of me is concerned about energy levels but that's down to me, I just have to manage it well. I had a lot of anxiety and probably over-prepared, but as soon as I started doing it I thought I can do this. (P1:4,9,105,106)

I did teach a 14-week term, but I wasn't comfortable with the organisation's professionalism, so I stopped. I kept thinking, "Well, I must start again. I've got to get organised", and then I asked myself, "Did you enjoy it?" "Not really." "Was it significant income?" "Not really." "Do you really want to do this?" "Not at the moment." (P2:178,179,180)

That's not like I have been before because I had the belief that if I take something for myself, I have to immediately start giving back. There would have been a sense of guilt: "But I have to teach, that's what I do". The guilt was about being good enough, being judged. (P2:181,182)

If I teach again, it will be with a careful assessment of being comfortable with what I'm committing myself to, that's appropriate to my energy levels and that it is going to be of value to me as well as of value to others. Even saying that makes me feel very wobbly because of many years of conditioning. (P2:183)

With my husband and I retiring now, there's plans for enormous amounts of not very much, just having a nice time. Five years ago I would have found that really frightening. Part of the not-being-judged is deciding to do things because I want to do them, rather than because I ought to or because I feel other people will think it's great. Also, being at pension age does mean that I have a lot more freedom to pick and choose volunteer projects. I've been asked to do the wardrobe for a local small theatre company. What fun to help people with their costumes! And I've been asked to get involved in mindfulness-based substance misuse rehabilitation in the criminal justice system which is a pretty heavyweight and worthy, but people's lives are so fascinating. It's running towards, not running away from. (P3:319,325,333,409,415,416)

Secondary analysis:

Patricia's experience of work has been influenced greatly by a long-term medical condition - chronic fatigue - which she has experienced for twenty years. She has tried hard to manage this condition through a variety of means, none thus far successful. Her pattern has been to desperately try different therapies. For Patricia, work has to have meaning and she likes working with people.

Initially, Patricia had a strong desire to teach mindfulness, to convert it into work that she could incorporate into her field of adult teaching. After her big insight, Patricia recognises the striving that fuelled that desire, and is able to unpick the complexity of motivation and emotion behind it. She recognises that identifying herself as a teacher equated in her mind to having to teach; that as she took she was compelled to pay back. Now she can experience her conditioning and her doubt, even as it causes her to feel ungrounded.

Patricia expands on what she is considering engaging in now that she no longer feels externally judged, and how this might enrich her life with new meaning. A childlike quality is noticeable in her motivations - fun, curiosity, fascination, interest, a disinclination towards boredom. That some of her chosen activities might be deemed 'worthy' is now incidental.

4.7.4 Relationships

4.7.4.1 Patricia's relationship with her granddaughter

I spent last weekend looking after my six-year-old granddaughter. I don't know how much has to do with her development and the length of our relationship or about my practice, but I had more equanimity, and was considerably more relaxed in her company than I ever have been before. (P2:198,199)

I can extrapolate easily that that's because I didn't feel I was being judged by her parents for my performance. Previously, I have felt I had to leave a sort of audit trail of good behaviour, but actually, we did all manner of things that her Dad won't approve of! (P2:200,201,202)

I did feel much more relaxed and I was so happy and, of course, that became a virtuous circle because she felt more able to call on me when she couldn't sleep, when she was anxious about something, because she wasn't sensing my anxiety. I don't care about her Dad not liking what he might hear! I did the right thing for me and her. She had a good time, she's my granddaughter. And that's very exciting. (P2:203,204)

Secondary analysis:

The effects of Patricia's big insight become apparent in two key family relationships. The first, with her granddaughter, has become more relaxed and open. Previously, Patricia would have been preoccupied with how the child's parents would judge how she looked after their child, and her thoughts about this would distract her from being in the moment with her granddaughter. Now, Patricia is able to focus on being in relationship to her granddaughter, being more present in her company, the relationship evolving of itself.

4.7.4.2 *Patricia's relationship with her son*

My son Ben and I have not got on well for many years. I have had years of desperately thinking, if only I can 'get it right', maybe he'll like me. (P3:360,361)

He suggested we meet for lunch, and it was wonderful. It's equivalent to the change in the relationship with my granddaughter, because it came at least partly from my inner strength and my recognition of a reality that depends upon things being allowed to be as they are. (P3:368,369)

When I met up with my son, I was very anxious because I was going to be with the person who, to be honest, I was desperately frightened of, because of his rejection of me. Heightened emotions and bodily sensations, lots of tension. (P3:371,372)

I was very aware that if I tried to fight the fear, I would get into a worse state and that what I had to do was to have the confidence to feel my own emotions without projecting them on to him. It was the first time I'd been with him on my own for that length of time for years, and, yes it did feel courageous. I had to play a part but within that part I was quite sure that I needed to be *me*, because if I was trying to turn myself into someone else, that wouldn't work. (P3:373,374,377)

I was absolutely shattered afterwards but only because I was holding it open. It was like holding a meditation. It was hard work to stay in that mental place which was open and positive and accepting and not intrusive and not demanding more than was reasonably available. (P3:380)

He was trying to play the sophisticated son and I was enjoying playing with that, but trying very hard not to get drawn into scoring points, or putting him down. He was trying to be helpful, I was trying to show that I have some knowledge of life as well. (P3:384)

It's a key to my future, because every parent wants a good relationship with their children. When children are little, the idea that they might not want a relationship with you is almost unimaginable. To be able to build this now with him is heaven on earth. (P3:388,389)

It goes back to the not-being-judged insight, because if I felt if I was looking for his approval before we had even met, I would have been in a state of unmanageable tension. I was able to go in and think, "okay, I will do my absolute best to make this work but I have a right to be me and I will do my best and that's all I can do". If it had gone wrong, I'm not sure I'd be able to hang on to that position, but it probably worked out so well because I was in a position of some strength and holding myself in a mindfulness turn. (P3:390,391)

I was consciously aware of all of these different aspects that I was balancing and co-ordinating, absolutely, because it's so important to me – everything, body language, choice of food, supporting that dual outcome when two people are together. (P3:392,393)

Ben was definitely being compassionate to me and so I was holding back like mad to avoid overstepping a line and moving from interest to what he might perceive as interference. Compassion is the attitude that underpinned all of the mindful actions. A lot of self-compassion for me, and probably for him as well. He wouldn't have bothered to come if he didn't want a relationship, and so if it had failed because he couldn't cope, for whatever reason, with me he would have been very vulnerable. (P3:395,399)

In my childhood, I had very difficult relationships with members of the family, never more than perfunctory, so if I want a relationship, it involves being vulnerable. It involves compassion. It involves cognitive awareness, authenticity, too, a balance of all of this. Interplaying, wonderful. (P3:399,400,401)

Secondary analysis:

Patricia's big insight has led to her relating very differently to her son. Their relationship has been difficult, at times estranged, characterised by reactivity and fear. In this encounter with him, Patricia is able to move through her fear to authenticity. By drawing on her inner strength, Patricia adapts to the unexpected/unwelcome i.e. being on her own with her son, remembering past bad experiences, anxious about chronic fatigue setting in. She is aware of fear arising, but refrains from fighting the fear. Instead she has the confidence to feel her own emotions and refrain from projecting onto her son. She refrains from adopting the pre-set pattern of identity - the role of mother, and opens to an awareness of her son's preferences . Holding the space - "holding myself in a mindfulness turn" - she likens it to a meditation; comparable to the process of eidetic reduction described by Depraz et al (1999). She is aware of what contributes to the tone of the encounter - "everything, body language, choice of food, supporting that dual outcome when two people are together".

Crucially, what freed Patricia to be authentic is her earlier big insight of not being judged. She was free to notice what was going on in her; when she was holding back, knowing when and what to say, when she was being courageous. In retelling the event, she recognised that "compassion underpinned all of the mindfulness actions" - self-compassion, compassion for her son, her son's compassion towards her. Patricia noticed the complex interplay at the time and by reflecting on it, notices more nuanced detail. Patricia recognised this encounter as a turning point for her and her son; a desired closeness is now possible. Although she has been physically and mentally exhausted by it, she is exultant.

4.8 Summary

Participants have integrated the taught theoretical perspectives from MSc programme into their practices and use them to make sense of the life experiences which have ensued. This is apparent in the fluency with which participants incorporate theoretical language within informal conversational

discourse, and the richly detailed accounts of where participants recognise the extent to which their practice has influenced their life experience. The rich descriptions offered by participants argue against pinning down a testable operational definition of mindfulness. As aspects of many of the definitions offered in 2.3 can be seen reflected in their narratives, I argue, as with Lynch (2008) that a pluristic approach would be more relevant than a unified definition. From participant accounts relating to the effect of their practice on their relationships with others and the wider world, a strong ethic is evident, suggesting that practitioners' inner development has had a direct effect on their outwardly focused attitudes and actions.

Participants demonstrate their preferences for different practices, some negative preferences motivated by the level of complexity of the practice, but more often, the choice of practice aligns with what is relevant for the practitioner in a given circumstance. Kornfield's (1978) findings from the Vipassana course of the array of mental and bodily states are similar to what participants on this study express as their experience; whilst their experiences are generally progressive, there is a cyclic nature to them, participants experience repetitions of their complexes but at a different level of cognitive awareness, becoming more acute as awareness increases, then as insights arise, the nature of the complex changes and becomes more nuanced, arising but with less suffering attached. Nairn notes "we are mindful when we can relax in the midst of the tangle of complexes and do nothing" (Nairn, 2011a, 4/5/11). All participants demonstrate this ability, not only in practice sessions, but also in day-to-day life.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

PART 2 - DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.9 Introduction

As set out in chapter 3, the principal aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how long-term practitioners of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight live mindfully in contemporary times, and the extent to which their practices traverse and permeate their life journey. In chapter 4 part 1, participant narratives were presented individually and examined for their unique storylines and distinctive events. Stepping back from the individual perspective in part 2, common themes emerge to be examined in the context of phenomenological theory. Forming part of the hermeneutic circle, this stepping back allows for the individual texts to be understood in relation to the whole set (Cohen et al, 2000), surfacing shared experiences. As discussed in 3.12.4, from the exercise undertaken to identify and draw out common crosscutting themes, a matrix was developed showing side by side similar storylines from each narrative (see appendix F). From there, mind maps were developed which allowed detailed crosscutting themes to be drawn out (see appendix G). A series of nine crosscutting themes emerged as participant stories were matched and examined together. Each crosscutting theme consists of several interwoven threads and is relevant to all the participants.

4.10 Crosscutting Themes

The set of nine crosscutting themes developed from the comparative matrix and mind mapping techniques show the correlations between six first-person perspectives of the experience of practising mindfulness, compassion and insight:

- Experiencing a defining life challenge
- Recognising default modes
- Developing mastery of practice

- Becoming embodied
- Experiencing insight
- Relating authentically to oneself
- Relating authentically to others
- Connecting with the wider world
- Integrating Mindfulness practice across life domains

Keeping in mind Moran's (2012) description of the lifeworld as "a thickly experienced context of embodied human acting and knowing that is not completely surveyable, not fully objectifiable, and which has an inescapably intersubjective and 'intertwined' character" (ibid, p181), the exposition below, whilst systematic, should be viewed as a partial analysis, based to a large extent on the researcher's unique perspective into the field of study as well as the participants' experiences.

4.10.1 Experiencing a defining life challenge

A common feature in the journey towards mindfulness is death or significant loss; being-towards-death according to Heidegger provides the motivation to seek the authentic self (Finlay, 2011). All of the participants came to mindfulness through a defining life challenge involving a variation of loss – death, age, physical illness, emotional trauma or limiting self-belief, and the literature supports the use of mindfulness-based interventions across a range of adverse life circumstances. Aidan remarks that after the death of his close friend "all my certainty about life was revealed to be fake with no credibility" (A1:23-24). Their life challenge presented each with an opening into a deeper understanding of the world and their place in it, acceptance of the difficulty offering the opportunity to gain insight (Germer, 2009). Gillian notes "it strikes me that difficulty and confusion and fear are good things, because that's where the potential comes from, you change once you've gone through feeling fear" (G2:141).

There were choice points for some that reflected their motivation and intention to practise, Shapiro et al (2006) observing that practitioners advance as far as their intention allows. Louise was offered medication to deal with PTSD, but chose mindfulness as a means to “overcome it myself” (L1:11). Patricia turned away from both religion and therapy, but found in mindfulness a non-threatening method where “you do just what you can do” (P2:249-250). A commitment to mindfulness was made by some despite their current circumstances: Fiona was experiencing menopause and potential loss of self-employed work; Patricia struggled to practise with chronic fatigue.

Difficulty at the beginning was experienced strongly by some; the literature supports the regularity of this (Nairn, 2011b; Malpass et al, 2012; Cairns & Murray, 2015). Gillian found her emotions were so intense that she “did a runner” from the course (G1:59); similarly, Fiona thought she “would have to stop ‘cause I really couldn’t handle it” (F1:23-24). Through practice, however, the urge to escape gave way to welcoming the difficulties; again supported by the research literature (Monshat et al, 2013). Aidan noted “I first found myself lost, and then gradually I became more comfortable with an existential unknowing” (A1: 23.24). As participants opened to the teaching and practice, they experienced transformational change, of an order reflected in phenomenological literature (Moran, 2012; Finlay, 2009) using terms such as “overwhelmingly better” (F2:174), “my path has been astronomic” (P1:49).

4.10.2 Recognising default modes

Whilst initial difficulties were overcome, all participants commented on periodic cyclic obstacles arising from their own projections. Whilst all participants valued their overall experience as indubitably positive and life enhancing, the discomfort inherent in bringing attention to psychological issues are a common and predictable feature of practice described in the research literature (e.g. Lomas et al, 2015; Kornfield, 1979), particularly so when committed to long-term practice.

All participants identified default modes or mind poisons which they were addressing through practice. As pointed out by Nairn (2011a) and Williams et al (2007), recognising the default mode could be tricky. Difficult emotions such as jealousy or pride, according to Gilbert et al (2009), can be shameful and therefore “painful and embarrassing” to see (G1:13). For Gillian, these emotions are tangible, felt sensations of pain in her heart “it’s just like someone has put a dagger through” (G1:15). For Fiona, a conceptual understanding of theory and practice preceded somatic knowing, which in turn gave rise to insight, experienced as an “aha moment” (F1:11), into the emotional mode: “I’ve noticed an element of social anxiety ... which I didn’t think I had” (F1:21). As noted by Nairn (2010a), whilst an element of conceptualisation in the form of instruction is required, the experiential practice of mindfulness transforms conceptual understanding. Aidan admitted to being “sometimes blind in my seeing” (A1:8), and found feedback from others helpful in pointing out his projections.

