

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SELF AND OTHERS: BUILDING AN ETHICAL  
FOUNDATION FOR A MINDFUL MODEL OF SPATIAL LITERACY

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a qualitative ethnographic study exploring embodied mindfulness practices in relation to self and community. I begin by recasting mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Langer, 1989) as literacy (Soloway, 2015) so as to bridge mindfulness studies with contemporary socially situated understandings of literacy (Cazden et al., 1996; Gee, 2015; Street, 1984). My aim is to redress personalized and individualized notions of mindfulness by reclaiming an ethical framework of mindfulness located in the social sphere. Through observations and interviews in self-reflexive ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) with educators of meditation and yoga in Chile, Canada and India, I explore how mindfulness-based practices are transformational in relationships with self and others. As conceptual frameworks, I turn to the philosophical work of Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1989) and Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) to query the connection and interconnection between the personal and the social. Based on analysis of the data, I propose a spatial model of literacy.

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*Ong Namo Guru Dev Namo*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

My dissertation is a qualitative ethnographic study to explore the teaching and learning of embodied mindfulness-based practices such as meditation and yoga in relation to self and community. Its aim is to redress personalized and individualized notions of mindfulness-based practice by exploring and reclaiming an ethical framework, of these practices located in the social sphere; currently, in popular discourse and much scholarly work, mindfulness-based practices are primarily located in the personal sphere for individuals' benefit. In order to discuss the findings of this study, of 13 teachers mindfulness-based practices including meditation and yoga, I turn to the conceptual frameworks of Emmanuel Levinas' ethics and responsibility as well as Thich Nhat Hanh's conception of *interbeing* or interconnectivity.

### **Background Statement**

Mindfulness has a 2500-year history as part of Buddhist practice and philosophy but has recently become severed from its Buddhist roots and a buzzword in the media and the sectors of health, business, and education. Over the last quarter century, it has been secularized and commodified, particularly in North America, due to an increasing penchant for the marketing of wellness. In a 2019 article in the Guardian newspaper, scholar Ronald Purser (2019) comments: "Void of a moral compass or ethical commitments, unmoored from a vision of the social good, the commodification of mindfulness keeps it anchored in the ethos of the market." The trend of mindfulness began as a move toward wellness in 1979 with Jon Kabat-Zinn's program Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) at the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. In 1990, he published the first edition of a 600-page handbook, *Full Castastrophe Living*, to describe the MBSR program. Mindfulness practices for the relief of individuals' suffering described in Kabat-Zinn's (2013) book include meditation, breathing, body

awareness, yoga, and walking. In particular, my dissertation focuses on the mindfulness practices of meditation and yoga teachers. Many scholars in mindfulness studies concur that the personal benefits to having a mindfulness practice include stress reduction by altering relationships to pain, people, work, sleep, food, and the world. Naming individuals' catastrophe or *dukkha* (suffering) has garnered the MBSR program and the book much attention over twenty-five years. Cited in the introduction, readers say the book saved their lives (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, xxvi). I suggest that the *saved* practitioners of Kabat-Zinn's program became *literate* to the body of knowledge called mindfulness. Whereas much of the literature espouses mindfulness practices as a way to improve various literacies, for instance, media, financial, home and community literacies, Soloway (2015) posits mindfulness *as* literacy. This is where my query begins.

How may mindfulness be conceptualized or re-conceptualized as a literacy? Mindfulness involves paying attention to an experience from moment to moment: "Knowing what you are doing while you are doing it is the essence of mindfulness practice. This knowing is a non-conceptual knowing, or a bigger than conceptual knowing. It is awareness itself" (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 16). If mindfulness is beyond "conceptual knowing," how does one come to know or experience awareness – through what kind of learning or embodiment? Or, if mindfulness is not a knowing, is it a simple skill to be habitually practiced? Soloway (2015) responds to this question thus: "Mindfulness is a literacy we are all capable of developing through practice. Just like learning to read a book, mindfulness is a literacy of learning to read the present moment as it is – minus the storylines we typically attach to experience" (p. 83). Mindfulness may sound simple, but it is not simplistic since detaching from our past storylines and future hopes and dreams may be a complex endeavour, which takes time, practice, and a constant vigilance. How can we *read* the present moment while engrossed in thoughts of the past and worries of the



future, which many are so apt to do? Soloway (2015) is prophetic on this point: “Over the past thirty years we have witnessed the growth of mindfulness-based training and its benefits toward health and well-being in adult populations. The next thirty years is on a path toward uncovering the role of mindfulness in education and human development” (p. 83). This possibility for ‘human development’ calls for a first step – the recognition of mindfulness as a literacy to be learned or experienced and implemented beyond the self.

In the preface of the 2013 edition of *Full Catastrophe Living*, Buddhist monk and activist Thich Nhat Hanh’s comment gestures to something more to mindfulness than individuals’ well-being:

As countless people have discovered over the past twenty-five years, mindfulness is the most reliable source of peace and joy. Anyone can do it. And it’s become increasingly clear that not only our health and well-being as individuals, but our continuation as a civilization and a planet, depend on it. (Hanh in Kabat-Zinn, 2013, xxiii)

Similar to Soloway’s (2015) prophesizing about the future of peoples’ engagement with mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh calls for the realization that mindfulness moves beyond interior pursuits of the self to the inclusion of others on a global scale. The same year that Thich Nhat Hanh wrote the preface for Kabat-Zinn’s book, scholars Purser and Loy (2013) called for a critical re-thinking of the field of mindfulness studies and the reclaiming of an ethical framework from the original Buddhist philosophy as a response to the colonization of mindfulness practices. Their public call came in an online Huff Post article. They suggest when mindfulness is compartmentalized with a motive for personal well-being, the interconnectedness between the individual and community is lost: “There is a dissociation between one’s own personal

transformation and the kind of social and organizational transformation that takes into account the causes and conditions of suffering in the broader environment” (Purser & Loy, 2013, p. 14). With an academic trail of scientifically based studies (Jennings & Apsche, 2014; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007), the case made for mindfulness for individuals’ well-being is strong. However, mindfulness as a literacy (Soloway, 2015) for understanding interconnections and living ethically with others has yet to be fully explored in the scholarly literature on mindfulness.

Since the inception of *The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education* at Stanford University School of Medicine in 2005, scientific studies of mindfulness have been increasing and show overwhelmingly positive results for treatment in clinical populations for personal health and well-being (Jennings & Apsche, 2014; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013, Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). In education, studies of mindfulness highlight the personal benefits for students from pre-kindergarten to university level. The benefits include stress reduction, resilience, and concentration (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Napoli, Krech & Holley, 2005; Rogers, 2013; Waters et al., 2015). However, few studies have focused on the relationship to community or environment after individuals’ mindfulness or meditation practices are established (Hart, 2004; Jennings et al., 2011). Even fewer studies focus on the educators of mindfulness meditation programs and their perceptions and practices of mindfulness in community (Sherretz, 2011). For his part, Soloway (2015) embarks on a novel yet brief discussion of mindfulness as literacy. This is where my research begins, querying how mindfulness may be considered a literacy and what a shift toward reclaiming an ethical framework of mindfulness practices, which encompasses the conceptual well-being of both self *and* others, may look like for educators.

## **Rationale**

Three auto-ethnographic sets of experiences inform my research: my personal mindfulness practice, my career as an ESL educator, and my research as a scholar. Firstly, my personal meditation and yoga practice has led me to big questions. Yogis and sages encourage self-inquiry with particular questions: *Who am I?* (Krishnamurti, 1997; Maharshi, 1985; Tolle, 2004) and *Is it true?* (Katie & Mitchell, 2002). After years of addressing these questions, accompanied by yogic and meditative practices, I have come to greet life's uncertainty and constant computations of the mind differently. Incessant thoughts are still there as the mind's job is to think, but I have more of a propensity to observe space or distance between self and thoughts, between self and dramas. I am seemingly fine *on the yoga mat* crossed-legged with a meditative practice, but what occurs *off of the mat* in the world? Following the questions *Who am I?* and *Is it true?* the next big question that follows for me is *Who am I in relation to others?* And, *how do I function and communicate in relationship with others?* My fieldnotes in Appendix E: *The Researcher Becomes the Researched*, illuminates my mindfulness practice, or lack thereof, as social, particularly with my mother, when I act as her care giver for five weeks during my doctoral research.

As an educator, functioning with others meant interacting with students as an English teacher and with my new community in small town Japan. In the 1990s in Japan, I became functionally literate in Japanese (Lankshear, 1993) and had what Cummins (1999) refers to as BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills). BICS and functional literacy enabled me to cope with daily life at the post office, bank and supermarket. I could read a few symbols of the written languages including Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji. I was not a diligent reading and writing student and even though I was in Japan for five years, which is the amount of time typically required for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Coelho & Rivers,

2004), I did not reach CALP. Instead I gained BICS and was aware of my surroundings both socially and professionally. I learned how to *act* literate or embody literacy in Japan: “Literate action opens the door to metacognitive and social awareness. In other words, literacy as a social, cognitive act creates some opportunities for strategic thinking and reflection that are absent in the pedagogy of textual conventions and correctness” (Bailey, as cited in Grainger, 2004, p. 286). I cultivated awareness in Japanese environments, functioning socially, with minimal reading skills in order not to get utterly lost on the streets. Unaware of what this phenomenon was called, I was being mindful, aware of my moment-to-moment experiences in a new-to-me environment, and learning to communicate in spaces with new textual and non-textual literacies.