For Louise, working the edge with the label of ‘burns survivor’ was dynamic: “the edge throws things at me” (L1:27), and corporal: “there is a feeling of a black ball inside my stomach .. and I know it is all tied up in returning back to the fold as a burns survivor” (L1:33), echoing Nairn (2011a) and Ray (2014). Patricia experienced her difficult emotional states of anger and the feeling of constantly being judged arising from “the dungeons” (P1:55) as “foreigners from within you” (P1:59), reflective of the experience of the RAIN practice (Mindfulness Association, 2011). James described similar states of anxiety, worry and self-criticism (J2:99) arising as a vicious cycle when he is practising in a less optimum state of mind.

4.10.3 Developing mastery of practice

In their practice of mindfulness, compassion and insight, participants demonstrated the ability to practise phenomenological epoche or bracketing through suspension of habitual thought, shifting attention to the interior experience and letting-go into the experience (Depraz et al, 1999) as put

forward by Hartelius (2015) and Thompson (2007). However, this is not wholly straightforward. Initially, participants experienced a growing awareness of the extent of unresolved psychological issues and mental habits, and the pull which they exert on the mind, a phenomenon central to the fields of both mindfulness and phenomenology (Depraz et al, 1999; Nairn, 2011a).

James, Aidan and Fiona described a mode of intense striving characterising their practice and resulting in strong somatic sensations, whilst Patricia took a more paced approach. For James and Aidan, striving is connected to their intense desire to be relieved of suffering: James's aim is to find the elusive middle road (J2:96) where he experiences his essential energy, whilst Aidan is motivated to find answers to life's questions. Both questioned the value of striving, reflecting Nairn's (2012) and Gilbert et al's (2009) opinion that it is counterproductive. Fiona and Patricia remarked that gaining a cognitive understanding of principles - undercurrent and observer; without preference (Nairn, 2012) - allowed those principles to be more readily experienced in practice.

The variety of practices taught on the programme along with familiarisation brought about by frequent practise afforded practitioners choice in aligning practice with their current life situation. It was apparent that participants were fluent in their use of practice, describing their choices confidently. An example of this was Louise's description of using specific compassion practices to ameliorate her acute stress symptoms (L1:41-47; L2:118-119). Participants evidenced their fluency using somatic and affective references suggestive of the transformed orientation to the world depicted by Ray (2014): the "delicious" breath (A2:215); a "deep rest" (L3:197); "finding my own sense of ease" (A1:48); "the heart energy ... that wells up in you" (J1:53-54); "I feel I have this great cavity in me!" (P1:67).

As well as regular formal practice, it was evident that participants engaged in on-the-spot or ad hoc practice triggered by moment-to-moment circumstance: "I love that I often find myself saying lovingkindness phrases for strangers" (A2:194); "I felt that sick feeling in my tummy, and I practised just rubbing my

stomach and acknowledging, ‘okay, it’s here, it’s okay’” (L2:118); also indicative of increased mastery of practice.

Participants were clear in their minds that the very act of doing the practice was of itself the aim, and that repeated practice creates conditions for insight and wisdom (J1:2-5). Participants felt challenged when practice was experienced as not going well, however were able to recognise this as fallacy (Nairn, 2012): “it’s not going well because I am having preferences and being judgemental ... which saying it I now recognise as nonsense! What it probably means is I’m moving on to some other stage”. (P3: 344-345)

Intention can be conceived as inherent in the very being of a person, in the way that they exist in relation to their life world (Heidegger, 1927/1962), which might also be considered as life purpose, and as intentional acts of will (Stein, 1916/1989). Perhaps because of the appreciation that gratification is not immediate, motivation and intention were viewed as essential to maintaining a commitment to practise. Fiona noted the virtuous cycle of positive experiences of practice leading to greater commitment to practise every day. For Fiona, setting an intention to trust in herself was an exercise that she hoped would seed future practice. Intention and motivation were seen as fundamental: “it’s all about motivation” (J1:2), “there are only two things we can do. We can set our intention and motivation and we can refrain” (G2:138); “I’ve got to keep going, because ... I don’t want to stop”. (P3:352)

As well as requiring the intention and motivation to practise, participants also noted the need for external input: “my mind is wandering, and I’m letting it ramble a bit, so now I am seeing that regularly I’m needing some input of some sort from outside ...” (F3:235); “if I have to be totally self-motivating, things tend to wind down dynamically” (P3:340); interaction with others within group practice would appear to be a motivating factor to sustaining practice (Shonin et al, 2014). In addition, both Fiona and Gillian found that teaching mindfulness to others renews their own commitment to practise, a position supported by McCown et al (2010).

4.10.4 *Becoming embodied*

The body provides spatial tethering for the experience of the self. Without proper attention, it remains 'habit-body'; subject to mindful attention it is the 'body-in-this-moment' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958). Participants experience the 'body-in-this-moment' during practice and moreover demonstrated that they can extend this embodied present moment awareness into their day-to-day lives. As well as an entry point through somatic practices, embodiment was of itself an outcome: "I'm able to centre and be grounded and embodied in my coming home to myself, even as things are happening around, sounds, thoughts or whatever" (L3:197). Thompson (2007) reminds us of the twofold characteristic of body as an interior and as an exterior experience, becoming "other to itself" (ibid, p251). Participants featured this understanding throughout their discourse in relation to their experience of observing the body and of sensing into the body. James exemplified this when he stated: "Knowing is the body sensing". (J1:15)

Participants were eloquent in describing their experience of embodiment and keen to stress their understanding of its non-cognitive nature (cf Ray, 2014; Nairn, 2012): "I used to not be bothered about that silly body scan stuff because it's only about relaxing. I didn't really believe that anything's relevant if it wasn't cerebral" (P64-66); "It feels simpler experiencing it than it is saying it" (J1:12); "It's a centering ... this core of wisdom and compassion that's in me. I do feel that quite strongly here in my belly. For me, wisdom is ... not intellectual, it's a sense, it's a feeling" (F1:78).

The subtle inner workings of the preloaded projected energy of impulse (Stein, 1916/1989; Nairn, 2011) and subliminal reflex (Nairn, 2012) became increasingly detectable: "I can sense thoughts almost, though if I try to focus on them, they dissipate. I'm in my body and they're just there hovering above my brow level. It's a felt sense ... a very very subtle sensation" (L3:264-265); "I'd relax but underneath that there seemed to be more tension and more tension and then the final subtle layer seemed to be this real bracing against life" (G3:204). Insight also is experienced somatically: "Remembering the insight literally brings it back to the body. It has the same physical effect as a flood of

wellbeing, a sort of whoosh sense of ahhhh!” (P2:189). Present moment experienced in the body afforded a different temporal awareness: “I am less aware of time passing, I’m just aware of being in it”. (J1:18)

4.10.5 Experiencing insight

Participants demonstrated a deepening of their ability to sustain attention on the subliminal undercurrent such that sufficient insight occurred to transform the ‘natural attitude’ in the manner of transcendental phenomenology (Macann, 1993). Insight was experienced as both gradual and immediate, often with a somatic aspect, and as resulting from experiential insight practice providing the conditions for insight to arise; this is in line with Nairn’s (2012) exposition on insight, and on the work of Ray (2014) and Wallace (2010). In reflecting on recent insight training, Aidan realised that he needed to drop his attention down further than the breath (A1:52), and doing so led to “more automatically seeing things through a different lens” (A1:95). Gillian reflected on the antecedents of insight: “I think that the insight was mostly due to the work that I had been doing that year on my mind poisons” (G2:101). Patricia asserted “it’s visceral and that’s why I am convinced that it is part of my mindfulness practice rather than some kind of cognitive thing” (P2:192-193).

Insight was reported to occur during practice: “just one morning when I was sitting in the shrine room, I had an insight” (G2:86), and also emerging abruptly during the course of everyday life: “I woke up one morning recently thinking ‘My goodness, I’m not being judged!’” (P2:169). Gillian reported that she has experienced four big insights, defining ‘big’ as “the seeing-is-the-doing, immediately liberating” (G2:144). She holds that a defining feature of insight is that it and its consequences have an unexpected quality and that insight relates to a ‘loosening of the sense of self” (G2:109); in line with Nairn’s (2012) theoretical perspective. Fiona’s experience of insight was that it is gradual and difficult to verbalise, and that she recognised accumulated insight in retrospect; again, in line with Nairn (2012) who describes this level of insight as partial. Barriers to insight were explored: Aidan reflected that striving may inhibit the

emergence of insight, but held the view that insight is a balance between analysis and reflection. This does not concur with Nairn's (2012) position that insight is only achievable from direct experience, and may reflect Aidan's partial experience of insight at that point in his practice.

Truth as experienced by participants shifted from an objective absolute to a felt sense of 'rightness' emanating from the deconstruction of the inauthentic self. This is in line with both Buddhist and phenomenological viewpoints (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958; Chogyam Trungpa, 1975). Aidan considered his insight journey as seeking truth, and on one hand appeared caught up in conceptualising the meaning of truth: "I think there is a real danger in being a perpetual seeker and expecting truth to be something dramatic or holding an idea of what truth is. I think I do get caught up in that" (A2:142) whilst also appreciating that there is an authentic, sensory experience that defies conceptual understanding, indicative of Ray's (2014) position: "There is an inner knowing of truth. When I reflect on my meditations, there are times when there is just a knowing of 'this is true, this can't really be questioned'. It's like when you're really in touch with the ground, you don't question it." (A3:357-359).

Reflective of Nairn (2012), Aidan noted that insight might need to come to fruition: "There's a basic awareness that comes from seeing the projection, the masks. But, here's the thing, maybe we can't shed these things before their time". (A2:176,189) When they do come to fruition, insights had far-reaching and unexpected outcomes. Both Gillian and Patricia reported on the transformational effects of big insights on their worldview, signalling transcendental shifts in perspective (Moran, 2012). Described as one of the steps – self-display - in the process of insight (Nairn, 2010a), Gillian reported that she only realised the diverse and interrelated causal factors of an inner complex once it unravelled: "I didn't realise just how interconnected the 'not-good-enough' complex was with so many aspects of my being" (G2:109); Patricia recounted that "my practice has led to some insights about the way I view my whole life, which is as momentous as it sounds" (P2:165).

Gillian's big insight, "I am good enough!?" (G2:87) resulted in a range of explicit effects, e.g. being able to socially connect with others, feeling younger, and also the more subtle outcome of no longer bracing against life (G3:203). More tangible is that Gillian's relationship to food and eating changed: 'I've lost a lot of weight because I have been able to stick to a diet for the first time and not be overwhelmed by unconscious forces arising" (G2:90).

Patricia's big insight of not being judged resulted in a web of transformative changes in her life. From the global: "and I now feel whole in a way that I probably never ever did actually" (P1:120) to specific instances such as the pivotal lunch date with her estranged son. Patricia's physical energy levels have increased which she attributes to the 'weight' that has been removed by the insight, and the subsequent lack of muscular tension (P2:184). Patricia likened the trajectory of her big insight to new sheep tracks being formed on a hillside: "it takes time for it to deepen and time for it to become easily available and it's hard work to start with and at the least provocation, you'll slip back into the old sheep track, but gradually you will deepen the new one until you can choose to go along that one. The old sheep tracks will always be there. You may well slip back into them, but the new ones will also exist and so as you regain your strength you will be able to head off in the direction you want to head" (P2:196). Gillian too noted the continued existence of the conditioned pattern: "It's not like it's gone completely and forever. Sometimes I can see it on the periphery, but I can just let it be." (G2:95). Patricia's and Gillian's accounts correspond to Nairn's (2010a) description of the process of insight where the echoes of habitual reflexes arise from the undercurrent.

4.10.6 Relating authentically to oneself

Participants made sense of their world in relation to their learning from the MSc programme, both theoretical and experiential, and the application of the learning in the form of specific practices. This took place in the wider context of their personal histories, familial background, childhood development and their wider world, as set forth by Heidegger (Langdrige, 2007). Authenticity, the self

calling back to itself from its lostness (Macann, 1993) towards a “primordial kind of knowing” (Heidegger, 1927/1962) is sought by all participants, and welcomed when experienced as a result of insight. Participants reported changes in how they relate inwardly within themselves, characterised by greater self-acceptance, increased self-compassion and greater self-recognition and agency.

Fiona embraced self-acceptance first at a conceptual level and then experientially: “Even though intellectually I understood the term 'acceptance', I didn't really get that in here [*gestures to heart area*]. I didn't get it in my heart and body, but now I understand that this anxiety is not going to go away, this anger's not going to go away, this sadness is not going to go away, but it's ok. It's about accepting them. It's not about trying to get rid of them.” (F1:8-9) Fiona noticed more when she is triggering and acted positively to counter mounting anxiety by becoming kinder to herself. Louise also practised self-compassion when she noticed anxiety arising, appreciating that: “There've been sometimes that I've had to stop because it's just too much, but then I'm able to acknowledge that I'm just not ready and I don't force it.” (L1:28) Through months of practice what appeared to Louise as an impenetrable black ball in her inner world was later described as a baby or a silent giant, a relatable human aspect.

Participants reflected on their life purpose throughout their discourse, at times measuring up what they have achieved thus far against their ultimate goal. This inevitably caused a degree of suffering when present attainment fell short of full realisation of the goal. The extent to which participants could be accepting of this, lessened their distress. Through the process of insight, psychological complexes resolved bringing the participant closer to their inherent nature. Where conscious intention was foiled by excessive striving, participants got caught on the hook of their suffering; a phenomenon noted in Buddhism and phenomenology (Stein, 1916/1989; Chodron, 2001a).

Aidan's exploration of the direct somatic experience of authenticity brought him closer to subtle knowing, allowing what is experienced non-conceptually to surface and be expressed in thought and concept: “Authenticity is when

something feels real and doesn't have a fake edge to it. It's not trying to kid yourself and others, and not investing in games when they're no longer needed. When I strip away illusion, I go 'aawhh!.....' it's like I get in touch with my skeleton, something core. I recognise not only how much I was kidding myself, but I also recognise that there was an incongruity, a part of me that knew I was deluded. This part for me is inauthenticity". (A2:153,155-156,158)

The inner striving that features in Aidan's and James's accounts worked against the development of acceptance and self-compassion. Aidan however began to relate differently towards his striving, becoming more accepting of the fact of his striving and the inherent contradiction with striving and acceptance: "Within the contradictions, at some level, I have to just rest and say I'm doing my best." (A3:353) James was engaged with balancing between acceptance and fixing, describing being "switched on all the time" (J2:134): "Getting into the subliminal, the parts of the personality that I can't see, it makes me feel broken. It makes me feel like there must be something I have to fix there." (J2:143) Whilst striving was a key feature of experience for both males in the study, Gillian, Fiona, Louise and Patricia all referenced working with a propensity for striving in their behavioural and thinking patterns; Gillian recognised that she is egocentrically driven, Fiona that she strives after perfection. Louise appeared to quite quickly make peace with her striving mind, and like Fiona, developed a degree of trust in the emergence. After her big insight, Patricia noticed more her propensity to strive and the causal link to her chronic fatigue.

4.10.7 Relating authentically to others

Posited on the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, positive orientation towards the other is believed latent and inherent (Wallace, 2010). The child's developmental attachment experience provides the ground from which all other relationships extend – those with other beings and with the world more generally (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958). Care for others, as a fundamental concern of Dasein (Heidegger, 1927/1962) is revealed as an underpinning purpose in the lives of participants, oft times thwarted by the extent to which the

individual has yet to address their own psychological issues. Empathy, a non-primordial intention towards the other (Stein, 1916/1989; Thompson, 2007), manifested for participants as a reaching out to others rendered more skilful through mindfulness and compassion practice and less effortful as a result of intrapersonal insight. Empathy was experienced through bodily sensation or 'sensing-in' to the other (Thompson, 2007).

Participants validated the phenomenological position that their relationship to others is predicated on their intrapersonal relating (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Finlay, 2011). Fiona opened up around her desire for a loving relationship thwarted by her fear of attachment, her compassion practice providing an opportunity to work on opening herself up to life. Others described the beneficial impact of their practice, expressly compassion practice, on how they related to close family. Gillian described greater empathy and compassion towards her husband and daughter; Aidan also experienced greater compassion towards his spouse, and described practice being embedded in his family life. Following her big insight, Patricia's connection to her granddaughter was greatly enhanced as she no longer felt judged by the child's parents. For Louise, a specific compassion practice - Circle of Allies - enabled her to re-experience what it was to be "genuinely adored" by close family and friends at the time of her accident (L1:68-70).

Participants gave accounts of changes in handling difficult relationships. Fiona described using the practice of Tonglen purposely to feel better towards her mother; however, also noted that she is distancing herself from old "high drama" friendships because of her personal transformation (F2:170-171). Louise similarly noted that she is less reactive to established patterns of social behaviour. Gillian and Patricia described significant changes to difficult relationships. Gillian made a tough decision no longer to meet with a close relative with whom she has a long-standing troubled relationship. Whilst her decision runs counter to social convention, Gillian was clear as to her rationale and motivation - to reduce suffering for everyone. Patricia benefited from no longer feeling constantly judged in an epic encounter with her estranged son,

where she utilised mindfulness and compassion practice to enable an authentic interchange between self and other.

Participants were able to reflect on their general orientation towards others. Gillian noted that she no longer has to protect herself in group situations, relating more easily to peers and students. Aidan describes a shift away from egocentricity: “I’m not the centre of the universe; we’re all of us here”. (A3:324)

4.10.8 Connecting with the wider world

Participants reflected on their perspective on the wider world. Gillian described a deliberate lack of engagement with consumer society and the media for the reason that there is no benefit to opening herself to suffering that she is not well equipped to deal with and cannot alleviate. James was similarly affected by global suffering and being unable to alleviate it, however he was determined to keep his awareness open despite this causing him acute emotional pain. Louise reflected on her connection with the wider burns community twenty years on from being burned, both emotionally distressing and intensely fulfilling. As Patricia’s long-held belief of being judged lifted and she became more inwardly congruent, she found herself more playful, less weighted as she contemplated her choices for later life.

In relating to the outer world, participants reflected on their understanding of interconnection or interbeing (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1988). Aidan reflected that the boundary that he draws between himself and the world is contrived, moreover he found through the practice of lovingkindness that his sense of interconnection with the fabric of life became enhanced. Reflective of Buddhist and Western phenomenology (Khenchen Thrangu, 2001; Heidegger, 1927/1962), both Aidan and Gillian recognised the link between their inner practice and relationships to the wider world: “our relationship with ourselves is the same as our relationship with everything else” (G2:126-127)

Aidan, Louise, Patricia and Fiona described their search for a like-minded community within which to share and practice. Louise is seeking to bridge the

gap between two spiritual paths, whereas Patricia and Fiona are searching for a local secular Sangha. Fiona's ongoing connection with fellow MSc students in her home town has been normalised within a "meeting of chums". (F2:164)

4.10.9 Integrating Mindfulness practice across life domains

The Buddhist underpinning of the MSc programme was acknowledged by participants as a strength, particularly by Gillian and James, both of whom define themselves as Buddhist. For both, the lineage of the course programme engendered trust in the material and it can be understood from their accounts that their Buddhist practice is inextricably linked with their practice of mindfulness, compassion and insight. Both Patricia and Fiona stated that they are non-religious, Patricia indeed expressed an antipathy towards organised worship. For them, trust in the course material grew from the integrity of the teachers; their humanity and preparedness to be vulnerable. Both Louise and Aidan had a Catholic background and an interest in Buddhism, and in the course of their study and practice, sought to develop their spiritual interests.

In a blending of their learning and work journeys, all participants had taken up an opportunity to teach mindfulness and to bring their learning overtly into the work context. Patricia expressed a desire to "turn the course into some work" (P1:5); however, noted that "giving back" was a behavioural pattern for her motivated by a desire to be "good enough" (P2:181-182). Gillian's drive to teach was awakened by being approached to take up a position, and she found she desperately wanted to do so, despite experiencing overwhelming feelings of insecurity. For Fiona, the motivation for engaging in the course remained mainly personal, yet she was keen to add mindfulness training to her portfolio. The participants have directed their teaching into varied work contexts, including running 8-week public courses (Fiona, James, Patricia), working for mindfulness organisations (Louise, Gillian, Patricia), running corporate courses (Fiona) and into specific fields (psychotherapy, sport coaching, drug rehabilitation).

Fiona described the challenges of offering mindfulness in a business context, where she reflected that a focus on performance improvement may be incompatible with the value base of the course, a caution highlighted by Monterio et al (2015). As the method of psychotherapy used by Aidan in his work with clients is somatic in nature, he found that he could readily introduce mindful breathing and body awareness. James has integrated body-based practice to such an extent in his role as a sports coach that he has completely transformed his way of working with clients.

On the whole, participants found teaching or integrating mindfulness in a work context highly rewarding. One feature is the positive effect teaching has on the participant's own practice, although this is an intense experience. Gillian referenced the experience of teaching-as-practice, the cycle of mutual reinforcement between student and teacher, the potential exposure to disrespect from students, and the inability to escape during teaching from one's own discomfort, describing teaching as "a crucible for your practice, where you get the really high heat" (G1:38). Despite highlighting deeply painful aspects to the experience, Gillian described it as "a really brilliant training ground, so excruciatingly awful" (G3:239).

Fiona found that teaching the material helped to integrate it further into personal practice and that teaching compelled her to trust the emerging experience. James experienced integration to such an extent that he now finds no difference "between me when I'm working and when I'm living" (J2:140). Likewise, Gillian asserted "these days, there's no effort required, because there's no defensiveness" (G2:122). Patricia and Louise use their practice to manage other difficulties related to work, i.e. managing fatigue and handling professional insecurities.

4.11 Conclusions

In their discourse, participants demonstrate a range of factors common to mindfulness and phenomenology, including present moment awareness, suspension of habitual thought processes, active attention and cultivation of

bodily presence (Brown & Cordon, 2009). Participants' experiences broadly fall in line with the similar three-phase constructs identified from within the qualitative literature (see 2.7.4) which describe the development of mastery: i.e. exposure to maladaptive coping strategies, shift in perspective, transformation in relation to the presenting difficulty (Malpass et al, 2012); experience of stress and over-reactivity, gaining stability, gaining insight (Monshat et al, 2012). As noted in chapter 4 part 1 summary, participants' skills matured through time, in accord with Fredrickson et al's (2008) 'broaden and build' theory. Progression sometimes appeared linear, but participants also reflected over the course of their interviews on the cyclic nature of practice, where psychological issues were revisited from a different vantage point in time, giving rise to new insight.

The in-depth nature of this study combined with the greater immersion of research participants in learning and practice across an holistic range of secular disciplines generated more detailed and nuanced descriptions than are evident in the current literature. Themes identified from the qualitative literature are recognisable, but these rich accounts describe experiences that are more intense, rooted and profound. Theoretical concepts taught on the course programme (e.g. Nairn, Gilbert) are evident in participants' accounts, suggesting that these constructs are relevant to lived experience. In particular, participants' detailed descriptions of embodiment emphasise its centrality to the development of both empathy and insight.

As was found by Lomas et al (2015), some participants experienced great difficulty engaging with practice at the beginning of their journey due to the initial pain of uncovering their mental constructs and habits. However difficult life experiences had undermined previously secure beliefs about the world, propelling participants to seek greater authenticity and human connection. Strong intention and motivation combined with confidence in the course material and trustworthiness of the tutors contributed to participants' capacity to sustain engagement with the programme.

While a range of positive features from the literature such as reduction in stress, increased self-management, sense of peace and relaxation are reported

in this study, participants also express characteristics which are negative and intensely distressing, such as openness to suffering and extreme emotional pain. As found by Shapiro et al (2005) amongst others, participants do show an increased capacity to tolerate strong emotions, but as they become less guarded, they open to a greater degree to psychological afflictions and worldly suffering. Despite that, participants deeply value their journey, actively welcoming painful emotions in a manner that from a conventional perspective might seem counterintuitive and harmful. As is described in the literature, compassion practice is shown to support greater self-compassion and empathy for others; more so than in the literature, participants describe this as deeply embedded in their lives with an extensive impact that permeates casual encounters with others, close relationships and orientation to the wider world in general.

Participants have undertaken their own phenomenology, forming and shaping their knowledge base from discoveries they make through embodied exploration and developing an existentialist meaning of their lives (Langdrige, 2007). Participant accounts indicate a spontaneous transformative effect from the practices of mindfulness, compassion and insight that goes well beyond a remedial or treatment framework. Mirroring the journey of participants, the researcher experience laid out in the next chapter draws from the profound synergies between Western phenomenology and the field of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE SECOND RESEARCH AIM

PART 1 – EXPLICATING AND INTERPRETING THE RESEARCHER NARRATIVE

5.1 Introduction to the Researcher Narrative

The second research aim – how the praxis of mindfulness, compassion and insight might enable and enhance a phenomenological research experience – is explored in this chapter. According to Idhe (1986) and Langdrige (2007), phenomenology is apparently obscure because it uses inventive phraseology to attempt to thrust the reader into an entirely fresh experiential perspective. According to Bentz and Rehorick (2008) phenomenology can therefore be difficult to engage in for first time researchers. However, like Taylor, a student of Rehorick, (quoted in Bentz and Rehorick, 2008, p22), I too “experienced a protracted sense of homecoming” when I discovered phenomenology; for me, this was due to recognising the deep resonance between contemporary mindfulness, compassion and insight theory and practice and the realm of phenomenological philosophy and research methodology.

This chapter highlights understanding and insight that arose through researcher reflection post-interview and researcher/participant co-reflection pre- and post-interview, conducted initially to aid analysis of participants’ accounts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Part 1 has been ordered into five emergent themes explicated through the same process of meaning interpretation as was utilised for the participant narratives. These themes are:

- Coming into connection
- Mindfully present with body awareness and empathy
- Trusting the emergence
- Following lines of inquiry
- Deepening reflection

In part 2, the emergent themes are examined against six key phenomenological themes unpacked in chapter 2.11. The raw data transcripts, like the participant interview transcripts, have been subject to a process of condensation into narrative text. The researcher voice is displayed in normal font, the participant voice emerging in co-reflection is shown in italics, and the codes link the condensed text to the original transcript.

The material reflects synergies between the practices of mindfulness, compassion and insight and a phenomenological research praxis, and I hold that the experiences of reflection and co-reflection I engaged in as researcher are instances of phenomenological reduction: the interview itself forming into engaged spirals of deepening inquiry; the reflection that follows shifting the spatial and temporal standpoint, providing new perspectives. Through co-reflection with participants, the practice of intersubjective phenomenological reduction is demonstrated. Boundaried by singular intrasubjective reduction, moments of active intersubjective exchange lead to connection, confrontation and mingling with the other; a decentering of the ego-self, where the other is interiorised empathically by the self. According to Depraz et al (1999), the accumulation of empathic experiences accustoms one to their dynamism, enhancing the flow between uniqueness and transcendence.

5.2 Emergent Themes

Five emergent themes were explicated through the process of meaning interpretation outlined in chapter 3: transcripts from the researcher reflections were segmented into Natural Meaning Units then condensed; thereafter themes were identified and the material ordered into Narrative Texts around the key themes. The emergent themes reflect both the interior experience of the researcher and the interrelationship between the researcher and participant. The Narrative Texts themselves constitute a first stage interpretation of the data, which is augmented with secondary analysis.