As an educator in Japan, however, I was not really *in* the classroom. My compulsive thoughts often took me away from moments with my students. Buddhists would say my thoughts made me suffer by distracting me from being present: *What other jobs could I get with a BEd? What am I actually doing in the classroom? I don't really know how to be a teacher.* After five years of bumbling through teaching in Japan and five more years trying to teach English literacy skills to adult immigrants in Calgary, I took a leave of absence from teaching for surgery. Post-surgery, on my physiotherapist's urging, I tried yoga and meditation. I began with one class per week on the mat, stretching my body and emptying my mind. When I returned to the ESL classroom, I felt less rushed and less worried about my abilities as a teacher. I began to enjoy my role as educator. I was more of my *in-the-moment self* (Mate, 2008; Tolle, 2004). I listened more to my students. The immigrant and refugee stories of the students were important to hear. Time seemed to slow down in the classroom and the pace was more manageable. Off of the yoga mat, I seemed to be experiencing or living what I learned on the mat. In hindsight, I was becoming literate in mindfulness.

Finally, my current research into mindfulness in education was promoted by courses taken during my first year of doctoral studies. Inspiration from the Faculty of Education at York University included courses on ethics, social and multi-media literacies, and ethnographic research. In Humanities at York, I took *Introduction to Mindfulness*, which allowed me to begin to query the implications of mindfulness in broader contexts than myself. The *Teacher as Contemplative Practitioner* at OISE/UT introduced me to possibilities of confluence among my personal, professional, and academic worlds. I began to see possible intersections in the dialectical elements of mindfulness practices, which may include consideration of others (Eppert et al., 2015; Eppert & Wang, 2008; Loy, 2008, 2009; Miller, 2006, 2014; Orr, 2014), and the Levinasian philosophy of *facing* the radical alterity or difference of the Other<sup>1</sup> (Levinas, 1969, 1987; Todd, 2001, 2015). For my discussion section, I draw on Benson and O'Neill's (2007) explanation of Levinasian facing:

... "the other" simply refers to another person; the person who stands before the self.

What defines this other person is *absolute* otherness. There is something about the other that cannot be synthesized like any other object, something that eludes the understanding of the self. Levinas calls this the "face." The face is not simply an assemblage of features such as eyes, nose, cheeks, and jowl. (p. 34)

As I read the literature, I wonder about a facing of others as "absolute otherness" and the Levinasian Other, "which cannot be synthesized like any other object." Philosopher Levinas' framework is seemingly in tension with philosopher, teacher, and poet Thich Nhat Hanh's

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge the complex and confounding ways Levinas utilizes the terms *l'autre*, *l'Autre*, *autrui* and *Autrui* to denote forms of "otherness." William Large (2015) explains in his Author's Note of *Levinas' Totality and Infinity* that "there are two words for other in French, *autre* and *autrui*. Generally speaking one uses the first to speak of things and the second of persons." For heuristic purposes in this dissertation, due to difficulties with English translations of Levinasian texts, here I use and read Levinasian upper case 'O' for the singular, radical alterity of the Other and lower case 'o' for the sociological other. All usage of upper or lower case in citations within this dissertation follow the particular texts cited.

framework of what he calls interbeing, which highlights sameness or absolute interconnection between self and all others. This dissertation provides opportunity to place these frameworks in discussion in order to analyze the ethnographic data. During my course work while reading the literature, I saw gaps and the opportunity for ethical discussions of mindfulness as a *social practice*. The ethical conceptualization of mindfulness and implications for educational environments holistically was not taken up as much as the personal benefits and effects for participants in mindfulness programs. In this context, there is an opening for inquiry into an ethical turn away from the colonization of mindfulness to a critical reflection on the causes of social *dukkha* (suffering). Purser and Loy (2013) query what aspects of the *dukkha* is caused by the ways institutions operate. I query the ways *dukkha*, in particular self-absorption, may be relieved by the way educators conceptualize, communicate, and embody mindfulness practices, and find new ways of being in their classrooms as well as social contexts.

Taken together, my personal endeavours and professional experiences of working mindfully with ESL students to develop their literacy skills have helped me to further consider the issues of mindfulness and literacy in relation to the educator. My research draws upon Hart's (2004) suggestion: "A teacher who explores his or her own contemplative mind is better able to help his or her student to do the same" (p. 35). There are two elements within this statement which pique my research interests: 1) the possibilities of the educator's role in communicating and helping others explore their own contemplative mind; and 2) the ethical considerations in sharing contemplative or mindfulness practices. My primary research question is thus used heuristically to guide the research: *How can mindfulness be understood as socially situated literacy, and what role can mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga play in*

*transforming knowledge of individualized selves into interconnectedness with others?* In order to explore this focus, I observe educators of meditation and yoga.

### **Researching Meditation and Yoga Teachers**

After wrist surgery in 2006, I tried different types of yoga before I found one that was comfortable - Kundalini yoga. I was hooked during the first class as, unlike many forms of yoga that have a strong focus on body postures, Kundalini yoga calls for an intense engagement with movements in the breath, body and mind as well as an awareness of silences and stillness. In 2013, I began the Kundalini yoga teacher training course and met one of the lead instructors. She is a naturopathic doctor, Kundalini yoga teacher-trainer, co-founder of many yoga and meditation-based wellness programs, and my key informant. She introduced me to an instructor who teaches one of her programs in Chile. He was willing to have me observe his Kundalini classes in the yoga studio and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres in Santiago. I began my fieldwork there.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study: Research Questions and a New Model of Literacy**

In an effort to understand how mindfulness practices are constructed, communicated, and embodied as an intervention for interrupting self as individual and recasting self within community, I explored and documented activities that take place in yoga and meditation classrooms and in educators' personal lives. My purpose for this dissertation is exploratory as I query whether mindfulness practices are a kind of literacy of affect, of things, feelings and sensations that we just cannot put our finger on. Street (1984) posits two models of literacy, autonomous and ideological. Autonomous literacy is literacy unto itself for itself while ideological literacy is bound up in social structures of power (Street, 1984). Here, I propose a new model of literacy, a spatial model, a model of literacy in which interbeing (Hanh, 1998) or

interconnectivity with others is the key component. Participants in my study demonstrate being spatially literate or able to ‘read’ the space between self and others. Interviews with my participants uncovered a paradoxical and interconnected relation between doing and being, the personal and the social, as well as sound and silence. The spatial model of literacy proposed here may also include contemporary literacies that describe affect, emotion, and the energetic inbetween-ness between self and others. In order to explore the possibilities towards a spatial model of literacy, I begin, in the next chapter, with a literature review in two parts, one focused on mindfulness and the other on literacies. In this way, I begin to understand each topic separately prior to entering my fieldwork, where topics may become intertwined and “messy” (Bai et al., 2016; Mills & Morton, 2013).

To re-cap, my primary research question is as follows: *How can mindfulness be understood as socially situated literacy, and what role can mindfulness practices play in transforming knowledge of individualized selves into interconnectedness with others?*



## **Chapter Two: A Two-Part Literature Review**

This review is two-fold and supports my inquiry into mindfulness as a literacy. In order to bridge mindfulness studies with contemporary socially situated understandings of literacy, I begin with a literature review of mindfulness in part one and follow with a review of multiple literacies in part two. These reviews are intended to 1) lend a sense of what mindfulness is and how it is taken up in current scholarly discourse, and 2) make the case there is space for, and even a need for, a further model of literacy that includes mindfulness-based theory and practices.

### **Part One: Mindfulness**

#### **Introduction**

Behind Eastern teachings of mindfulness lies an elaborate system of cosmology developed and refined over time. The moral aspect of mindfulness (the idea that the mindful state achieved through meditation will lead to spontaneous right action) is an essential part of these philosophies. (Langer, 1989, p. 78)

Problematizing the current research trends in mindfulness entails a critique of the lack of exploration in *elaborate systems* of cosmology or totality of systems in the universe. In much of the literature on mindfulness, cosmology is not mentioned or cited as a mystic outcome of the practice leading to calmness or serenity. The moral aspect of *spontaneous right action* is also largely unacknowledged in much of the research on mindfulness. As Langer (1989) posits, the elaborate system of cosmology and moral aspect are essential parts of mindfulness, so why are they missing or lagging in the current discourses on mindfulness? What is at stake when the elaborate system and morality is severed, simplified, or even commodified for packaging and sale as self help? Some scholars have critiqued modern mindfulness as a private internal affair and called for a return to the traditional Buddhist roots, to an ethical and social engagement with

the ideas and practices (Eppert et al., 2015; Ergas, 2015; Purser & Loy, 2013). The approach to mindfulness as effective or beneficial for self-preservation, advancement, or resilience under the duress of daily stressors divorces mindfulness from the original Buddhist concept of interconnected engagement or the possibility of acknowledging the moral aspect of *spontaneous right action*. In a recent 2019 article in the Guardian newspaper, scholar Ron Purser notes, “although derived from Buddhism, [mindfulness has] been stripped of the teachings on ethics that accompanied it, as well as the liberating aim of dissolving attachment to a false sense of self while enacting compassion for all other beings.” In the 80s, with the first edition of his book *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, Thich Nhat Hanh tries to revitalize the social ethical precepts of Buddhist teachings. Five of the 13 guidelines are related to self in relation with others. The social ethical guidelines include: harmony in the community, mindful speech, standing up to injustice, protecting life, and social justice (Hanh, 1993). With the severing of mindfulness from its Buddhist roots of interdependence or concepts interbeing, awareness and responsible action toward and with others and the environment is lost. Purser and Loy (2013) explicate the loss of cosmology or the totality of phenomena and its interdependent nature:

When mindfulness practice is compartmentalized (...) the interconnectedness of personal motives is lost. There is a dissociation between one’s own personal transformation and the kind of social and organizational transformation that takes into account the causes and conditions of suffering in the broader environment. (p. 2)