5.2.1 Coming into Connection

5.2.1.1 Co-reflection post 1st interview with James

You're an easy participant to talk to! *I don't know what a not-easy participant would be!* Maybe somebody just closing off. You were following your own stuff which is lovely to see and I didn't want to get in the way of that. I just wanted to allow you to explore..... and ask as many opening questions as I could do, just to allow more... *I would find it hard to imagine an interviewee being anything other than that, because we're talking of a topic that we're integrally involved in on a daily basis, on a personal level. And with the work, and certainly with the research, some of the questions you were asking there were very valuable.* This is going to be such a joyous journey if every interview is like this one! (J1R:14-16)

5.2.1.2 Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Aidan

I feel a bit spaced after my interview with Aidan as his mode of delivery is somewhat disjointed. At a point during the interview, self-consciousness kicked in and I shifted from being immersed in what Aidan was saying to thinking about how I was coming across. I got a little bit lost in that for a while and I lost the connection, not in an overt way, just a subtle sense of losing that connection with him as a person and his experience. It was when I heard myself think 'space cadet!' when Aidan was talking about a guru, then I noticed my judging, then felt ashamed at myself, then I parked that and leaned in again - physically leaned in - towards Aidan and opened up to what he was saying about his guru curiously. So losing connection didn't last for long because I recognised what was going on. Recognising that let me re-engage with Aidan as a person and that sense of us just being two people talking in a room together. I can't help but compare this interview with Aidan with my previous interview with James. I felt a stronger connection with James from being students together on the MSc. During the interview with Aidan, I was aware of making a comparison, though not judgementally just naturally thinking of something that is similar to what is going on now. I suspect that this will happen throughout the course of doing the interviews. Maybe it's more noticeable right now because this is only the second interview. (A1R:20-27)

5.2.1.3 *Co-reflection post 1st interview with Patricia*

I can't come into this without some preconceived ideas because this is my journey too. Yes, this is my own stuff and I've been part of that Sangha, if you like, with my cohort so I've been doing the same as you, hearing their stories and resonating with them, or not, and making that journey together. I suppose what I'm hoping is the capability to be mindful will allow me to see what there is to be seen; if I'm making judgements or too quickly trying to categorise or to find themes. (P1/R:35)

But what you will understand is the meta language. I'm sure there will have been lots of things I've said and that other people will have said that would sound like a load of tosh really to people who don't do mindfulness because it doesn't fit into normal language. (P1/R:36)

There's something about having lived the experience of this and researching it from that point of view that allows me to immerse myself in what you're telling me and to have an insight into that, whereas for somebody researching it who doesn't have this experience, there would be more of a separation I think, more of an observation rather than an ... inhabiting the material which is what I'm hoping for from this. (P1/R:37)

5.2.1.4 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Aidan*

This second interview was great because I felt I knew Aidan better which in itself is positive within the phenomenological research process as it's about exchanging views and exchanging connection. I felt that much more this time, the sense of connection was much stronger. (A2R:50)

5.2.1.5 *Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Fiona*

In the interview with Fiona I did feel a slight disconnect but I recognised in myself it was partly to do with me being tired and a little bit mentally fatigued because I had needed to concentrate a lot during the day today at work. However, just reflecting on the interview with Fiona, I did get quite a sense of Fiona herself wanting to tell me what she thought I wanted to hear in quite a methodical way. To me came across as "Right, I'll tell you about this and I'll tell you about this and I'll tell you about this". It was only towards the end that I had a sense of more relaxation and things started to flow a little bit more like a stream of

consciousness sort of flowing rather than a kind of methodical thing. But the methodical thing may well just be the way Fiona operates, the way she delivers what's emerging so I'm not too sure at this point. (F1R:88-92)

5.2.1.6 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Louise*

Okay, this is me recording the reflection after the Skype interview with Louise. I'm very glad I made such a good connection with Louise last time because I think otherwise having a Skype interview might have been difficult. I'm not sure I would want to do another Skype interview because the flow of the conversation wasn't as good and the felt-connection wasn't nearly as strong. It just simply wasn't.... I was seeing Louise and I was seeing what she was doing with her hands and how she was gesturing to her body, but I didn't get that felt sense of connection. It was really interesting. In fact, I almost got more of a felt sense of connection when the video connection broke and we then changed to using the phone. (L2R:153-155)

5.2.1.7 *Co-reflection post 2nd interview with James*

The power, the strength of the depth of feeling of what's alive, I got to the core of it during the last few weeks [grieving for my friend]. I've been fortunate to have that time, it's been like a silent individual retreat. (J2R:167)

But the sharing of the aliveness is something to do with my ability to relate to the interviewer, to you Jane, on a level that is not about the interview, but about companionship. (J2R:172,174) One thing that influences that is that you have come through the programme at the same time in your own way, and there's a sense of companionship born from the mutual journey through the MSc programme. Each of us in a totally embraced, committed fashion. It's not just the fact that you've been on the programme, but you've been in it. (J2R:175,177)

That's my perception of you; it's not the only thing but it's a personal perception that contributes. Your ability, your capability to be present. You've obvious thought a huge amount about the process and articulated some of that in what you've presented and written. Yes, it's a huge element. So what's that about? There's a sense of me being interviewed, but it never feels that way. (J2R:178-179)

I got to reflecting on my journey over the past few years of us all being together on that mindfulness, compassion, insight journey and I feel as though I went into the mindfulness on that first round, then into compassion and that dug up some stuff for me and the insight and that really intrigued me and then back into the mindfulness again and then really got into the insight stuff, and it's like I missed the compassion the second time around. (J2R:181)

It was something that Kristin [Neff] said actually about giving yourself permission to be self-compassionate and I realised that I wasn't doing that anymore - or I was doing it only to a certain degree - and how non-self indulgent self-compassion is, and how much it helps with compassion to others. (J2R:183)

I thought, 'how come I've not seen this before?' and something just pinged in me at that moment and then I found I could sit with my own feelings of pain and shame and feel so much more relaxed about it. I mean, I'm a social worker. I've done this as a job! I was like, damn, I never get really get good at this sort of thing! (J2R:184-185)

After that insight, I was wondering how this opening into self-compassion, what that'll look like in the research as it moves forward? This research process is transforming me and I just need to open constantly, need to keep opening and opening to all of this stuff. And then today in this interview with you I felt so privileged to be able to sit with what was going through you without shutting down. *That's what I was sensing from you!* I just felt very open and touched and able to see some of my stuff that's coming up and really feel for you. (J2R:186-188)

Secondary analysis:

It was easier to form stronger connections with some participants than others. I identified an initially stronger bond with James as we had been peers in our MSc cohort. I identified preferences as to how the participants communicated, finding Aidan's disjointed stream of consciousness difficult to engage with fluidly, and Fiona's methodical delivery initially intimidating, and noted also the impact of outside influences on my own state of mind prior to the interview.

The one interview conducted via Skype/phone, despite visual input of body language and gesture, highlighted a lack of felt connection with the participant.

As the interviews progressed and in subsequent meetings, the bonds with all the participants strengthened. Two pivotal incidents shaped my interview skills. An ability to work somatically with the prejudice I noticed in the first interview with Aidan allowed an opening into a more compassionate and curious space, where the preference fell away as I lost the focus on myself and entered the world of the participant. In identifying my avoidance of compassion practice prior to the second interview with James, and then having an intention to engage with compassion towards James in the interview, allowed an open space for James to experience and voice his grief for his friend and to reflect on his anguish at the suffering of the world. My own experience during the interview with James is indicative of the deepest level of hermeneutics where the researcher experiences transformation as a result of the phenomenological research process (Rehorick & Bentz, 2009).

5.2.2 Mindfully Present with Body Awareness and Empathy

5.2.2.1 Co-reflection post 1st interview with James

I can see your movements sometimes you read, moved and breathed. It looked like you were just centering, just making sure that you were there present. Your physical positioning and lack of movement and eye contact as a way of searching for stuff - that was all very facilitative. (J1/R:3) And the questions were unobtrusive. I could feel a strength in them, but it was subtle and they were engaging, like 'oh, right, so tell me more about connectivity?' which prompted me to figure out what I mean. (J1/R:4) So, as you were saying that, then I positioned myself and just breathed a bit and tried to be where I was. Yeh, I noticed that. I noticed you doing that, very still, and your eyes were closed a bit and you went inside, it felt good to elicit those deeper.... yeh, the deeper stuff, rather than trying to get it from the head, yeh, yeh, and I didn't notice a lot of paraphrasing or anything like that, which is great, because the paraphrasing would just get in the way for me. (J1/R:5-6)

5.2.2.2 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Patricia*

Wow, Patricia was so different, really different to look at. I tried to describe it in words and feedback to Patricia herself but it certainly didn't capture where she appeared so different. I think the physicality was more in relation to micro movements rather than her doing anything particularly different. It was how she was in herself; I felt from her a real sense of stillness. I was reflecting that in myself at the time, and now reflecting again, I was feeling still and breathing more evenly and deeply and really noticing how still and congruent she was. She was still animated but there wasn't the same sense as the first time of a constant moving between and around, no sense of coming to rest. So this time very different, and what a journey and how lovely to have some powerful insight like that. Very amazing to be with. (P2/R:69-74)

5.2.2.3 *Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Louise*

How excited I feel and how that resonated with me! As Louise was getting excited, I was very aware that I was very automatically copying some of her gestures. She was fiddling with her necklace and I found my hand on mine; she moved around the chair and I moved in mirror to that; so, yes, I really felt it was catching. It was like a yawn, but not boredom. It was a catching thing and I felt very excited for her. There were a couple of times where I had to hold back a little bit from becoming too caught up in it and discussing the content with her. I really had to pull back and be enquiring more into her experience rather than adding to the whole thing myself. (L1/R:84-85)

5.2.2.4 *Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Fiona*

The practices that I'm doing just now around breathing and meeting my own anxiety by breathing deeply and moving meant I felt very comfortable there. I was very aware that I was moving my spine and I really valued being in Fiona's office chair that had a back that moved because I was flexing and breathing deeply and feeling very comfortable as I did so. That was good. As a result of that, there were points during that interview when I could feel the tension building a little bit as I was trusting the emergence and maybe it wasn't getting to that kind of...I don't know. There's a sort of a sweet spot in an interview when you really feel somebody's opening up and just giving a little bit more of really fresh and new stuff and I didn't really ever quite get there with

Fiona in that interview, so there was a little bit of anxiety building with that. And maybe a little bit of “Well, what am I doing, or what could I be doing differently?” that would get a different kind of response. So, though that anxiety was there, I was aware of breathing in and arching back and coming forwards, I felt my spine relax and my shoulders relax a bit and I was able just to breathe into that and accept the situation for what it was which was fine. You know, there was absolutely nothing wrong about that interview at all. (F1/R:96-99)

5.2.2.5 *Researcher self-reflection post 3^d interview with Patricia*

I had a certain sense of anxiety during that interview, and what I find myself exploring is that sense of constant anxiety that’s kind of welded to my soul, and my relationship with that anxious feeling. I’m touching my stomach as I say that. Exploring my anxiety is a theme of my practice at the moment, so I was very aware of it during the interview, of there being that anxious energy that flutters and flickers and keeps me sharp maybe and a bit on edge, a little bit verging on the ‘must get it right’; then seeing that and allowing that to just be there and choosing to re-engage with Patricia. So, if I was describing this as a practice then Patricia was my support, and I felt myself physically leaning in towards her on a number of occasions, very touched by the wonderment of her exchange with me about the lunch with her son. I really felt the enormity of that for her and it did touch me emotionally quite deeply. I know at that point I was thinking of my own children and I was also thinking of a friend of mine who, like Patricia, had had a split with her children, so I was drawing on my own feelings and what I’d heard from my friend about this and that was creating a sense of empathy for Patricia. I could hear a bit of self-judgement in Patricia’s voice, a self-criticism of the things that perhaps she’s said to herself in the past about the relationship with her son, and there’s a bit of that in me as well, that kind of, ‘how can you abandon your children’ kind of thing. (P3/R:117-123)

These days when I experience those mind poisons, when I am bitter, judgemental, prideful, proud, I’m much more able to notice them. They are just there. (P3/R:124-125) The teaching is that it’s only by fully accepting the mind poison that the wisdom then appears and it does. (P3/R:126)

For me this last little while it’s been a little bit like that. One day I’ll feel tight and anxious and clamped and nasty and self-critical and whatever, and then accepting that is difficult because I feel completely immersed in it. (P3/R:127) And then the next day I can be feeling hugely equanimous. I can have huge equanimity for everyone in the world. I feel very spacious and open and loving

and compassionate. It's seemed a bit schizoid to me how I can go from one to the other and back again, but I feel, okay that's fine, and that is part of this. I can recognise in the description of the mind poisons, I can recognise that I'm in this process, It feels good, it feels good. (P3/R:127-128)

Being with the anxiety [of the interview], I didn't feel that I had to transcend it at all where I might have on previous occasions, feeling like I have to do something with it, but I didn't feel that at all this time. (P3/R:129)

Secondary analysis:

The sense of connection with participants was further strengthened through mindful attention of body and emotion both in myself as researcher and of the participant as other. My own practice permeates the interview space with Fiona as I utilise my somatic breathing method to settle my anxiety. With Louise, I had to set my own tension aside in order to remain focused on the energy of the participant and prohibit the researcher voice from predominating (Finlay, 2006). I noticed keenly a core stillness within Patricia following her big insight and my own experiences and judgements being triggered viscerally as Patricia related her experiences.

Spontaneous mirroring of participants' gestures and energy levels was evident. Louise's high energy elicited in me a corresponding emotional/somatic response whereas James noticed a quietness about my physicality during his interview and a minimal use of language, both of which suited his relational needs.

Physical evidence of my own anxiety complex emerged in the third interview with Patricia. Leaning bodily towards Patricia enabled both a shift of focus from myself to Patricia and a loosening of the anxiety, allowing space for emotional connection. Here too I reflect on my growing capacity to remain with my anxiety without reacting to it from my own work with my prevailing mind poisons of pride, bitterness and judgement. There is a temporal aspect to the process of phenomenological interviewing, where the coming together of participant and

researcher with their attendant emotional states takes place in the very moment of engagement, uniquely and inexplicably.

An insight emerged as to my evidence criteria for a rich interview, the felt sense of opening into a 'sweet spot' of freshness born of the connection between interviewer and participant; nevertheless a need to relax into acceptance when this level of connection did not occur.

5.2.3 Trusting the Emergence

5.2.3.1 Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Aidan

I have a strong sense of having to really trust the emergence and not try to have control over the interview situation, of really just listening, and remaining present and connected with the person that I am listening to. This is challenging for me, to go beyond a sort of professional, social work-type of listening to sustaining a genuine connection with the only purpose being to talk and explore. (A1/R:28-29)

For the first interview, I think it's important to stay true to a sense of non-agenda because I could feel a bit of a hidden agenda coming through. I heard myself in my own head saying something about 'is this going to give me good material for my PhD?' (A1/R:30-31) I have to trust that the material will emerge .. or not! (A1/R:32)

5.2.3.2 Co-reflection post 1st interview with Patricia

It's so good from my point of view to get that sense of where people are at with all of this stuff. It's such a unique journey, that every single person is on and it always will remain unique . . . and yet hearing so many voices. (P1/R:33)

I'm sure over time themes will emerge. It is very interesting already, to hear the different journeys and the uniqueness of it and already there are things that appear to be lifting out of what people are talking about, that seem similar although I don't know yet. I have to let that rest, and also examine it in terms of, is this just my perception, or can I step back and reflect on and see differently from how I'm seeing as I'm talking to you. By reflecting

I'll be taking another step back, seeing differently and I'll be hearing me. (P1/R:34)

5.2.3.3 *Researcher self-reflection post 3rd interview with Patricia*

That sense of unfolding, the trust in the emergence, allowing the discussion to unfold and trusting that some things that I might have missed hearing because of my own preferences in what I listen to and what I don't listen to, some of the things that I might have missed will appear when I re-listen. Just trusting that whatever data comes of this, the transcript will be very rich. (P3/R:130-132)

I feel pretty grounded about this whole thing now. I feel more like a phenomenological researcher now. I like that! (P3/R:133)

5.2.3.4 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Fiona*

Under the surface in all of the interviews there's a sense of "Oh my God, where are we going now? Where can I take this?", and the constantly having to 'come back to the moment' and 'trust the emergence'; two things that are just so critical in doing this research. I can't think of being able to do phenomenological research in this deep way without having those two things absolutely wedded to how I operate in these interviews. (F2/R:138)

'Coming back to the moment' and 'trusting emergence' are both quite basic mindfulness skills, and they are skills because it does take a bit to come away from the distractions and the concerns and be present with the other person and be willing to trust what comes up. (F2/R:139)

Secondary analysis:

Significant to the experiential process of phenomenological interview emerged the notion of non-agenda; meaning not that the exchange lacks purpose or context, rather it requires the researcher to remain in present moment experience with an attitude of trust. This viewpoint is supported by Van Manen when he describes phenomenology as "presuppositionless" (Van Manen,

19984, p1). Trust was a key element, particularly given my aforementioned levels of anxiety. I found myself having to simply step into a space of trust, rather than attempting to develop a trusting attitude, even though this would amplify my anxiety.

Emergence refers to dialogue and also to themes, with a requirement to remain open to what emerges, without inhibiting possibilities. I had an appreciation of that during the data-gathering phase; later treatment of recorded material such as repeated listening, reflecting, transcribing and interpreting would allow themes to form unforced from the raw data.

As noted previously, my preferences arose during the course of the interviews. In accord with mindfulness theory, my intention was to notice their occurrence and to maintain an attitude of curiosity and acceptance towards my own bias. In trusting the phenomenological process in this way, I began to feel like a phenomenologist, akin to Simpson's description of the hermeneutic spiral of practice and transformation in her phenomenological researcher journey (Simpson, 2009).

5.2.4 Following Lines of Inquiry

5.2.4.1 *Co-reflection pre 1st interview with James*

I had a chat with my PhD supervisor beforehand and he said it's not really an interview it's a conversation that you're having. It's an informed conversation! (J1:R:6)

5.2.4.2 *Co-reflection post 1st interview with James*

An interesting line of inquiry that you had, the direction that you led me, a bit like being led on a path which arises in you as well. That's the whole point, isn't it, to follow the energy? (J1:R:7) I was following where I connected, where I think I perceived the energy in you and where I then connected with that. Yeh, that's what it felt like. At some points, I could see a branching out and it could have gone in several different directions. There was a moment of choice as to which path I followed and that was where it was my

choice to then prompt or ask, but sometimes I just stopped and I just left the silence hoping, knowing you would find your own way. (J1:R:8)

Are you using any cues to sense where the energy is in you? And do you see from my non-verbal behaviour where I have energy for things? I'm thinking maybe my voice speeds up? Yes, more your voice, because you're quite contained in your bodily movements. I decided that I wanted to increase the likelihood of a sense of embodiment right now. I'm trying to be in my own mindful space but when there's lots of movement I'm not. For me it's got to be almost like I'm in a sitting practice. (J1:R:9)

It wasn't that when your voice speeded up it meant this and when it didn't it meant that. Sometimes when your voice speeded up, clearly there was an energy there, but other times when you slowed down, there was also a sense of an energy there too that drew me. I was interested and curious. (J1:R:10) *When my voice is speeding up it just means that the information is more readily retrievable, but the other stuff actually may be just as interesting. You're right, your voice slowed, it got quite gravelly at one point. It felt like you were going into a trance! (J1:R:11) I did feel that way because what I was trying to do was connect with that feeling ... I was on the skis, I was in the mountains on the slopes. I know exactly where I was! I could take you there! So I was internalising that connectivity. Literally re-remembering it? Bringing it into your body. Exactly, bringing it back into the body. (J1:R:12)*

5.2.4.3 Co-reflection post 1st interview with Patricia

So, when things went quiet, which parts of my conversation did you pick up to carry on with and then how will you choose how to frame a reprise of a conversation you've already had? And will I say the same things or will I give you a completely different approach? We shall see! (P1:R:45)

5.2.4.4 Co-reflection pre 2nd interview with Patricia

So, what I did was went over the transcript again and listened again and noted down some more lines of inquiry, rather than questions 'cause I didn't feel particularly comfortable about coming back to you with a list of questions. I feel that that would break the connection because it's your story and it's your experience. (P1:R:62)

I found it quite surprising and a bit overwhelming reading twelve pages of a stream of consciousness, and I thought, well, shall I try and analyse this? Shall I try and make some notes and I decided not to. I decided I would rather either talk to you from where I am now if that's what you want, or to be led into talking from your suggestions ... however it is that you want to lead the process. (P1:R:65-66)

How about you starting and talking from where you are now and I'll sit with my notes and I'll cross-reference what you're saying with the things that I picked up and then if anything's left of my lines of inquiry that we haven't covered when we get towards the end of the hour then I'll pick up on those. Does that sound okay? *The phrase that you used last time, "What is alive for you?", that's what I've been thinking about. (P1:R:67)*

5.2.4.5 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Gillian*

I find in subsequent interviews there are areas that have been opened up in the first one that I do want to return to, so there's that sense of a stream of consciousness and I try to pick up on things that either leap out as being big or have been mentioned the first time. Not to lead people as such, but it feels a bit more structured, the second time, because there are areas that we've explored previously that I want to come back to. (G2:R:142)

5.2.4.6 *Co-reflection pre 2nd interview with James*

So, it's a year on then, and the question remains the same which is, What's alive for you now? *I was waiting for that! Yeh, cause people change and their journey's ongoing. Asking oneself the question, 'what's alive for you today?', as it can change on a day-to-day basis. I wonder if 'what's alive for you' really could capture maybe not so much an absolute in-time-right-now, but the time and place that you are in. (J2:R:164-165)*

Secondary analysis:

The open research question, 'what is alive for you?' permitted participants to follow their own energetic experience. This was particularly evident in the co-reflections with James, whose intention was to inhabit a mindful space during

each interview, and Patricia who had used the question as a prompt ahead of her second interview. Whilst having this question as the only pre-formulated interview question seemed risky to me initially, the benefits of returning to such a simple, graspable instruction acted as a trigger for participants to take a turn towards present moment mindful awareness during the interview process.

Participants were interested in the interview method. Patricia and James understood that there were choice points where different threads of inquiry could be followed, and each engaged with me in reflecting on the method utilised in their interview, exploring cues such as vocal speed and tonality, bodily remembering and my use of a spatial image of branching paths. With Patricia, I negotiated an elegant method of picking up on lines of inquiry from the previous interview without compromising flow. Whilst I engaged to an extent in intellectual processes in formulating secondary questions and in choosing the conversational thread, these were secondary to intuiting the energetic conditions of the participant during the interview.

The evolution of meaning through time emerged as a noteworthy focus for me in the research process and was explored by James and Patricia, both of whom remarked on how importance and meaning change through time. This is explored further in the analysis on deepening reflection.

5.2.5 Deepening Reflection

5.2.5.1 Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Aidan

The first time, I didn't always get the meaning of what Aidan was saying but when I listened and read through the transcript, different meanings came out. I will want to have a deeper exploration of meaning with Aidan, to really exchange with him, give him my view and really pursue whether the meaning that I am making is his meaning, and in doing that, he will tell me more of his meaning.

I can then feed that back to Aidan, as if I am preparing to be interviewed by him. That will be an even scarier thing for me to be putting my uncertainties out there for Aidan to comment on. But it will be a really good learning. (A2/R:52-60)

5.2.5.2 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Patricia*

I felt very quickly that I'd found my feet in a sense so that's a good feeling for me that each time I meet a new situation in this process of research, there's a learning that almost immediately gets translated into a deepening of my practice as a researcher and my relaxation into it and certainly I felt more relaxed there. I notice when I was sitting very still and realised that I didn't have to actually sit as still as that and I was able to move around a little bit more and that really helped the flow of conversation. (P2/R:76-77)

5.2.5.3 *Researcher self-reflection post 3rd interview with Patricia*

So I'm now reflecting on my feelings and emotions as I was interviewing Patricia, and I'm sitting in the seat I was sitting in when I was interviewing Patricia looking at the seat she was sitting in, so I'm now going to stand and move to a point like a triangle looking at both of those seats, so that's looking at the different perceptual positions and remembering how the exchange went. (P3/R:116)

5.2.5.4 *Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Louise*

This is something that's emerging for me. I felt I didn't have to prompt in any big way to get to a level of a felt depth of inquiry. I guess I have an evidence criterion that, unless I get to that depth of inquiry then I don't feel that I have the material that I'll need, so there's something there that's not a superficial thing. I need people to be able to come deeper than the superficial level, deeper than a description that just sits on the surface, that's only conceptual or one-sided. I guess it's when people talk to me in words which are conceptual, but then they're able to give me the evidence of depth by the way they talk or the reference to their body and the feelings, the sensations that they have in their body, either by gesturing or by talking directly about that and clearly also the emotional resonance when there isn't a flatness to the delivery, so there needs to be a touching in with the emotionsI suppose again that's an assumption of mine that it warrants an emotional response. Interesting. I'm also reflecting that quite a bit of that for me probably relates to my training as a social worker and my previous experience of interviewing in terms of social

work interview, where you want, quite quickly, to get to a kind of meaningful dialogue with someone. Where the meaning is their meaning and you get to a point where there's a release of tension and you can then move forward. So, similarly in this research, before I feel we can move on from a topic or a subject, I feel there has to be that kind of depth of engagement. Great, and I certainly felt I had that with Louise. (L1/R:80-83)

So really interesting and I will be incredibly interested and delighted to come back to hearing the recording again and reading the transcript of that interview. There's so much richness in there. I could feel it. With a researcher head on, an observer head on, I was involved with sitting having that exchange with Louise, I was involved in what she was telling me at one level, a very strong level, but another level of observing I'm going "Wow, that'll be brilliant to use as an illustration as a quote. Wow, that's an amazing thing, the way she brought that together. That's wonderful". So, yes, that felt very full on. (L1/R:86-87)

5.2.5.5 *Researcher self-reflection post 1st interview with Fiona*

I found it very interesting how Fiona was reflecting on the intellectual understanding you get the first time around when you hear the teaching and you start to put it into practice and there's that sense of deepen it a bit more and then a bit more. I'll be very interested to meet with Fiona again after the insight and wisdom training, on how she's found that material and what might be coming up for her. (F1/R:93-94)

I was reflecting with Fiona at the end about the meaning-making aspect to the research; of listening again and again to the audio recording and reading the transcript and really immersing myself in the whole-person experience, and that sense of letting the reflections unfold, of not just reflecting and making meaning quickly, but of really immersing myself; and acknowledging that each time I listen to the transcript is a new moment, so it's an 'in-time' moment for my reflections and what meaning I make at that point in time. (F1/R:100)

5.2.5.6 *Researcher self-reflection post 2nd interview with Fiona*

Again that overriding sense with Fiona that this time I interpret as Fiona's style of being, or style of talking. She's quite structured in the way she talks about things and gives a fairly linear account of something. I did have to dig a little bit to surface some of what

was behind words, like 'good' and those descriptive words that describe some kind of amorphous 'Oh yes that was nice'. Well, what does that mean? What's behind that? (F2/R:134)

It was at the end where I really got a sense from Fiona of the aha moment and the kind of difference that's making for her in the sense of the changes that are coming about in her life. Right at the end as I was rounding off the interview, stepping back a bit and having a quick overview of what we had just discussed and pulling out, almost like a tone or a movement, rather than any particular topic, of how it is for Fiona. (F2/R:135)

I could almost see this fairly strong thread that was guiding her, that was and I am now fantasising because I'm now seeing an image in my head of there being a string of her path going through the middle of her, her gut really and of her sensing and following that and yet being assailed round the sides with the doubts and the drive and all of these distractions, almost like flies or moths or butterflies, things that were taking her attention off and yet, there's this kind of tugging and pulling of a 'no, this is what I want, this is what I'll do', a certainty, a sense now of Fiona understanding that and of coming towards that. This is maybe something I'll reflect back to her in the third interview. (F2/R:136)

I'm standing looking at the two chairs we were sitting in and remembering the interaction between us. Fiona's a straight-looker, she looks straight at you when she talks and has very wide eyes, quite alert and I was aware of responding to that by a couple of times feeling a little bit under the spotlight of the gaze and then of meeting that with understanding it for what it was which is just Fiona's way of being and also an alertness and an interest and that's quite compelling. (F2/R:137)

Secondary analysis:

As pointed to in mindfulness, Buddhism, phenomenology and somatic therapy (e.g. Nairn, 2010; Flanagan, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958; Levine, 2010), the embodied experience, sensation and emotional resonance of a 'felt depth of inquiry' are highlighted as requirements for deepening reflection. This was evident in my sense of physically relaxing into the research interview and the evidence criteria that emerged as necessary for meaning i.e. what is true/authentic for the participant to be recognised, suggestive of Van Manen's assertion that "phenomenology directs the gaze towards the regions where meaning originates" (Finlay, citing Van Manen, 2009, p14).

Hermeneutic spirals are observable in participants' cognitive then experiential understanding, their journeys from mindfulness through to insight training and practice, their interior and exterior experience, and intra- and inter-personal connections. Participants are committed to seeking deeper meaning in their insight journey; this is reflected in their interview transcripts, such that the distinction between the hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion is blurred, the evidence of non-verbal expression demonstrating the depth of insight (Finlay, 2009). Where this was not evidenced during interview, such as the use of anodyne words such as 'good' and 'nice', further probing uncovered greater recognition and understanding.