When compartmentalization happens, one may choose a personal journey or transformation over ethical and social transformation. However, social *dukkha* (suffering) cannot be separated from individual *dukkha*. Einstein (1954) wrote of interconnectivity and noted that we “must learn to

understand the moves of human beings, their illusions, and their sufferings in order to acquire a proper relationship to individual fellow-men and to the community” (p. 66). Purser and Loy (2013) call for a reclaiming of an ethical framework for the mindfulness movement, taking into account not only the ideas of others, as Buddhists as well as Einstein suggests above, but the well-being of all. Hart (2014) explains the connection of mindful attention (or micro, inward attention) to accessing the cosmos (macro space and possibilities): Our mindful attention “gives the cosmos its opportunity to come alive before us and within us” (p. 37). What constitutes *cosmos*, and how can the mysteriousness of cosmos within us be understood? From the Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is an active, investigative practice or process that involves cognitive, attitudinal, as well as social and ethical dimensions (Grossman, 2010). Scholars have noted the internal work of mindfulness practice and emphasize that mindfulness practice must *begin* as a journey inward (Hart 2014, Rechtschaffen, 2014). Epstein (2013) clarifies the role of self in this journey: “In the Buddhist approach, the ultimate target of mindfulness meditation is the sense of self” (p. 95). Once we get to understand a *sense of self*, then what? Perhaps with a newfound selflessness, the possibility of *what next?* begins to unfold. What is next in terms of social and ethical interactions?

To illuminate what comes after an inward journey, Epstein (2013) tells the story of the Bengali monk named Atisha, born about 500 years after Buddha’s death. Atisha was asked by his Tibetan followers to summarize the Buddha’s realizations: “The highest skill lies in the realization of selflessness. The highest nobility lies in taming your own mind. This highest excellence lies in having the attitude that seeks to help others. The highest precept is continual mindfulness” (p. 194). Following this lead, mindfulness practices, which begin with the self in mind, end with *higher* skills, practices, precepts or maybe even literacy or pedagogy. The

predominant tone in the literature privileges the personal benefits of mindfulness practices and sometimes touches on, but does not fully explore, the social or ethical implications. Mindfulness may be the tip of the ethical iceberg and I wonder about mindfulness as first ethics. For this reason, my literature review now addresses the roots of mindfulness, definitions of mindfulness, and what mindfulness is good for.

**The roots of mindfulness: The suffering Buddha.** Before Siddhārtha Gautama became known as the Buddha, he sat for a long while under the Bodhi tree and he suffered. He “was attacked by all the terrifying beings of this world” (Gyatso, 2001, p. 190). After countless vicious encounters from the dark shadowy side of his own mind, he attained enlightenment (Armstrong, 2001). The process of preserving the teachings of the Buddha’s life as well as the path from suffering to enlightenment began shortly after his death in the year 483. Loy (1992) explains the teachings on suffering (*dukkha* or *duhkha*): “The Buddha repeatedly summarized his teaching into four truths: *duhkha*, the cause of *duhkha*, the end of *duhkha*, and how to end *duhkha*” (p. 166). There is much to say about suffering in the Buddhist tradition; Loy (1992) sums it up: “*duhkha* is not something we have but something we are” (p. 166). One aspect of becoming free from suffering is practicing mindfulness, seeing things as they are without change or judgment. As we change our minds, judge, and ruminate, we suffer: attachment to our positions and complaints arise “as a consequence of the persistent, pervasive psychological, verbal, and physical habits that together constitute what Buddhist philosophers call ‘root delusion,’ the ignorance of the true nature of things” (Garfield in Nāgārjuna & Garfield, 1995, pp. 236-237). Continuous suffering can be heeded as a warning to return to our ‘true nature’: “Busy-ness and suffering are like warning bells to remind us to slow down, be aware of nature within, and come into balance” (Bliss, 2017, p. 117). Under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha witnessed the gamut of his

thoughts and came to an ultimate balance of enlightenment: “He noted that his ... thoughts and feelings, if carefully observed, did not provoke him to act. Like bubbles in a stream, they would come to the surface of his mind and pop” (Epstein, 2013, p. 120). This was the Buddha’s enlightenment – no longer identifying or getting caught up with impermanent thoughts, feelings, and sensations. This new way of relating to impermanence was termed mindfulness (Epstein, 2013). Mindfulness, being aware of our pleasures or sufferings in the moments they happen, allows us to steep in our *dukkha*. We begin to see, experience, and understand the chains of *dukkha* by observing, attending, being mindful (Loy, 2012). Epstein (2013) refers to the Buddha’s prescription for suffering as self-investigation and mental discipline or “mindfulness and clear comprehension” (p. 6). It has been suggested for one to throw oneself into self-investigation to relieve suffering, which may not be easy:

Bravely let go

On the edge of the cliff

Throw yourself into the Abyss

With decision and courage

You only revive after death! (Po-shan, in Chang, 1959, p. 73)

**Becoming rooted in academia: No backdoor Buddhism.** How do scholars begin to measure the effects of the cessation of suffering through Buddhist practices such as meditation and mindfulness since science and religion are generally not coupled. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Stanford School of Medicine approached the Dalai Lama and his then translator and assistant, Thupten Jinpa, and asked them to collaborate in studying meditative practices and their effects. The Dalai Lama agreed based on two conditions: firstly, the studies meet scientific rigour and, secondly the practices be secularized with “no backdoor Buddhism” or no proselytizing (T.

Jinpa, keynote, May 14, 2016). Scholars then divorced the research from Buddhist roots and, in 2003, *The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education* opened its doors to researching the efficacy of mindfulness-based practices. Rechtschaffen (2014) explains the current ideal of super-secularism in this way: “mindfulness does not belong to Christianity, Buddhism, or Taoism, just as the breath we inhale and exhale does not belong to any one of us” (p. 36). Despite the Dalai Lama’s blessing, is conceptualizing mindfulness as belonging to no one or everyone, and severing the practices from Buddhist philosophical roots, the right thing to do? Regardless of right or wrong, the severing of mindfulness from its roots has created ethical and social gaps - in the perceptions and practices of mindfulness for its practitioners, in popular discourse, as well as in much of the scholarly discourse regarding mindfulness-based practices.

### **Mindfulness Defined and Re-conceptualized**

#### **Meditation 101**

The terms *meditation* and *mindfulness* are at times conflated. Epstein (2013) assists in piecing the terms apart: “There is no single word for meditation in the original language of Buddhism. The closest is one that translates as ‘mental development’” (p. 87). There are many forms of meditation that bring focus on the concentration on an object like a sound (mantra), image (candle flame), or feeling (compassion) (Epstein, 2013). These meditations require a physical space to listen to mantra, chant, or stare with ardent concentration at a lit candle. These meditations are generally done on the yoga mat or in *asana* (seated posture). The word meditation conjures up imagery of the meditator sitting crossed legged, eyes closed, hands placed in *gyan mudra* (a hand position with index finger touching thumb, like the North American hand gesture for *okay*). Kabat-Zinn (2013) explains the reputation of the word: “Until recently, the very word *meditation* tended to evoke raised eyebrows and thoughts about

mysticism and hocus-pocus...” (p. 7). If meditation is mental development, then it follows that one could do the development or hone the skill in differing ways. One form of meditation is mindfulness.

## **Mindfulness**

For the Buddha, the most effective meditation, according to Epstein (2013), “was moment-to-moment awareness of what is actually happening at successive moments of perception” (pp. 87-88). This moment-to-moment awareness is considered mindfulness. It is also considered in some of the literature as a practice as it is a skill that needs building (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, Bishop et al., 2004, Soloway, 2015). The term mindfulness is an English translation from Pali, a language from the Indian subcontinent in which much of the early Buddhist teachings were written. Germer (2005) explains the original Pali word for mindfulness, *sati*, connotes *awareness*, *attention*, and *remembering*. The word *remembering* may be problematic for mainstream understanding and usage of mindfulness, which posits mindfulness as present-moment dwelling. We may conceptualize remembering as an attention to the past, which distracts us from our mindful job of attending to the present moment. Remembering in *sati* does not involve dwelling or ruminating in memory. *Sati* is not memory function and rumination but a recollecting and way of remembering (Gethin, 2011; Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Purser and Milillo (2015) further explicate that “right mindfulness (*sammā sati*) signifies a faculty of mind that is able to remember both skilful and unskilful actions” (p. 5). Remembering not only involves reorienting “our attention and awareness to the current experience in a wholehearted, receptive manner” (Germer, 2005). Right mindfulness involves re-calling or re-membering our past actions in the moment so that we are actively engaged in re-creating something skilful or re-creating a new experience in the present moment or the future (Kang & Whittingham, 2010).

Right mindfulness takes into account all facets of linear time – past memory as well as prospective memory in the present and the future; however, the mainstream uptake of mindfulness of many scholars, poets, and contemporary thinkers has heavy focus on remaining in the present moment, without an ethical or critical engagement of remembering past or (re)creating a future.