Similarly, hermeneutic spirals, interpretation mediating the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990), occurred in the research process resulting from exchanges with participants during interview, immersive listening to recordings, transcribing recordings, subsequent interviews with participants, reflection and co-reflection, temporal perspective and spatial perspective (e.g. use of perceptual positioning in post-interview reflection; use of imagery) and methods of interpreting data as outlined in chapter 3, part 2, such as inviting participant reflection and interpretive feedback (Rehorick & Bentz, 2009). My acquired competency in mindfulness allowed me to maintain a core state of attentive presence where I could gain a clear contemporaneous perspective on the usefulness of the aforementioned techniques.

5.3 Summary

Uniting Buddhist and contemporary mindfulness with Western phenomenology, the research process became practice. As researcher, I prepared for and remained open to the emergence of transcendental insight whilst embedding my practice in the explication of meaning within lived phenomenon, and aimed to point to emerging insight through the evidence of embodied awareness.

Illustrated in the researcher reflections and participant co-reflections, my experience is that mindfulness, compassion and insight practice builds the capacity to hold open a fertile space in the research interchange supporting the undertaking of competent phenomenological interviews as depicted by Langdrige (2007) and Kvale (1996). Where preference or bias is accepted through the process of paying sustained attention to subtle arising of preferences, the preference loses the power to affect the interconnection of researcher and participant. I assert that this is the underlying energetic structure of bracketing that can be understood through the synergy of Nairn's psychology of insight and Western phenomenological psychology. Western phenomenology offers a structure for bringing insight and wisdom from the personal into the social lifeworld, as a practical philosophy or phronesis (Bentz & Rehorick, 2008).

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE SECOND RESEARCH AIM

PART 2 - DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.4 Introduction

In chapter 5 part 1, five themes emerged from explication of the researcher narrative data: Coming into connection, Mindfully present with body awareness and empathy, Trusting the emergence, Following lines of inquiry, and Deepening reflection. As with the participant accounts in chapter 4, chapter 5 part 2 steps back from the detailed researcher narrative to examine the findings of the second research question in the context of phenomenological research theory. The six phenomenological themes that formed the basis for discussion in chapter 2 part 2 are revisited here in relation to the researcher experience where considerable parallels are found to the explicative themes discussed in chapter 5 part 1. The phenomenological themes are;

- Intentionality
- Experiencing self
- Intersubjectivity
- Temporality
- Epoche/phenomenological reduction
- Embodiment

Findings are in relation to the interview stage of the phenomenological research method. The process of analysis has been discussed in chapter 3 part 2.

5.5 Phenomenological Themes

5.5.1 Intentionality

My main intention as researcher was to be open to the other, to hold open the reflective space to allow the authenticity of the other to be seen and felt, manifesting Idhe's understanding of intention as the correlational relationship between noema and noesis (Idhe, 1986). The energy of that intention is

reflected in the focal interview question: 'what is alive for you?'. My ability to hold to my intention was under threat from various fears emerging in the course of the interviews related to my default affective mode – anxiety – and specific fears such as not having good enough data. Open acceptance was somewhat derailed on occasion when I fell into habitual ways of thinking or judgement. Remembering my intention and bringing myself back into my body helped to reassert connection. The aspect of intentional will appears to be a balance of allowing forward momentum without becoming too grasping (Stein, 1916/1989). For me the balance was disturbed when I became too cognitive and consequently more anxious, or when I was tired and lacked focus, and I required to return to the body to calibrate the most effective pace.

5.5.2 Experiencing self

My experience of self in this context is self-as-practitioner and self-as-researcher, where I temper the risk of objectifying an identity through returning to the lived experience. The self-as-practitioner is focused on becoming more authentic, recognising default modes, working with taming the cognitive/intellectual habitual tendencies, intending to become more embodied, somatic and compassionate. Because of the sympathetic relationship of phenomenology to mindfulness, compassion and insight, the emergent journey to becoming a phenomenological researcher allowed me to keep focused on my personal intentions, and indeed provided opportunities to enhance and reflect on these. The academic nature of the research challenged me to remain true to my self-as-practitioner intentions, in particular to experience increasing authenticity as self awakens self, as referenced by Macann (1993). The other-focused intention of self-as-researcher extends to a motivation to carry out robust quality research and disseminate the findings within the mindfulness community for the benefit of other practitioners, reflective of the Buddhist Bodhisattva motivation to bring benefit to all beings (Khenchen Thrangu, 2001).

5.5.3 Intersubjectivity

Empathy, a non-primordial intention towards the other (Stein, 1916/1989; Thompson, 2007), manifests as a reaching out to others rendered more skilful through mindfulness and compassion practice and less effortful as a result of intrapersonal insight. Empathy is experienced through bodily sensation or 'sensing-in' to the other (Thompson, 2007). In my researcher reflections, I commented on the difficulty that I experienced in bringing into my practice the compassion and self-compassion training, indeed my near denial of compassion as an area of practice. This speaks to my own biography and mindset where the interrelationship with others in the course of this research presented me with some of my greatest challenges, most so in the process of carrying out the interviews. Interviewing was when I felt at my most vulnerable, and it was challenging to remain true to my intention to become and remain open to influence by others.

Central to working with this difficulty was for me to engage with my own embodied authenticity, extracting my 'self' from the overwhelm of the other sufficient to observe and reflect while remaining in touch with myself and other. My experience was of maintaining exquisite balance: if I became too overwhelmed by the other, then I found myself thrust back into habitual patterns of judgement and self-protection; too disconnected, then all authentic empathic connection was lost. Constant balancing occurred within each interview to maintain this degree of mindful awareness; mirroring the internal processes that happen during mindfulness practice but with an added emotional edge. Bodily awareness was crucial to this balance. It was in the body where I received the feedback I needed as to where I was positioned empathically in relation to the other. My self-as-practitioner was also crucial to how others related to me; they felt free to express themselves-as-practitioners fully, unafraid of ridicule or misunderstanding.

As I became practised within the research interview situation, I became more adept at judging as to when I was sensing-in to the other and when this was not occurring. From an embodied awareness, I gained true insight as to the cause of my experience. As well as contributing to the development of my self-as-

researcher, the interview process provided a valuable opportunity to overcome my habitual reserve in relation to others within a defined and structured context. Specifically, the encounter with James (see 5.2.1.7) transformed my ability to sit with another's pain in authentic openness. In one reflection (5.2.2.5), I comment on 'schizoid' swings between anxious detachment and compassionate equanimity, and how that dynamic played out in the interview process.

5.5.4 *Temporality*

According to Heidegger, our experience is always bound by its temporal perspective (Langdridge, 2007). In this study, the 'what is alive for you?' question acted as an anchor, pinning each interview to its time and place, allowing the energy of the moment to surge forth in a fresh way. The benefit of the approach is evidenced in the participant narratives where the perspective of the participant evolves over time, and seen more explicitly in the researcher reflections where participants Patricia (5.2.4.4) and James (5.2.4.6) fix themselves in the moment by reorienting themselves to the 'what is alive for you' question. Post-interview reflections and repeated immersion in voice recordings and transcripts allowed for different temporal vantage points where stories emerged and unfolded through time. Stepping back created a new perspective where in-time prejudices could be examined away from the energy of the moment and set aside (5.2.4.2). These instances of bracketing resulted in momentary suspension of habitual attitude; repeated suspension broke through to a fresh understanding of the phenomenon at hand which is reflected in the research findings.

5.5.5 *Epoche/Phenomenological Reduction*

My experience as a practitioner of mindfulness, compassion and insight afforded me a level of skill in epoche even at the beginning of my journey to becoming a phenomenological researcher. During the course of the data gathering phase of the research, interview became the ground for the praxis of

epoche (Depraz et al, 1999). The ‘what is alive for you?’ interview question set myself and participant up in a mindful inquiry where present moment energy was paramount, and mental considerations (talking about, remembering, intellectualising etc) circled back to the embodied awareness of that moment in time. My own experience of the course curriculum, of practice and of the participants themselves were treated as part of the research process, examined either in self-reflection or co-reflection with participants. Whilst we had studied the same basic theoretical principles underpinning secular mindfulness, compassion and insight, these theories were offered to participants in the same manner as in Buddhism; theory to be tested in live practice, rather than presented as deductive knowledge. It is the results of these tests that participants reflected on in the interviews, leading to abductive inferences grounded in experience (Reichert, 2004).

5.5.6 Embodiment

Much of the evidence for what can be known in this research centres on embodiment, what is sensed and known abductively through somatic verification (Thompson, 2007). Reference to embodied knowing is threaded and referenced throughout this thesis, and as researcher, I regard embodied confirmation as evidence for a range of factors – authenticity of participant accounts, empathetic connection between myself and participant; indeed, the ‘what is alive for you?’ question could only be answered from an embodied knowing. Participants’ and my own persistent turns towards somatic experience support Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/1958) view of the person as consciousness embedded in a body. Impulsivity, intention, empathy, habitual tendencies and neuroses all take voice through the body (Nairn, 2011); accordingly, the body can be considered as the only authentication as to the “view from in here” (Gilbert, 2006, p66). However Johnson’s (2006) point that meaning relayed conceptually is but a small part of the “vast, continuous, unconscious or barely conscious process of immanent meanings” (ibid, p6) should be heeded as what has been given verbally by participants in interview,

however sensitively and insightfully described can only remain partial and fleeting.

5.6 Conclusions

Chapter 5 examines the task of becoming a phenomenologist (Van Manen, 1990) and the extent to which the praxis of mindfulness, compassion and insight might enhance the phenomenological research endeavour. Part 1 demonstrated where experience gained through mindfulness, compassion and insight practice can support the researcher in conducting skilful phenomenological interviews (Langdridge, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Themes emerging from researcher reflections correlate well with the phenomenological themes examined in part 2, with strong synergies evident in the experience of self, intersubjectivity, embodiment and the practice of epoche or bracketing.

The overall quality of the experience of phenomenological interview is one of subtle motion and balance, with embodied awareness as the fulcrum, providing the ground from which the researcher can agilely adjust physical, emotional and verbal activity. The embodied self makes these adjustments with regard to the expressed intention of the researcher with the adjustment becoming conscious more usually in retrospect. Distraction took the form of a pulling-back into the natural attitude. This occurred when circumstances triggered an affective default mode or when intention was weakened. Preferences surfaced and became conscious through mindful awareness, and it became evident where these deflected the course of intersubjective connection. The capacity to be mindfully present with preference and accepting of it, even when preference was strong or triggered powerful emotion, ensured a prompt return to embodied connection. As teaching did for Gillian (4.2.3.1), the praxis of interview provided me with a crucible for the practice of embodied compassion. Resting in moment-to-moment awareness during the interview allowed for the next moment to arise afresh, looked upon with curiosity and wonder, researcher open to the arising of insight.

Agreeing with Thompson (2007) that “attention and meta-awareness could be flexible and trainable skills, so that ... individuals could become more attuned or sensitised to aspects of their experience that might otherwise remain inaccessible to them” (ibid, p306), I show in the researcher reflections and researcher/participant co-reflections that mindfulness, compassion and insight practice can be transferred to the field of phenomenological methodology, enhancing the connection between researcher and participant and supporting an increased reflexivity. Whilst the embodied practice of mindfulness – “knowing what is happening, when it is happening, without preference” (Nairn, 2011a, 29/4/11 - 5/5/11) – provides the ground for the process, and in itself would provide a compatible skill set for the phenomenological researcher, the interview can be enhanced considerably by the overt practice of compassion. Nairn holds that “compassion is the most transformative energy in the universe” (Nairn, 2010b), and data gathered in this study demonstrate that opening into compassionate connection with participants can bring about transformative insights. With immersion into the experience of phenomenological interview as a practice, the self-as-practitioner metamorphosises into self-as-researcher.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

6.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapters to this study, I outlined the nature of the current body of research into secular mindfulness and identified issues regarding the restricted range of mindfulness practice taught in secular curricula and the short duration of standard mindfulness trainings. I underscored the importance of considering the impact of the practice of mindfulness and related disciplines on a wide perspective across life domains rather than confining research focus onto its remedial effects. I highlighted the limits of postpositivist methodology typically employed in mindfulness research and identified a more relevant research paradigm (constructivism) and a more sympathetic research approach (phenomenology). As laid out in preceding chapters, the aims of this study were:

- To examine the current body of literature relating to secular mindfulness, compassion and insight practice.
- To design a study capable of bringing to light the nuanced experiences of long term practitioners of mindfulness, compassion and insight.
- To contribute to the body of knowledge relating to mindfulness and associated disciplines.
- To contribute to the question of how mindfulness and associated disciplines might be researched and to offer evidence as to how the field of phenomenological research might be enhanced by the practice of mindfulness and associated disciplines.

In this closing chapter, I review and examine the research study to draw conclusions about what has been learned from the study and its significance, highlighting key themes and opening out discussion of relevant professional debates (Dunleavy, 2003; Hart, 2005). I finish with consideration of some viable direction for further research.

6.2 Contribution to Knowledge and Practice of Secular Mindfulness

The primary research question as defined in chapter 3 section 3.8 was to understand:

- the lived experience of people who have committed to and are engaged in the long term practice of mindfulness, compassion and insight
- how participants understand and enact the concepts of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight
- how they live mindfully in contemporary times
- the extent to which their practices traverse and permeate their life journey

As was my underlying intention (see 1.2), the study was designed in such a way as to draw out the lived experience of long-term practitioners of mindfulness, compassion and insight using pluralistic phenomenological methodology capable of bringing into sight rich nuance and complexity, and to allow the researcher's own direct experience of theory and practice to be recognised and incorporated into the methodology and the findings. Unique and important epistemological and ontological insights emerge from the data and discussion of findings into the breadth and depth of the impact of mindfulness and associated disciplines, mindfulness practice and the study of mindfulness. The research makes an important contribution to the practice of mindfulness, points to where the curricula of mindfulness courses might be developed, expands expectations about the potential of mindfulness to enhance quality of life, and highlights the pervasiveness of mindfulness and related approaches across life domains.