**Mindful daily activities and poetry.**

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand*

*And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,*

*Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand*

*And Eternity in an hour.*

*-- William Blake, Auguries of Innocence*

When William Blake (1970) recognizes the cosmos in a grain of sand, eternity opens up and time is rendered pointless. Mindfulness does not suggest that we give up on the world, our jobs, and responsibilities in order to meditate on a grain of sand. Contemporary Buddhist-inspired mindfulness suggests we deal with our personal stress by developing in-the-moment, non judgemental awareness and not question why stress is so pervasive in modern western life (Purser and Milillo, 2015). The western and poetic engagement with mindfulness is not right mindfulness leading to critically thoughtful actions. Contemporary engagement with mindfulness is a partial uptake, which focuses on the self practice in the moment. Moment-to-moment practice allows one to focus on and make daily actions meditative. Whether on the subway, washing dishes, eating a sandwich, or enjoying the company of a child, one may be mindfully engaged (Hart, 2014). Miller (2014) suggests, “mindfulness is insight meditation applied to everyday life and involves bringing awareness to acts that we do each day. *Mindfulness can be*



*seen as meditation in action*” (p. 40). In this way, it is accessible and possible for everyone to mindfully meditate during everyday activities. Thomas Merton (1974), American Catholic monk and writer, suggested a spiritual practice of doing the ordinary while being intensely absorbed in it. Ram Dass (2000) calls mindfulness resting in the eternal present and gives examples: “When you are drinking tea, drink tea. When you are reading the paper, read the paper. This helps to slow the mind and stop time-bound patterns. When we attend, with care, to our present activity, we discover a wonderful freedom from thought” (p. 135). Miller (2006) gives another example: “. . . as you cut the celery for the salad, just cut the celery” (p. 77). The Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who has written several books on mindfulness, suggests many different activities for mindfulness. One activity is a 45-minute slow motion bath thinking “of yourself as being in a clean and fragrant lotus pond in the summer” (Hanh, 1978, p. 87). Mindful moments become poetic moments. Poets such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1971), Thomas Merton (1974), and Thich Nhat Hanh (2011) write of the experiences of deep awareness in the present moment.

*I have arrived, I am home*

*In the here, in the now.*

*I am solid, I am free.*

*In the ultimate I dwell.* (Hanh, 2011, p. 30)

**Wholehearted practice and autotelic experience.** Germer (2005) and Miller (2006, 2014) suggest mindfulness as a practice of wholeheartedness; we engross our selves in an activity and we dwell in it. No matter if the immediate experience is marked by calm or chaos, mindfulness calls for paying attention fully to the moment (David & Sheth, 2009). This wholehearted being-in-the-moment allows what Csikszentmihalyi (2008) has called autotelic experience or the state of *flow*. In flow, time passes quickly and the momentary experience is

transcendent where the activity removes a sense of egoic self: “Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 64). An example of a person in flow include a rock climber, “focusing all her attention on the small irregularities of the rock wall that will have to support her weight safely ... [leading to] a sense of kinship that develops between fingers and rock, between the frail body and the context of stone, sky, and wind” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 64). Wordy definitions of mindfulness seem flat compared to the poetic renderings of experience of being in the moment fully engrossed in activity or one’s surroundings. Perhaps under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha felt such a deep connection to the fig tree itself, its roots, bark and leaves as well as the insects that inhabited it.

**Watching one’s own drama.** The most metaphorical explanation of mindfulness likens the experience to being a spy in one’s own drama. Epstein (2013) describes mindfulness as “a spy consciousness in the corner of the mind, watching or feeling everything that unfolds in the theater of the mind and body” (p. 28). According to Epstein (2013), mindfulness is not “stewing in one’s own juices or merely accepting what is” (p. 90). Mindfulness is both active and passive, encouraging both detachment and investigation and thus a “release into a neutral space and critical inquiry when one is there” (Epstein, 2013, p. 90). Watching one’s own drama is watching the self as a thinker. When a person asked the Dalai Lama what the most important thing he does, he responded: “I watch my mind. It’s the most important thing I do” (Hart, 2014, p. 52).

According to Tolle (2004) watching the mind opens up transcendent possibilities of freedom: “The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity—the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start *watching the thinker*, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated” (p. 17). This ability to first *watch the*

*thinker* within allows one to embark on a journey to become continually more aware of thoughts, surroundings, and agitations; this observing may be the gateway to *purusha* or unchanging, ultimate awareness. Once well-practiced in observing *the thinker*, Tolle (2004) encourages one to be aware of the gaps between the thoughts—the gaps of *no-mind*:

At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you. This is the beginning of your natural state of felt oneness with Being, which is usually obscured by the mind. With practice, the sense of stillness and peace will deepen. In fact, there is no end to its depth. (p. 19)

In addition, Watts (1960) explicates the existential necessity to detach from our thoughts:

We need, above all, to disentangle ourselves from habits of speech and thought which set the two apart, making it impossible for us to see that this – the immediate, every day, and present experience – is IT, the entire and ultimate point for the existence of a universe. (p. 11)

For Watts (1960) and Tolle (2004, 2003), whatever one attends to *is*. If one attends to a past memory, it overrides present-moment experience and one tends to either brood or be joyful; it is simply a delusion or story. If one attends to the future, one lives in a fantasy that has not yet occurred. The attention to mind chatter in the past or future (the delusion of time) causes suffering: “Incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering” (Tolle, 2004, p. 15). Observing the mind’s tendency to continually step away from the moment-to-moment experiences helps understand one’s suffering and illusions:

Step out of the time dimension as much as possible in everyday life. If you find it hard to enter the Now directly, start by observing the habitual tendency of your mind to want to escape from the Now. You will observe that the future is usually imagined as either better or worse than the present. If the imagined future is better, it gives you hope or pleasurable anticipation. If it is worse, it creates anxiety. Both are illusory. (Tolle, 2004, p. 55)

Besides the philosopher Watts, spiritual teacher Tolle, and psychologist Epstein, other contemporary thinkers are writing on escape from suffering by watching one's own drama of the mind and finding more joy and peace *in one's life* through mindfulness practices (Brach, 2003; Chopra, 2000; Dass, 1978; Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Kornfield, 2009, 1996; Salzberg, 2011; Salzberg & Goldstein, 2001). These contemporary authors point to possibilities in existential freedom. In scholarly discourse, however, research on mindfulness began with a primary focus on psychological and physical relief rather than existential freedom.

**Scholarly operational definitions: From simple to complex.** The definition of mindfulness in scholarly research leading up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century was largely based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's program *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR), created in 1979 at University of Massachusetts Medical School. Mindfulness is described as a process of bringing attention to moment-by-moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Brown et al. (2007) offer similar short operational definitions for mindfulness: "a receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience" (p. 212). Germer (2005) also use such a definition: "awareness of present experience with acceptance" (p. 7). In addition, descriptions of mindfulness by a number of investigators in psychology (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013; Shapiro et al., 2006; Teasdale, 1999; Teasdale et al., 2000) use similar definitions. Hart (2014) explicates both the truth and illusion of the simplicity of the practice: "In fact it's so simple that it may be hard to see what all

the fuss around contemplative practices is actually about. But what we've discovered is that when we shift like this, there is both a physiological state change as well as a change in our perception and thinking" (p. 40). Mindfulness may seem simple, but it is not simplistic.

A barrier to defining mindfulness may lie in translating from the Pali language to English: "Early Buddhist thought employs a crisply defined technical vocabulary that can be useful in identifying and untangling the thickets of subjective experience" (Olendzki, 2011, p. 56). The more complex *thickets of subjective experience* in the mindfulness literature is explored and expanded by eleven scholars from North America who convened to propose an alternative: Bishop et al. (2004) suggest past definitions are merely describing mindfulness rather than defining it. They provide an operational definition comprised of a two-component model including 1) self-regulation of attention and 2) orientation to experience. The first component of the model rings similar to previous definitions. The second component adds a description of attitudinal commitment: "This orientation begins with making a commitment to maintain an attitude of curiosity" (p. 233). The curiosity includes a stance of acceptance about different objects within one's experience including thoughts, feelings, and sensations (Bishop et al., 2004). Bishop et al. (2004) also posit mindfulness as curiosity and acceptance that involves the continuously changing flow of *private* experience, which raises the question, *what then of public or social experience?*

A precise definition of mindfulness may further elude us because modern definitions diverge from their multidimensional Buddhist roots (Germer, 2005; Grossman, 2011; Olendzki, 2011), and different traditions within Buddhist psychology do not necessarily agree on the meaning of mindfulness (William & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Langer (1989) may have preceded the scholars in this difficulty by adding descriptions of what mindfulness is not – *mindless*.

**Habitual thinking and what mindfulness is not.** The grooves of mindlessness run deep. We know our scripts by heart. In the routine of daily life we do not notice what we are doing unless there is a problem. Locking ourselves out of a car or throwing socks in the garbage instead of the laundry basket jolts us awake (Langer, 1989, p. 43). Mindlessness is losing awareness of what is happening inside and around you in the moment. David and Sheth (2009) give examples of mindlessness: reacting strongly to a minor issue with a student, suddenly noticing a colleague speaking after several minutes, and gulping down lunch not tasting anything. Our habitual thinking and acting is not mindful as there is no aware attention to the particular thought or action in the moment – we get stuck in grooves of habitually patterned thinking and momentary sensations and experiences wane. A number of organizational behaviourists concur that when we are behaving mindlessly, relying on categories drawn in the past, development is fixed (Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Gersick & Hackman, 1990; Langer & Newman, 1979). In mindlessness, there is less personal agency while with mindfulness there are more choices and possible outcomes: “Mindful involvement in each episode of development makes us freer to map our own course” (Langer, 1989, p. 97). Loy (1992) concurs that “meditative techniques decondition the mind from its tendency to secure itself by circling in familiar ruts” (p. 176). With mindlessness we are stuck in ruts or predetermined notions of categories such as masculine/feminine, young/old, and success/failure and “once distinctions are created, they take on a life of their own” (Langer, 1989, p. 11).

Langer (1989) further posits that mindlessness also allows us to compartmentalize comfortable or uncomfortable thoughts and systems of belief. For example, in North America, some people consume pigs but not dogs. Why one and not the other? We tend to cling to rules and categories we construct in a mindless manner: “Among the reasons for this are repetition,

practice, and a more subtle and powerful effect that psychologists call premature cognitive commitment” (Langer, 1989, p. 19). Mindlessness limits our control by preventing us from making intelligent choices by confirming old mindsets and rigid categories (Langer, 1989). Mindfulness allows for more intelligent choices and, if we think of Buddha under the Bodhi tree, mindfulness is a surrendering to all experiences, both so-called good or bad, while in a state of absolute awareness.

### **What’s the Point? The Benefits of Mindfulness**

Tenzin Palmo, one of the first western females to receive full *bhikshuni* ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, clearly outlines the need for mindfulness: “Our mind is so untamed, out of control, constantly creating memories, prejudices, mental commentaries. It’s like a riot act for most people. Anarchy within” (Palmo, as cited in Mackenzie, 1998, p. 30). Anarchy reigns within because one believes the thoughts. A practice of mindfulness or being present on a regular basis gives way to something else: “Try the other way: Be indifferent to pain and pleasure, neither asking nor refusing, give all your attention to the level on which ‘I am’ is timelessly present” (Maharaj, 1973, p. 212). Mindfulness practices may lead to or come from a search of big questions like *Who am I?* and an existential exploration of being-ness. The point is to find out who you really are (Godman & Maharshi, 1985; Maharaj, 1973; Tolle 2004; Watts, 1960, 1966). *Who I really am* is not a quantifiable benefit to be measured, but specific aspects of our individual suffering is, so scholars took another tact to measure certain personal and professional outcomes as indicators of the efficacy of mindfulness practices.

### **Well-being and Beyond**

Mindfulness based programs like Kabat-Zinn’s *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) and Siegel and William’s (1991) *Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy* (MBCT) have

become increasingly integrated into wellness programs, medicine, health care, and psychology. Because of evidence based research on efficacy rates of these programs, mindfulness is applauded as a possible treatment or interruption of a range of stress-related and pain-related conditions as well as those with depression and anxiety (Kabat-Zinn in Rechtschaffen, 2014; Kenny & Williams, 2007; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale. 2013; Teasdale et al., 2000). Other scholars identify the beneficial aspects of mindfulness to include intention or the motivations for practicing (Shapiro et al., 2006); non-reactivity and describing or labeling with words (Baer et al., 2006); insight or de-centered awareness (Bishop et al., 2004); and meta-awareness or recognition (Carmody, 2009). Tang et al. (2012) researched the executive functioning of the brain on mindfulness and cite improvements in attention, cognitive control, and emotion regulation. Siegel (in Jennings 2015) concurs and posits mindfulness as an integrative practice of sensing and observing that helps in regulating emotions, attention, thoughts, and behaviours. In addition, Langer (1989) notes the interest of mindfulness for business sectors: “For employer and employee alike, mindfulness may increase flexibility, productivity, innovation, leadership ability, and satisfaction” (p. 133). In education, the list of benefits to practicing mindfulness is similar.

### **Mindfulness in Education**

Research shows that mindfulness helps students perform better academically, have positive personal goal outcomes, and demonstrate optimism when compared to peers who did not practice mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007). Benefits to honing a mindfulness practice include supporting mental focus, improving academic performance, and contributing to emotional balance (David & Sheth, 2009). Research with college students shows mindfulness as beneficial for fostering resilience, a kind of tonic with a mix including improvements in memory, attention, academic skills, social skills, emotional regulation, and self-esteem (Huppert & Johnson, 2010;



Keye & Pidgeon, 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). This resilience increases students' ability to manage effectively the complex challenges and competing demands of university life (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013). The danger in 'Buddhist-inspired' mindfulness is the co-opting and exploiting of the practice "for maintaining the status quo rather than effecting transformative change" (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p. 4). Mindfulness for creating a resilient subject in education for neo-liberal agendas has been explored (Binkley, 2014; Purser & Milillo, 2015; Reveley, 2016). The question remains in education, then, is mindfulness best suited to assist students in handling current pressures or can it be used as a new approach to rethink institutional pressures? Perhaps there is room for critical mindful inquiry.

Mindfulness not only has an effect on improving cognitive functions and raising performance in schools, colleges, and universities, according to Srinivansan (2014), it also nourishes harmony and happiness. Some scholars suggest that mindfulness can lead to honing attributes such as acceptance, curiosity, non-judgment, equanimity, and kindness (Bauer-Wu, 2012; Jennings, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2012, Rechtschaffen, 2014; Srinivasan, 2014). Practicing mindfulness also enables one to be more responsive and less reactive (Srinivasan, 2014). Ritchhart and Perkins (2000) posit that studies must move beyond conceptualizing mindfulness as a state of being and move toward mindfulness as a disposition: it is only from an ongoing mindful disposition that the educational landscape for students can be altered. It may be in educational research where mindfulness is brought back into balance with its philosophical roots and what Langer (1989) highlighted as an essential element – "spontaneous right action" (p. 78). With a focus on and revitalization of the importance of the Buddhist roots of right mindfulness and an ethically informed practice, which Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) outlines, perhaps the course

of mindfulness research may be adjusted (Purser & Milillo, 2015). Jennings (2015) has termed this new direction interpersonal mindfulness, which includes the following:

- Listening with full attention to others
- Present-centered awareness of emotions experienced by oneself and others during interactions
- Openness to, acceptance of, and receptivity to others' thoughts and feelings
- Self-regulation: low emotional and behavioural reactivity and low automaticity in reaction to the everyday behaviours of others
- Compassion for oneself and others (pp. 6-7)

Jennings (2015) further posits that mindfulness promotes a sense of belonging and connecting: “As we experience present-moment, nonjudgmental awareness, we can more readily recognize our common humanity and our interdependence on one another and on all of life, not as a philosophical abstraction but as direct experience of interconnection” (p. 183). It is a way to become more connected to others and understood to be operating in the world. Rotne and Rotne (2013) further this point by suggesting that mindfulness is “an intentional, systematic way of developing a compassionate and insightful presence in the world” (p. 21). After a *compassionate, insightful presence* is cultivated, actions that follow fall under what Purser and Milillo (2015) describe as the transcendent purpose of Buddhist mindfulness, which includes human flourishing, virtuous behaviour and concern for the welfare of all sentient beings (Flanagan, 2011; Forbes, 2012). From this transcendent purpose, my research queries the social implication of mindfulness. Is being skillful in mindfulness-based practices the precursor to *spontaneous right action*? Does individual practicing give way to a new operation socially and

*interdependently*? After a mindfulness practice is honed individually, is it then a kind of socially situated literacy of reading the self, others, and the world?

### **SWBAT (Students Will Be Able To)**

Educator Srinivasan (2014) lists mindfulness skills for students to develop, which include both internal mindfulness practices such as “recognize when they are not present [and] keep the mind focused by using the breath as an anchor” (p. 96). Srinivasan (2014) also includes skills that shift the attention from self to others and the space in between. The *students will be able to* (SWBAT):

- Send well-being to others.
- Consider the well-being of a loved one.
- See how their own behaviour and choices affect others.
- Communicate effectively and listen actively. (p. 97)

After the list of student outcomes that includes benefits and considerations for both self and others, Srinivasan (2014) offers a rubric for educators to assess students and suggests the rubric may be adapted for student self-assessment of mindfulness. The inclusion of considering others in the list of mindfulness outcomes is a novel concept in the literature regarding mindfulness. Srinivasan (2014) has perhaps begun a move toward and integrating what Grossman (2010, 2011) and Purser and Loy (2013) have called for – a social and ethical turn in the discussion of mindfulness. The ethical turn may have begun, but there is still an unanswered question: What is mindfulness in education? Is it a technique, skill, sensing of self and others, or way of being, studying, or teaching? Is mindfulness a literacy or perhaps a pedagogy?

### **Mindfulness as literacy**

Some scholars consider mindfulness a practice or skill (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Soloway, 2015). According to Kabat-Zinn (2013),

Mindfulness is a skill that can be developed through practice, just like any other skill.

You could also think of it as a muscle... [which] grows best when working with a certain amount of resistance to challenge it and thereby help it become stronger. (p. xxxiii)

Soloway (2015) addresses mindfulness as a literacy to be developed in order to read the present moment:

Mindfulness is a literacy we are all capable of developing through practice. Just like learning to read a book, mindfulness is a literacy of learning to read the present moment as it is – minus the storylines we typically attached to experience. This includes a clearer understanding of one's emotions as well as the emotions of others. (p. 83)

If mindfulness is a skill to build, can it be considered a literacy? At the *Provoking Curriculum* conference in February 2017 at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, I had an opportunity to put this question to an educational philosophy scholar who is a mindfulness practitioner. Upon asking the question *can mindfulness be considered a literacy?*, there was silence. After a few seconds, she furrowed her brow and answered, “No, it can't. It just can't” (C. Eppert, personal communication, Feb 18, 2017). Reframing the question so as to ask ‘*how* can mindfulness be considered a literacy?’ may open up more possibility. Could mindfulness be reconceptualised as a non-textual literacy, such as “social emotional literacy” (Matthews, 2006) or musical literacy, which considers audible sounds as texts (Gershon, 2011)? Does Ritchhart and Perkins’ (2000) call for mindfulness as a disposition (and not a skill) lead in the direction of a new kind of engagement between self and other? Is it more palatable for scholars to consider mindfulness as a pedagogy (Bai, 2001)? Is it possible that mindfulness builds awareness to understand or

embody a new type of literacy – a literacy of reading thoughts, feelings, sensations, that leads to a novel way of reading the world?