The empirical evidence shows the extent to which practising mindfulness has been deeply ingrained into the lives, living and experiences of the participants. In all cases, initial motivation for undertaking mindfulness, compassion and insight-based practice included a life-altering experience such as loss or death of someone close. The life journey up to the beginning of practice indicated for most participants a previous interest in meditative/contemplative practices, with participants' family or situational context acting as enabler or inhibitor to

undertaking a commitment to learning and to maintaining regular practice. Intentions, beliefs and frame of mind towards life in general and mindfulness/compassion/insight practice specifically altered through practice; and subsequent changes were evident in family and social relationships, mental and physical health, psychological states of being, experiences of spirituality or connection to a larger reality, and connection with the environment. Whilst many changes were experienced as positive, some had important negative connotations.

Whilst participants may or may not have had a clinical condition (e.g. post-traumatic stress, chronic fatigue), they all had experienced adverse life events – the human condition of suffering, according to Buddhism (Hanson & Mendius, 2009) – and it was that adverse experience and their attitude to it that brought them to mindfulness studies. This speaks to the holistic appeal of mindfulness as a life-enhancing faculty, as presented by Nairn (2010) not merely as a treatment for a disorder as is the focus of the current body of research. It is relevant that the mindfulness studies course that practitioners engaged with overtly sets out to support enrichment rather than remediation:

“The unique focus of this course is a compassionate approach to mindfulness practice that is the basis for deepening insight, which then enriches one’s life and work” (University of Aberdeen, 2016)

Their adverse experiences brought practitioners outside of their habitual attitude about life, shook them to the core so that they were motivated to seek transformation; Aidan conveyed this attitude when he stated “all my certainty about life was revealed to be fake with no credibility. I realised then that no-one else would have any answers to my unanswerable questions” (A1:23). Their motivation allowed participants to view the sometimes profound difficulties on their mindfulness journey as somehow positive and good, as markers or openings to the transcendental.

The literature review shows that mindfulness and compassion practice ‘work’, and to some extent ‘how’ it works, but lacks in-depth rich description of what constitutes the lived experience of practitioners. Unlike this study, the literature

does not include studies of secular insight practice, and does not examine mindfulness, compassion and insight practised in an integrated holistic way. Whilst the review of the literature found a range of positive changes to health and wellbeing as a result of short mindfulness- and compassion-based interventions (e.g. Carson & Langer, 2006; Farb et al, 2010; Shapiro et al, 2005, 2008; Neff et al, 2007; Malpass et al, 2012; Cairns & Murray, 2015), the current body of research does not reflect the type of transformational change found in this study. The findings of this study do however show a parallel with the transcendental experiences found in the practices of Buddhism and Western phenomenology, suggesting that the comprehensiveness of a mindfulness studies programme that encompasses compassion and insight, taught over a longer-term duration, provides the conditions for more fundamental transformation.

I hold that that the seemingly problematic Buddhist vs secular debate is in fact advantageous. Some participants expressly did not wish to adopt a religious practice and if the curriculum had been more overtly Buddhist, may not have embraced it. However, the Buddhist foundations of the secular programme are well understood by participants and welcomed as underpinning the legitimacy of the curriculum and the authenticity of the teachers; participants just preferred it to be unobtrusive. From what the participants on this study expressed, it is acceptable to present overtly Buddhist concepts within a secular context where there is no explicit or implicit expectation that participants are required to adopt the religious aspects of Buddhism in order to get full benefit from the curriculum. However, I strongly maintain that further reference to Buddhism should be considerate of the ethical concerns raised regarding the secularisation of Buddhism (Lindahl, 2015).

I hold that the significance of embodied practice cannot be overstated. Embodiment is a key feature of Buddhism and Western phenomenology as well as secular mindfulness, the inseparability of mind and body fundamental to a non-dualistic worldview. It is accepted that some degree of cognitive effort is necessary to understand the essential principles of meditation, but once familiar with the basic theory, practitioners can shift their energy to the experiential

without needing to conceptualise (Nairn, 1999). The experience of embodied awareness is exemplified by participant James when he states “Knowing is the body sensing” (J1:15). Embodiment is necessary to bring the practitioner into the present moment of the lived experience according to Nairn (2010) and whilst body-based practices such as mindful movement are a fundamental component of all secular mindfulness curricula (e.g. MBSR, MBCT, MBLC), the findings of this study suggest that embodiment could be emphasised more pointedly as the gateway to transformation, using “the intelligence of the body” to release us from cycles of mental rumination (Nairn, 2010a, 16-18/7/10). I suggest that greater emphasis on the development of interoceptive awareness and the ‘felt sense’ (Gendlin, 2003) could be incorporated into teaching and practice, such as is expounded by Ray (2015). Becoming skilled in embodied noticing allows the practitioner to experience fully the psychophysical pain of emotional states whilst refraining from avoidance or denial; this in turn enables the experience of pervasive transformation to occur. This would seem to be linked to developing the ability to hold an embodied awareness of what appears cognitively as paradox until the self-protection mechanism – Nairn’s (2011b) egocentric preference system – gives way to transformational insight.

Practitioners’ confidence and authority became more self-referential through embodied cognition. Knowledge and truth are described in somatic terms; practitioners know that they know when they feel it, reflecting the concept of primordial knowing (Khenchen Thrangu, 2001; Nairn, 2012; Heidegger, 1927/1962). Transformational insight also reveals causation through the process of self-display (Nairn, 2011); practitioners come to know during the moment of insight from where the habitual state or belief originated. In this way, the experience of practising mindfulness, compassion and insight is shown by the findings of this research to have the potential to be transformative in the Husserlian sense and Buddhist sense, with demonstrable effects both long-lasting and far-reaching. Transformational change comes about through somatically grounded insight practice. Practices that prepare the ground for insight and support self-compassion help move the practitioner from “knowing what is happening” to “recognising what is happening” (Nairn, 2011a); from partial understanding to fully transformative insight.

The commitment to long-term, indeed life-long, practice motivates practitioners to work through the difficulties that arise when habitual mental states are exposed. The range of practices across mindfulness and compassion allows for developmental progression, for the practice of awareness and improvement of mental skills. Self-compassion practice is shown to be vital when ego identity is exposed and threatened. Participant findings strongly evidence that the duration of practice in months and years rather than weeks affords for development of mastery and fluency; practice becomes self-sustaining even though external input is sought to keep practitioners on track and to boost progression. Embracing the difficulties rather than rejecting them is shown to be a necessary condition for transformation. The description of how acceptance and striving function strongly suggests that they are opposing forces; striving acts to prevent acceptance, and acceptance is necessary for insight to occur.

Transformation is shown to persist over time. The nature of the process of transformation is described by participants; there are remnants and memories of the previous way of being but the new way becomes more embedded. The emergence of a new path does not obliterate the old but there is never again only the old way; a fresh compelling choice opens up. Transformation is also shown to be pervasive, effects reach out in surprising ways across seemingly unconnected life domains.

Participants' accounts illustrate that interior mental and emotional development has a corresponding effect on social behaviour in the outer world; which counters the claim by Forbes (2016) that mindfulness is solipsistic. Gillian encapsulates this when she states:

“The same pattern’s in the internal and external environments. It’s the whole thing, everything, all connected. What we’re practising in our internal environment also pertains to the external environment. Our relationship with ourselves is the same as our relationship with everything else.” (G2:126)

The unguarded empathy necessary for personal development results for participants in acute susceptibility to the effects of world suffering. However, participants demonstrate that such tenderness should not be avoided or considered negative per se. All participants welcomed emotional pain in a

seemingly paradoxical manner; the benefits of being more alive appear to be worth the agony. Positively, participants were able to exercise choice as to how far to open out to others, even though the extent to which they were affected might be considered harmful to others unfamiliar with a transformative insight journey. From long term repetition of the formal and informal practices taught in the course curriculum, practitioners developed a mastery and fluency in their ability to utilise emergent life experiences as their practice. This ranges from reacting differently in social exchanges, being mindfully present when teaching, working or researching, feeling at one with the environment, and generally living more energetically; playful and imbued with wonder.

6.3 Contribution to Phenomenological Research Methodology

The second research question was based on my emerging understanding of the similarities between Buddhism and Western phenomenology and undertook to elucidate:

- how the praxis of mindfulness, compassion and insight might enable and enhance a phenomenological research experience.
- how the practices might prepare the researcher to ‘become a phenomenologist’ (Van Manen, 1990).

This study has important implications as a phenomenological study into the lived experience of mindfulness. This is to date a rare and important addition to research using other methods (i.e. social science research methods, research of a more quantitative nature using statistical analysis, and neuroscientific research) which demonstrates the relevance and usefulness of phenomenology to this field. The methods used are shown to be a useful addition to the research tools for future in-depth studies of mindfulness and human experience in other contexts. A number of key findings emerged from the data and its interpretation.

Researcher reflexivity was greatly enhanced by my experience as a practitioner of mindfulness, compassion and insight. I came into connection with the

participant more readily because of my ability to sustain a present moment embodied state, able to recognise my own mental processes and practice, bracketing them to remain in connection with the participant. Here too, the centrality of embodied awareness cannot be overstated as a prerequisite for mindful researching. The capacity to handle my own emotional responses, from anxieties about the quality of the research to the deep empathic emotional overwhelm experienced when meeting the same from a participant, enabled me truly to trust emergent experience within the research praxis. Research presented me with an intense opportunity to practise being open and keeping open my awareness (Rehorick & Bentz, 2009), and with intention and commitment, research itself became practice, highlighting my own areas for further development (i.e. compassion) and opening me to the transformative influence of participants' life stories.

Accepting that the presuppositions and biases of the researcher do affect the course of the research and the interpretation of it (Golafshani, 2003), the concern has been addressed explicitly in this study through dynamic use of researcher reflexivity (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). I used mindfulness techniques to ensure that I recognised researcher bias when it occurred during interview and in subsequent data analysis. I followed the primary interview question (i.e. 'what is alive for you?') through the whole research process as a method of appreciating the distinction between my own and the participants' embodied experience during interview and reflection, to keep focus on 'aliveness' in the repeated listening of interview recording and the transformation of the raw transcripts into participant narratives. I utilised participants as co-researchers inviting critical feedback on their narratives, thus aligning my and the participants' interpretation of the data (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p212). Through the processes of interview and the treatment of the data, surface meaning (hermeneutic of empathy) gave way to deeper insight (hermeneutic of suspicion) (Langdrige, 2007), reflecting the lived experience of mindfulness, compassion and insight theory.

As noted in chapter 3, phenomenology is a process of close connection between the researcher and participant (Van Manen, 2009). Within the

phenomenological practice, this study highlights that embodiment is a crucial element of the recognition of what constitutes evidence of knowledge. Criteria included a felt sense based on the degree of aliveness I intuited in participants' narrative. The question, "what is alive for you?" turned out to be much more than a starter question; it became a hook to trigger participants into present moment embodied awareness during interview, and it is suggested that a variation of this question could be incorporated into any phenomenological interview as a means to orientate participants to the origins of personal meaning (Van Manen, 2009). Choices about lines of inquiry to follow were likewise informed by embodied awareness. Deepening reflection involved a somatic emotional response following participants on their own journeys, spiralling through their and my own development, returning to the same topics but with greater awareness and understanding.

The reflections of participants, in relation to their degree of confidence in the researcher, highlight the centrality of the researcher herself being a mindfulness practitioner: participants found it easy to talk about their experiences knowing that they would be understood and recognised. Participants on this study responded well to the 'what is alive for you?' question; but it is less likely that non-practising participants of other non-mindfulness research studies would be as able to experience this degree of embodied engagement. However, mindfulness is a human capacity and it is my contention that this could be evoked in any research interview with the use of suitably sympathetic methods. Echoing Thompson (2006), I suggest that mindfulness courses should be recommended to fledgling phenomenological researchers, and phenomenological researchers could benefit from peer mentoring with a mindfulness teacher.

Whilst researcher reflexivity features strongly in a phenomenological research approach, it also pervades qualitative research approaches overall (Creswell, 1998), with means to enhance reflexivity called for in grounded theory methodology (Bryan & Charmaz, 2007). As a consequence of this study, an approach to mindful researching is being presented to mindfulness studies students (Kellock, 2017) as a way of introducing them not only to the richness

of phenomenological research but to the transferability of the skills of mindfulness, compassion and insight to the qualitative research journey more generally. My experience is that the student cohort is able rapidly to assimilate an elementary understanding of phenomenological methodology based on their practical experience as mindfulness practitioners, and interest is emerging into further application of mindful research methods in masters-level research.

6.4 Implications for Curricular Development and Further Research

Phenomenological research aims to close with issues and implications rather than firm conclusions (Lester, 1999). As one of the intentions of this study is to open up the field of mindfulness and related concepts to social science research, the intention is to offer a “suppositional structure” to the conclusions (Lester, 1999, p3) pointing to promising areas for further exploration. I assert that this study makes an important contribution to our knowledge about secular mindfulness and its potential to be insightful and transformative. Insofar as the body of research contributes to setting expectations regarding what mindfulness is and is not and what experience is possible through practice, then this study should engender the understanding that mindfulness, practised alongside related disciplines, can have a long-lasting transformative effect across a wide range of life domains if engaged in with that expressed intention and a steadfast commitment.

The issue of plurality of interpretation is a frequent criticism of phenomenological research, although divergent interpretation is less apparent than might be supposed according to Kvale & Brinkman (2009). It should be accepted that the interpretations and findings of this study are a product of their time co-created through participant-researcher interaction, and that what has been elucidated has derived from the treatment of the raw data by one researcher within a specific personal context. Saying that, the findings from this study provide evidence that there is both appeal for and significant benefit in an holistic secular programme of mindfulness studies incorporating the Buddhist concepts of mindfulness, compassion and insight taught over the longer-term.

It should be noted that the participants in this study are degree qualified and were motivated to undertake further academic study at masters level. The requirements of the course programme undoubtedly provided an environment for participants to further their knowledge about mindfulness and allied disciplines and to relate their learning to their personal and professional lives which might be absent in non-academic settings. As well as the MSc programme of Mindfulness Studies at the University of Aberdeen, non-academic curricula in mindfulness, compassion and insight have been developed by the Mindfulness Association (2016) and are available as a suite of successive courses. Further qualitative research, either phenomenological or utilising elements of mindfulness to enhance other qualitative methods, would be effective in exploring whether similarly transformative effects are an outcome of such courses taught outwith an academic framework.