## **Part Two: Literacies**

### **Multi-literacies**

A cursory investigation reveals a two-fold meaning for *literacy*: 1) ability to read and write, and 2) knowledge in a particular subject or field. The field of literacy studies is vast and the word *literacy* currently has a polysemic character beyond its original focus on reading and writing alphabetical letters (Grenfell, 2012). Conceptualizing literacy as only the reading of texts marginalises other meanings and uses of the term (Street, 2004). Instead of focusing on reading and writing, the term literacy is often used to mean being generally competent in something and currently there is a proliferation of literacies (Cambridge Assessment, 2013). Conceptualizing literacy beyond *autonomous* competencies or skills (Street, 1984), the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), a group of 10 international professionals and academics, designed the *International Multiliteracies Project*, which redefines the process of literacy to include multiple streams of meaning-making such as the linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial. The New London Group also calls for attention to multimodal patterns - the interconnections between the first five modes of meaning-making listed above. Even though the New London Group focused on new communications and media, they opened up scholarly discourse for more possibilities to re-conceptualize newer literacies. Examples of newly coined multiplicities of literacy beyond what the New London Group envisioned include social emotional literacy (Bibik & Edwards, 1998; Matthews, 2006), music literacy (Miller, 2009; Nolet, 2007), and moral literacy (Herman, 2008). Limbrick and Aikman (2005) posit the re-conceptualizing of literacy as multiliteracies transforms views of what it means to be literate. Due to this burgeoning of forms

of literacy, there may be a space for conceptualizing mindfulness as a literacy, as a skill or practice which is interwoven between self and others.

**Socioliteracy studies.** Socio-cultural theorists conceptualize literacy as socially situated within communities. Sociocultural viewpoints consider knowledge and learning in terms of relationships between individuals and their environments. The environments may be physical, social, cultural, and technological (Gee, 2015). The New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective encourages “educators and researchers to examine the range of literacy practices that people engage in [order] to mediate and make meaning of their lives outside the context of formal schooling” (Schwartz & Rubenstein-Avila, 2006). Burns (2003) comments, “New Literacy theorists (Barton, 1994; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984) argue that reading practices are inherently contextual, relative, and pluralistic, and need to be understood in relation to broad cultural and social roles and purposes” (p. 19). NLS is “sometimes referred to as sociocultural approach to literacy or as socioliteracy studies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 184). Gee (2000), one of the scholars in the New London Group, elucidates situated literacy as being an integral part of new literacies where people create meaning from using social languages to enact, recognize, and negotiate depending on the situations. The notion of learning as situated within community takes learning beyond schools and into all realms of social interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Socioliteracy studies allows for a broadening of page-bound literacy to what Morris and Tchudi (1996) call *real-life* literacy in which literacy is seen as practical for life situations. Along with the expanding sites of learning and multiplicities of meaning-making or making sense of the world comes an ever-expanding list of literacies.

### **List of Literacies**

In 1990, Macias began a list of literacies to include the following: functional, marginal, survival, cultural, home, community, historical, financial, computer, digital, media, and geographic literacies. In viewing this expanding list, one can perhaps make a more understanding and welcoming accommodation for even newer literacies. The list is growing with the addition of contemporary literacies including social emotional literacy (Matthews, 2006); moral literacy (Herman, 2008); existential literacy (Arman, et al., 2013); and mindfulness literacy (Soloway, 2015). This list of newly-conceptualized literacies includes and highlights affect or feelings. These literacies require people to have sensitivity to *doxa* (unwritten rules) of cultural and interpersonal relationships. *Doxa*, according to Bourdieu (1977), includes the unwritten self-evident rules of the cultural spaces. The *doxa* is self-evident to those people who are literate in the rules of the space in which they inhabit. Knowledge of *doxa* gives people cultural or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). For their part, Chow and Cummins (2003) posit knowledge is generated through interpersonal space as well as through affect: “we saw literacy as multidimensional and integrated with all aspects of students’ lives inside and outside the school. . . . We also knew, intuitively, that literacy acquisition belonged as much to the affective realm as to the cognitive realm” (p. 33). Contemporary literacies such as social emotional, moral, existential, and mindfulness literacies emphasize the affective realm, which includes an intuitive sense. Moral and social emotional literacies include a knowing or understanding of interplay of responsibilities to self and others and emotions between self and others.

**Moral and social-emotional literacies.** Moral literacy involves three basic components: ethics sensitivity; ethical reasoning skills; and moral imagination (Herman, 2008; Tuana, 2007). Herman (2008) explains our social institutions, which shape our moral lives, sometimes empower us or challenge us to act well or morally. She calls this process of moving toward

acting morally *moral literacy*. This type of literacy is dependent on context and *doxa* as each community may have differing definitions of what morality is comprised of. A similarly socially situated literacy born out of interaction with others and sensitivity to the affective is *emotional literacy*:

To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life around you. Emotional literacy improves relationships, creates loving possibilities between people, makes co-operative work possible, and facilitates the feeling of community. (Steiner, as cited in Matthews, 2006, p. 42)

Emotional literacy can be explained as a five-part process: knowing your feelings; having a sense of empathy; learning to manage your emotions; repairing emotional damage; and putting it all together as emotional interactivity (Matthews, 2006, p. 43). This process implies sensitivity is needed in order to *put it all together* and to be emotionally literate or interactive with others.

Matthews (2006) argues emotional literacy is crucial in fostering the ability to handle indeterminacy and ambiguity. Emotional literacy “*has to be seen in conjunction with that of others [as] a social process* that takes place in a social setting and is not something that is ever achieved, unlike learning your 12 x 12 tables” (Matthews, 2006, p. 45, italics in original).

Similar to moral literacy, emotional literacy or the *reading* of emotion is dependent on the socio-cultural context. How emotions are approached varies depending on the community.

Overarching both of these literacies is the *reading* of what is moral or what emotions are in play, a reading of what may be overt or subtle.

**Existential and mindfulness literacies.** Two newly coined literacies, existential literacy and mindfulness literacy, also include a reading of subtleties. Arman et al. (2013) explain



existential literacy:

Existential caregiving in practice requires an ‘existential literacy,’ using the metaphor of human life as a text or a book whose contents are legible only for the one versed in the language. In order to gain a complete understanding of caregiving, an ability to read a suffering human’s language and decipher its meaning is essential. The patient’s narrative might open up a caregiver’s awareness in a single illuminating moment. (p. 1)

Is it a certain skill or a literacy to “read a suffering human’s language and decipher its meaning” (Arman et al., 2013, p. 1)? A similar question arises with mindfulness to read self and others: is it a skill or literacy? Some scholars consider mindfulness a skill to practice (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Soloway, 2015). Soloway (2015) suggests because mindfulness is a skill that can be developed, it is a literacy. Does building a skill equate to literacy? Since Soloway (2015) does not elaborate on his conception of mindfulness as literacy, further questions arise: does reading the present moment include internal readings of the present moment (what is happening within the body and mind) as well as external readings of the present moment (what is happening in the environment)? Does reading the present moment include reading others in social situations?

### **Reading the External and the Internal**

Because socio-cultural theorists conceptualize literacy as socially situated within communities, readings are external as they start with the world. Freire and Macedo (1987) claim that the external world experience *precedes* the internalization of words: “reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world.” (p. 29). For Freire and Macedo (1987), literacy is cultivated from external experience with words within the world. Knowledge of words happens

in a continual process of reading the world. Poignantly, Freire and Macedo (1987) add, “words should be laden with the meaning of people’s existential experience” (p. 35). Existential experience is shared with words. Lankshear and Knobel (2011) describe the possibility of agency within this sharing of experience:

Humans alone can consciously understand their relationship with the world, the distinction between culture and nature, the way in which their action upon reality transforms the natural into the cultural and the historical: the way in which they can transform reality. (p. 17)

Perhaps humans’ understanding of their *relationship* with the world and the *interconnectivity* between self, social, and consciousness can be understood as a new type of literacy – a kind of literacy of interconnectivity in a spatial realm, in the spaces between self and others.

Psychologist Vygotsky (1962) broaches the interrelation between thought and speech and posits a fluid, changing relationship between intrapsychological functions and interpsychological relations as well as intrapersonal communication and interpersonal communication. Like Freire and Macedo (1987), Vygotsky’s work (1962, 1979) implies that an interwoven relationship and dynamic movement between text and context is central to the literacy process. Vygotsky (1962) describes the ebb and flow between thoughts and words: “the relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought” (p. 218). The processes of going from consciousness to thought to word and back again is nuanced and fluid. Gibbons (2015) notes that Vygotsky (1962) would argue, “external, social dialogue is gradually internalized to become a resource for individual thinking” (p. 14). For Vygotsky, there is an ebb and flow in the processes between external stimuli (social dialogue) and internal (individualized thinking). Vygotsky (1962) suggests: “thought has its own structure,

and the transition from it to speech is not an easy matter” (p. 250). By way of analogy, it is difficult to pinpoint the transition when a wave becomes the sea – everything blends into one and is not easily separated. Similarly, the transitions from social interaction to thought and then into speech are not easily captured, as the transition from waves to ocean is not capturable nor easily separated. In this way, thoughts may be drops of water, speech like the waves striking the shore, and consciousness the vast ocean.

**Fluidity of thoughts, inner speech, and exterior speech or words.**

*Thought and speech turn out to be the key to  
the nature of human consciousness.*

*- Vygotsky, Thought and Language, 1962, p. 256*

According to Vygotsky (1962), there is an inherent flow that connects consciousness to thoughts, thoughts to inner speech, and inner speech to the spoken word. All consciousness is reflected in one word:

Consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water. A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness. (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 256)

According to Vygotsky (1962), speech is born of a flow from incomprehensible thoughts (consciousness). The incomprehensible flow of thought gets caught up in inner thoughts or inner speech. Incomprehensible thought (consciousness) is motivated to flow toward external speech by desires, needs, interests, and emotions (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 252). When one relinquishes control over processes such as desires, needs, and interests, one enters what Csikszentmihalyi (2008) refers to as *the flow experience*, being in the moment with ease. Literacies that allow one to be in the moment with ease may be in a new category, beyond Street’s (1984) two models of

literacy – autonomous and ideological. Street rejected the autonomous model, literacy unto and for itself, literacy as neutral (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, p. 40). Street argues for the ideological model in which “literacy is entirely a matter of how reading and writing are conceived and practiced within particular social settings” (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, p. 43). I argue here for an ethical spatial model of literacy in which reading self and other is a not only how we are socially situated but includes how we engage with others within social spaces. Both Street’s ideological model and my proposed ethical spatial model supposes we are all in it together – *it* being language, communication, and literacies.

**In language like fish in a pond of water.**

*Language is so close to us we cannot understand what it is.*

*We are “in” language the way a fish is in water:*

*for the fish, water is just the way things are.*

*-- Fischer, Beyond Language, 2011*

Like a fish in water, we are *in* language. We are interwoven in our language, each word, and myriad meanings. Words turn into labels, labels into categories, and these categories often harden. According to Fischer (2011), categories and labels can be unrelenting *unless* one re-conceptualizes language in some way to be flexible, poetic, or musical:

All language is singing. Music doesn’t have any describable meaning, yet it is vital to our lives. But we don’t know this. We hold onto objects we have created with our language, objects that don’t exist as we imagine that they do, and we suffer. [...] We would be free from the special sort of anguish that human beings feel when they are lonely and estranged from themselves, others, and the world. (para. 8)

This is similar to Vygotsky's (1962) conception of the connections between the intra- and the inter, the flexible flow between internal processes and external, social engagement. In this flow, language is a mediator between internalization of external actions (speech) and the development of thinking processes. For Vygotsky, internal and external processes are intertwined; however, for Fischer (2011) the process may be separated: "learning to let thinking come and go, we can eventually understand a thought as a thought and a word as a word, and with this understanding we can find a measure of freedom from thoughts and words" (para. 15). In this way, when not holding fast to our language and views we may let our desires and needs come and go. Vygotsky (1962) would disagree on this point of motivation; he posits desires, needs, interests, and emotions motivate, which in turn lends to the very function and purpose of speech, language, and literacy. Purposes and functions may also shift since language and literacy are in constant processes of flux and evolution (Morris & Tchudi, 1996; Vygotsky, 1962).

### **Literacy Functions for Different Purposes**

The union of consciousness, thought, and speech is also a union with communication (Vygotsky, 1962). Word meanings are negotiated within thought, speech, and communication each time social interchange happens (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 9). Like Vygotsky, Gee (2015) suggests that literacies allow us to communicate and function in order to serve different purposes, include making meaning of our lives. Gee (2015) sums up literacy as "the story of the social mind in search of ever further reaches of meaning making in the service of new forms of life and new worlds" (p. 135). Making meaning of newness every time a person is in communication serves a function to proliferate *new forms of life and new worlds* (Gee, 2015). This notion of meaning making anew is romantic and vast as our habits and tendencies are more apt to harden meanings (Langer, 1989) rather than proliferate newness. The ability for one to

make new meanings may be a result of context: “in a very real sense, what and how we learn depends very much on the company we keep” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 13). Regarding communication, Morris and Tchudi (1996) concur that our company is part and parcel of community: “language and discourse are inextricably connected to the cultural and social milieu of a community” (p 22). Context is key to determine what purpose literacy can serve: “the purposes, uses, and formats of literacy are varied and expanding. To a large extent, how literacy is used is determined by social contexts” (Mikulecky, 1990, p. 24). How literacy functions is dependent on the socio-cultural views in a community. Mikulecky (1990) asserts that literacy functions in the following ways:

- Literacy liberates
- Literacy is used to domesticate free individuals
- Literacy use is growing
- Literacy use is shrinking
- Literacy illuminates the ways of God and humanity
- Literacy sells soap
- Literacy spawns creativity and makes possible between individuals links that span space and time
- Literacy serves gatekeeper functions
- Literacy, by itself, wields no magical transforming power over learning and life
- Literacy scholars will never produce a comprehensive social history of its uses or a comprehensive theory to explain the history of texts and readers. (p. 24)

As suggested in the last bullet point above, not resting on a comprehensive theory of literacy allows for more possibilities to emerge in answering questions like Lankshear and Lawler’s

(1987): “what is literacy?; what does it mean to be literate or illiterate?; what is it about literacy that makes it valuable, and for whom is it (most) valuable?” (p. 37). Socio-cultural scholars argue literacy is not neutral as it is cultivated by different socio-cultural worldviews and can be used to marginalize and dominate (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, Street, 2012). As with functional literacy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993), do all literacies function as a means to an end and are those ends always political or *ideological* (Street, 1984)? Could a mindfulness literacy be conceptualized as neutral, without personal or ideological motives? How can newer literacies be conceptualized outside the binary of *autonomous* and *ideological* models (Street, 1984)? Are the more intuitive literacies such as social emotional, existential, and mindfulness literacies less (or more) political due to their affective nature? I posit there is room for a new model of contemplative literacy that encompasses the most contemporary conceptions of literacy such as social emotional, existential, and mindfulness. Through my research and analysis, I posit the new model of literacy is spatial and that it be critically examined within ethical frameworks. It is spatial as it involves readings of self and others in ever-shifting contexts and can be built, as literacy can, as a skill overtime with mindfulness-based practices.

### **Chapter Three: Paradigms and Frameworks**

My research investigates the dynamic inbetween-ness among educators in a mindfulness-based program, their students, and their environments. To review, my primary research question is as follows: *How can mindfulness be understood as literacy, and what role can mindfulness practices play in transforming an individualized self into a sense of interconnectedness with others?*

#### **Beyond Current Models**

*Truth resides in the haze between multiple perspectives.*

*-- Colonel Chris Hadfield, lecture at the AGO, Nov 2, 2016*

As explicated in the literature review above, conceptions of literacy and definitions for the word itself are multiple and shifting. In this context, there is the possibility for further scholarly expansion of the field. For instance, Street's (1984) models of literacy are described as autonomous and ideological. The autonomous model purports literacy to be neutral and for and unto itself: "Literacy is literacy is literacy. It is not shaped by the facts of particular social settings" (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, p. 40). The autonomous model assumes that "literacy in itself, autonomously, will have effects on other social and cognitive practices" (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 103). By contrast, Street (1984) argues that literacy is not neutral due to its enmeshment with the social realm and thereby involves politics and power. This ideological model takes into account that literacy practices vary in contexts and cultures (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 103). At the beginning of my research, I was in what Heath and Street (2008) call an ethnographic pursuit driven by a *hunch* or *curiosity* about human behaviour (pp. 33-34). My curiosity and scholarly hunch propelled me into researching possibilities to reconceptualise literacies and mindfulness-based practices. A new model of literacy may be conceptualized to involve affect, emotion, the reading of interiority (inner life) as well as exteriority (the social realm) in tandem. A new model



may be conceptualized as spatial, involving spaces between self and others, and include contemporary literacies such as social emotional literacy, moral literacy, existential literacy, and mindfulness literacy. A newly conceptualized spatial literacy is supported under the larger paradigms of interpretivism and spirituality. The spiritual research offers a shift toward spirituality and practices that are open to new ways of knowing, researching, and being (Lin et al., 2016). These ways include the intuitive, somatic and contemplative, which have, until recently, been marginalized (Wilber, 2001). In order to support my call for spatial literacy, I draw on the following two paradigms: interpretivist (sometimes referred to as constructivist) and spiritual.

### **Interpretivist and Spiritual Paradigms**

The ontological belief that accompanies interpretivist research traditions “portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 2010, p. 8). In ever-changing scenarios, interpretivist research focuses on how people continually interpret and make meaning from their contexts. From the interpretivist approach, variables are interwoven and difficult to measure (Glesne, 2010). Interpretivist research uses modes such as contextualization, understanding, and interpretation. The second of these three modes, understanding, is the central purpose of interpretivism (Glesne, 2010 pp. 7-9). In interpretivist research, understanding is cognitive and phenomenological. In other words, the researcher observes and participates in her context, seeks to understand the other culture on its own terms, and then lends interpretation. Understanding of the other culture is gleaned as researchers interact with people in their social context and talk with people about their perceptions (Glesne, 2010). Taking the research beyond perceptions of both the researcher and participants allows for a broader understanding of the environment.

A spiritual research paradigm allows for a broader inclusion of *what is going on*. Perhaps, *what is going on here, and there, and everywhere*. A spiritual research paradigm (SRP) refers to “a holistic concept and approach that incorporates conscious awareness of oneself as a unique individual, but also as a being in relationship with all other forms of existence” (Lamb, 2016, p. 57). Spiritual research is concerned with pluralism (Bai, et al., 2016; Edwards, 2016; Lamb, 2016), which considers multiple views. Pluralism is concerned with the individual’s interior and exterior as well as the collective’s interior and exterior (Wilber, 2006). A SRP espouses the interconnection of internal and external experiences, a connection that cannot be separated. Miller (2016) posits that the inner world is deeply connected to the outer and “inquiring into the inner world we also discover our relationship to others and the universe” (p. 131). In SRPs, the interior and exterior experiences of all people involved are considered.