Within a mindfulness studies curriculum, this study suggests that there would be benefit in more emphatically highlighting the centrality of embodiment as the gateway to transformative change. There is a wealth of diverse but complementary sources of theory and practice on embodiment, derived from Buddhism and indigenous traditions (Ray, 2014), phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958), psychotherapy (Levine, 2010) and neuroscience (Thompson, 2007) which could be drawn from to enhance curriculum content.

Participant narratives reflect the psychosocial benefits of engaging in mindfulness and compassion practice and the extent to which practice pervades interrelationships with others and the wider world, reflective of the concept of engaged Buddhism (Hanh, 2008). This area would benefit from further research focused on the effects and ethics of secular mindfulness and compassion on social cohesion, perhaps within specific educational and care settings such as schools, hospitals and in social care where vulnerable population groups are subject to the ministrations of others.

To conclude, the findings from this study are, to date, unique. The data show in great detail the impact of practising mindfulness, compassion and insight, about the full personified experience and how people live their lives from a new

ethical and grounded perspective. I end my thesis with a reminder from Patricia about the transformative potential of long-term practice:

“The non-cognitive nature of it still astonishes me, the cutting of the roots. It sort of happens almost by itself. I can’t make head nor tail of it! It seems like magic. Turning around expecting to find this spectre on my shoulder and it isn’t there. To have that kind of change happen without any kind of intellectual striving is just astonishing and wonderful and long may it continue!” (P2:253)

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GLOSSARY OF BUDDHIST AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL TERMS

Abhidharma	Ancient text describing Buddhist philosophical and psychological phenomenology.
Acceptance	Practice of relating to experience without judgement or resistance.
Alethic pluralism	The position that there are multiple truths, where propositions can be true in different ways.
Beginner's mind	The attitude of openness practiced by mindfulness practitioners, as if a beginner.
Compassion	The concept of basic kindness underpinned by a deep awareness of human suffering and the motivation to relieve it.
Constructivist	A paradigm that maintains that reality is socially constructed, where knowledge is subjective and changeable.
Dasein	Heidegger's concept of the self that understands its own nature of being.
Dualism	The worldview underpinning positivism that holds that the mind and the body are distinct and separable.
Egocentric Preference System	An internally constructed defence system, in place to protect a separate sense of ego identity. Can be conceptualised as three filters through which life is experienced: attraction, aversion and indifference.
Eightfold Path	Eight dimensions of the Buddhist path to cessation of suffering, which includes 'right mindfulness'.
Embodied empathy	The dynamic capacity to assess and interpret bodily signals between individuals.
Embodiment	A non-dualistic perspective where the mind and body are one indistinguishable experience.
Epoche/bracketing	The act of setting aside judgement about the world. Part of the phenomenological

	reduction.
Equanimity	An evenness of mind characterised by freedom from ego grasping and inner stability.
Existential phenomenology	The study of how the world is experienced through embodied cognition.
Four Immeasurables	A set of four Buddhist virtues and practices, incorporating lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity.
Hermeneutic phenomenology	An approach centred on how we find meaning in the world we experience.
Horizontalisation	The practice of viewing all experience as of equal value.
Insight	Understanding the nature of both the experiencer and experience; insight practice exposes the subliminal mind. Insight arises of its own accord (self-arising), in doing so, shows its origins (self-displaying), and immediately liberates the person from deluded ways of thinking (self-liberating).
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	A phenomenological research approach featuring psychological and interpretive elements.
Karma Kagyu lineage	One of four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism; followed by the Samye Ling monastery in Scotland.
Lovingkindness	Practice of relating with the attitude of goodwill.
Meditation Awareness Training	An eight-week secular mindfulness course that includes related concepts such as compassion and insight.
Mindful Inquiry	A phenomenological research approach that incorporates phenomenology, Buddhism, hermeneutics and critical social theory.
Mindfulness	Paying attention to present moment experience with an attitude of non-judgement; the faculty of being in touch with our experience as we experience it with an attitude of acceptance.

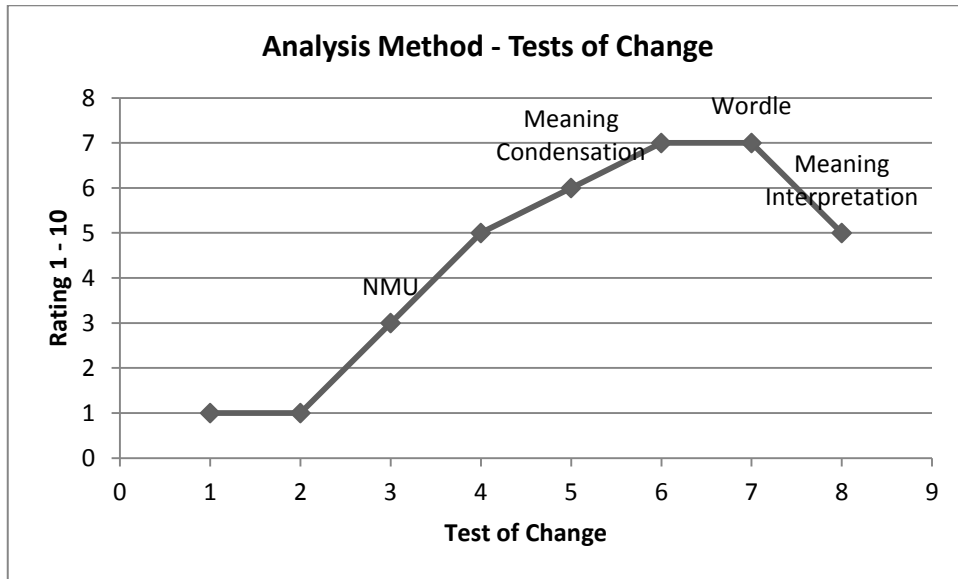
Natural attitude	Can be understood as the default mode of the mind. The unexamined day to day existence.
Non-conceptual cognitive awareness	The shift from dualism of an observer and an observed experience to the direct experience of pure observing.
Observer	The aspect of the mind that is the source of self-concept. The Undercurrent results from the action of the Observer.
Paradigm or worldview	A set of accepted scientific achievements that prevail at a given time in history.
Paradigm shift	The point at which previous theories give way to new theories that fit better with current observations.
Phenomenological reduction	The process in phenomenological research of setting aside judgement in order to focus on the experience.
Phenomenology	A philosophical movement arising in early twentieth century as a direct challenge to the scientific paradigm of positivism. Signifies a return to the lived experience.
Positivism/ postpositivism	The paradigm that is based on the belief that there is an objective truth or reality to be discovered which can be measured.
Rumination	The experience of repetitive, cyclic thinking; often unwanted.
Somatic	Related to the body and bodily sensations
Subliminal mind	The part of the psyche just below conscious awareness, accessible through sustained mindfulness practice.
Subliminal reflex	A psychological mechanism just below conscious awareness that triggers habitual thought patterns and emotions.
Transcendental phenomenology	An approach centred on understanding the essential structure of phenomena.
Triangle of Mindfulness	The content of the undercurrent, it consists of bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions.

Undercurrent	The aspect of the mind that comprises obviously identifiable contents.
Vajrayana Buddhism	A form of Buddhism common in Tibet; one of the three routes to enlightenment along with Hinayana and Mahayana. Makes use of visualisation techniques.
Wisdom	The experience of seeing through delusion and gaining an understanding of the true nature of our experience.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CMT	Compassionate Mind Training
DBT	Dialectic Behaviour Therapy
EPS	Egocentric Preference System
IAA	Intention, Attention and Attitude
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
MA	Mindfulness Association Ltd
MAT	Meditation Awareness Training
MBCT	Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy
MBI	Mindfulness Based Intervention
MBLC	Mindfulness Based Living Course
MBSR	Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
SCS	Self Compassion Scale

APPENDIX A. TESTS OF CHANGE METHODOLOGY



Test of Change (ToC) 1: use of Process Recording analysis in Word using Findlay's and Van Manen's guidance

ToC 2: use of Process Recording analysis in Excel using Findlay's and Van Manen's guidance

ToC 3: Separate transcript into numbered Natural Meaning Units in Word (Graham, 2011)

ToC 4: Introduce Kvale and Brinkmann's Meaning Condensation in a column to left of NMUs

ToC 5: transfer to Excel; to left of Meaning Condensation column, add column for Themes, begin to theme, and create a separate list of themes

ToC 6: separate Themes column alphabetically into two – A-L and M-Z – for ease of search

ToC 7: test out use of Wordle software on themes

ToC 8: introduce Kvale and Brinkmann's Meaning Interpretation in column to right of NMUs

APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT FLYER

Interested in being part of a PhD research study?

Living A Mindful Life

What?

Through the Mindfulness Association and Aberdeen University, I am undertaking PhD research over a 4-year period into **the experience of long-term mindfulness, compassion and insight practices**. The research will explore the experience and holistic effects of long-term practice of mindfulness, compassion and insight methods as presented in the **Mindfulness-Based Living model** (Nairn/Mindfulness Association, 2011).

Why?

Although Kabat-Zinn fully accepts that practising mindfulness has generalist relevance, much of his research, and subsequent studies by other researchers have focused on the application of mindfulness in a medical setting as a treatment option for specific disorders. The current body of clinical research confirms that the practice of mindfulness is effective in the treatment of a range of mental and physical disorders; however, there has been little examination of the lived experience of mindfulness practitioners and the wider benefits of living a mindful life.

There are relatively few qualitative studies of mindfulness or compassion, and those that have been undertaken mainly relate to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) 8-week programmes.



How?

I will undertake an hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of the **lived experience of practitioners with one year or more experience** of regular mindfulness practice. The study will take a **social science** viewpoint and will be sufficiently broad as to encompass psychological, social, professional, spiritual, and environmental perspectives. The study will be based on the researcher's own knowledge and direct experience of mindfulness, and the researcher's relationship with participants on the MSc in Mindfulness Studies, University of Aberdeen and one-year mindfulness and compassion courses.

This approach aims to provide evidence of the effects of long term practice that go beyond the predominant focus on pathology, and to represent the richness and breadth of the experience of Mindfulness-Based Living.

Who?

A **small group** of research participants (**both men and women**) will be recruited from student cohorts undertaking the University of Aberdeen MSc in Mindfulness Studies. To enable exploration of the effects of the maturation of practice, data will be gathered from each participant on more than one occasion with an interval of at least 6 months between the first and last occasion. Initially, semi-structured **interviews** would be carried out with each participant and other relevant methods would emerge from reflection on the participants' preferences, i.e. reflective journal, audio recording, visual drawing etc.

Participants will be committed to long-term mindfulness-related practice, and will be willing to take part in face-to-face interviews and reflective writing/recording.

I anticipate that being part of the research process will support participants' reflection into their practice and contribute to a deepening of insight.

When?

I am in the early stages of my study, writing the preliminary chapters. However, I want to recruit a small group of participants so that I am ready to begin the research phase of the study **later in 2013**.

Contact me for a chat: **Jane Kellock**

Home phone:

[REDACTED]

Mobile:

[REDACTED]

Email:

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX C. RESEARCH CONSENT AGREEMENT

Research Project: Living A Mindful Life: the experience of long-term mindfulness, compassion, insight and wisdom practices

Researcher Contact Details: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.
4. I agree to the interviews being audio recorded
5. I agree to share the following additional data (insert description below):
6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications *[NB. data will be stored in password protected files/locked filing cabinet; participants will be assigned a code known only to the researcher – only codes will appear on transcripts; pseudonyms will be used in the research write-up.]*

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

APPENDIX D. INTERVALS BETWEEN INTERVIEWS

PARTICIPANT	DURATION BETWEEN INTERVIEWS (to nearest month)		
	Between 1 st and 2 nd interview	Between 2 nd and last interview	Between 1 st and last interview
Gillian	9 months	3 months	12 months
Fiona	4 months	5 months	9 months
Aidan	5 months	4 months	9 months
James	12 months	n/a	12 months
Louise	4 months	3 months	7 months
Patricia	5 months	4 months	9 months



APPENDIX F. EXERCISE TO IDENTIFY CROSSCUTTING THEMES

	GILLIAN	FIONA	AIDAN	JAMES	LOUISE	PATRICIA
Personal Development	Gillian's journey towards understanding	Fiona's life journey – seeking love	Aidan's life journey - seeking truth	James's life journey	The journey from Burnland	Living with Chronic fatigue
	Working authentically with mind poisons – pride and jealousy	Fiona's default mode – anxiety and self-criticism	Aidan's reflections on striving and moving towards acceptance	- finding the elusive middle path	'I nearly died': working the edge of extreme emotional pain	The dungeons – my angry alter-ego and having to 'do it right'
		Fiona's experience of developing trust in the practices	Aidan expands from mindfulness to compassion practice	James's strong motivation towards embodied wisdom	Louise soothed by compassion practice	Practice is 'damn hard work' with CF
		Finding my safe space in embodied compassion	Connectedness through the 'delicious breath'	When emotion breaks the connection with present moment		From the cerebral to embodied wholeness
			Preferring simple practices, and getting sleepy during practice			Practising when it's not going well – the self-critic
		Gillian's big insight dispels belief of 'not being good enough'	Accumulative small insights counteract 'failure' self-talk	The bind of striving		'My goodness, I'm not being judged!'

	GILLIAN	FIONA	AIDAN	JAMES	LOUISE	PATRICIA
Work	Gillian's insecurity gives way to 'no effort'; 'teaching to where your practice is'	Teaching mindfulness in the corporate world; perception is 'the panacea for all ills'	Staying with the breath in psychotherapy reduces emotional intensity	Mindful learning in sport; moving towards an awareness without preference	Creating a mindfulness blog enhances daily life practice	Chronic fatigue, working and mindfulness
Relationships	Practising reduces the 'flashpoints' with a teenager	Moving away from 'high drama' friendships			Less self-criticism & enhanced connectedness	'Not being judged' as a grandmother
	Deciding to stop seeing 'extreme' family members		Being affected by others		Noticing expectations in changing relationships	Being vulnerable transforms relationship with son
	Being distressed by the wider world			Experiencing the anguish of universal suffering	Being emotionally prepared to return to the burns community	Making new sheep tracks in the world
			Experiencing a sense of interbeing		Seeking a unique spiritual interconnection	Reflecting on life's challenges and growing older
Learning	The importance of Buddhist lineage	Mindfulness community		Having faith in the training programme	Research versus recovery	Seeking likeminded people

APPENDIX G. MINDMAPPING TO IDENTIFY CROSSCUTTING THEMES – MINDMAP 6: CONNECTION