The words interconnection and spiritual can be as problematic and troubled as the words literacy and meditation. The spiritual is often suspect and marginalized as a proper research matter (Bai et al., 2016). SRPs entail a confluence of the affective, somatic, spiritual, cognitive, and intersubjective dimensions (Bai et al., 2016). Spiritual is “immanent in human reality and experience” as an “open-ended or emergent phenomenon” (Bai et al., 2016, p. 78). Spiritual researchers engage in “dynamic, communicative, interactive, and reflexive process of discovery” (Edwards, 2016, p. 261). This engagement is essential and ongoing as “the ultimate truth about the spiritual realm is unknowable, our knowledge of spiritual truths is constantly being developed and refined through our rituals, dialogues, and collaborations” (Edwards, 2016, p. 261). SRPs include an *inner awareness* of knowledge about oneself that is not limited to physical, mental, or emotional dimensions. It incorporates “conscious awareness of oneself as a unique individual, but also as a being in relationship with all other forms of existence” (Lamb,

2016, p. 57). SRPs draw upon and integrate aspects from a variety of academic disciplines and include an openness to “approaches that inspire conscious expansion of the researcher as a part of the process” (Lamb, 2016, p. 65).

The SRPs include an aspect of consciousness raising or expansion of the researcher – this aspect is apropos for my ethnographic research as I was a participant observer in yoga and meditation-based classes that call for introspection. Because my research is situated within the perspectives of both interpretivist and spiritual research paradigms, which call on me to commit to full engagement internally and externally, I turn to two ethical frameworks: Firstly, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’ (1969) conception of exteriority and secondly, what Buddhist and poet Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) refers to as interbeing. Both these frameworks are concerned with self and others and the ethics of being and interacting with others. The concepts of self and other(s) as well as responsibility are well-situated to the interpretivist paradigm, being both cognitive (of thought and philosophy) and phenomenological (of experience), as well as the spiritual paradigm, concerned with the whole.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

Following Flanagan (2011) my research analysis is framed with a conception of ‘naturalized Buddhism’. Flanagan (2011) imagines Buddhism without the bodhisattvas, oracles, and reincarnated lamas. He imagines Buddhism with what is left after stripping away the religious imagery, people, and stories. Flanagan (2011) is then concerned with metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Although tempting to tackle all three, my dissertation focus is on ethics and the ethical engagements with self and others after a mindfulness practice is established. Undergirding my data analysis are two frameworks: Levinas’ (1969) conception of facing others and the Other as separate from the self and Hanh’s (1993) conception of interbeing where self

and other are inexorably linked. I choose these two frameworks not as an *either/or* scenario: rather, I place them in conversation and tension with one another in order to remain open as a researcher to the possibilities of both separateness and interconnectedness in the social realm.

**Levinasian ethics.** Levinas' (1969) conception of the self and Other places each as distinct and separate. It is dualistic and asymmetrical – me and thee: “It is in order that alterity be produced *in being* that a ‘thought’ is needed and that an I is needed” (Levinas, 1969, p. 39). In other words, to perceive difference, the *I* must conceive of a *thou*. Prior to the I and the thou, there is interiority, which Levinas (1969) describes as neutral or pure: “interiority as such is a ‘nothing,’ ‘pure thought,’ nothing but thought” (p. 55). In a state of “nothing but thought”, there is nothing to learn as the self (interiority) cannot be a teacher; the self is bound by the teaching of experiencing the Other (alterity, or difference, in exteriority) (Levinas, 1969). In other words, we are beholden to the Other; we cannot learn without the Other. Interiority being *nothing* is shockingly interrupted by exteriority, being in the face of the Other; “the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face” (italics in original) (Levinas, 1969, p. 50). Here Levinas uses “himself” and “other” with a lower case ‘o’; this usage may be interpreted as an experience of the other (person) as a facing, *or* as part of the singular upper case, radically different Other, who is my teacher. I argue, without sociological others, there can be no conceptualizing the Levinasian singular Other; they are inextricably linked. This notion of facing others opens other perspectives (Levinas, 1969, p. 51). Without a conception of me and thee, one (or One<sup>2</sup>) resides in totality or wholeness, unbroken, without alterity (difference). Once one perceives a me and thee, totality is transcended or ruptured. In this state beyond totality, which Levinas terms infinity, the world of exteriority is marked by language,

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<sup>2</sup> If the singular *Other* can be conceptualized, then it follows that a singular *One* would be a state of being in totality. Once One faces the Other or others, One becomes one of many others.

speech, and interlocutors; “the relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the other to me [note: lower case ‘o’ in original]” (Levinas, p. 73, 1969). For Levinas, as Ippolito (2002) explicates, language is integral to ethics: “... the world enacted by interlocutors is the very site of an ethical engenderment between speakers; that is, it is an expression of the self’s responsibility for the other. For this reason, language is inextricable from ethics” (p. 20). In its separation from the other, the I is thereby responsible for the other as teacher:

... to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I ... means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching. (Levinas, 1969, p. 51)

For Levinas (1969), language does not presuppose universality; it presupposes interlocutors, a plurality, and alterity or radical difference (p. 73): “discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, as pure ‘knowledge’ or ‘experience,’ a *traumatism of astonishment*” (p. 73). The trauma of astonishment may be difficult unless one welcomes radical exteriority, as Levinas (1969) suggests, by allowing the absolutely foreign to instruct me without grasping to know or gain knowledge of the other. In other words, the other as alterity, as difference, is ultimately a teacher. According to Levinas (1969), prior to the trauma of astonishment and the invocation of a separate I, there is *totality*. Once totality is transcended or ruptured through the trauma of astonishment and alterity in the face of the other, there is no returning: totality is a state of being prior to the interruption (Levinas, 1969).

***Shunyata* and interbeing.** From the Buddhist perspective, *shunyata* is not broken or transcended as it is for Levinas (1969). *Shunyata* is a state, a vast expanse of emptiness, nothingness (Loy, 2008; Newland, 2008), which may be experienced. In the Heart Sutra (a

*Mahāyāna* Buddhist recitation), *shunyata* is a distant other shore, which may be travelled to via mindfulness-based practices which help to overcome obstacles of the mind, fear, and wrong perceptions<sup>3</sup>. Insight leading to the other shore of emptiness requires stillness and silence (Todd, 2001; Tolle, 2004). Hart (2008) posits that silence may lead to subtle transformations: “Silence can invite the chattering mind to settle down and recede a bit, in turn opening awareness of more subtle currents of consciousness” (p. 242). By embracing silence, we cultivate vigilance to find and experience a new way of learning and being. Contrastingly, this silence, which is the antithesis to voice and conversation, is terrifying for Levinas (1969, pp. 90-94). Silence may cause dread: “All the arts, even those based on sound, create silence...[and this silence] may weigh heavy or cause dread” (Levinas, 1949. p. 147). For Levinas, the self learns through the shocking alterity of the other in the face of the other. In Buddhist and mindfulness practices, however, silence is a way into a new experience, a new kind of learning.

For Hanh (1993), falling deeply into *shunyata* (emptiness), which is cultivated by silence, allows a deep understanding or embodied realization that one is not separate: one is interconnected or inter-being with many others. The idea of emptiness or nothingness may be initially dreadful; however, the state is not a nihilistic nothingness. *Shunyata* is, paradoxically, full (Loy 2008; Newland, 2008). Loy (2008) explicates the origin of the word *shunyata*:

The original Buddhist term usually translated as emptiness actually has this double-sided meaning. It derives from the root *shu*, which means “swollen” in both senses: not only the swollenness of a blown-up balloon but also the swollenness of an expectant woman, pregnant with possibility. So a more accurate translation of *shunyata* would be: emptiness/fullness. (p. 22)

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<sup>3</sup> Copy and paste this link into browser to access online *Heart Sutra*: <https://plumvillage.org/news/thich-nhat-hanh-new-heart-sutra-translation/>

Hanh (2011) also posits when one is empty (experiencing *shunyata*), one is full of possibilities and interbeing:

Emptiness ... refers to the absence of a self that exists apart from everything else—the way a flower, for example, cannot “be” by itself alone, but rather is made of non-flower elements such as the seed, fertilizer, rain, and sunlight. If you take the non-flower elements out of the flower, the flower no longer can exist. Emptiness does not mean nothingness or nonexistence; it only means there is no such thing as a separate “self” entity. (p. 87)

*No such thing as separate self* will be a framework for my research in tension and along with a *distinct and separate self* in the face of others and the Other<sup>4</sup> that Levinas (1969) casts. As Sean Hand explains in the preface of *The Levinas Reader*, “*the very nature of Levinas’s thought involve[s] an infinite responsibility for the other.*” Regardless of responsibility born out of sameness and interdependence (Hanh, 1993) or absolute alterity (Levinas, 1969), these frameworks provide tensions, ultimate unknowingness, and responsibility to others that inform my choice of method, ethnographic research, in which I must remain vigilant to be open to possibilities of connection and interconnection, while researching from an *emic* (insider) perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> Here, *distinct and separate self* refers to Levinasian I / thou relation

## **Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods**

*Wisdom not steeped in method is bondage.*

*Wisdom steeped in method is freedom.*

*Method not steeped in wisdom is bondage.*

*Method steeped in wisdom is freedom.*

-- Tsongkapa, *The Principal Teachings of Buddhism*

### **Ethnographic Approach**

I approach my qualitative ethnographic research with a view to grounding my research methods in the wisdom of scholars before me as well as the wisdom and perceptions of my study's participants. Glesne (2010) uses the terms qualitative and ethnographic research interchangeably. Since the 1980s, there have been more novel approaches to ethnographic research including ethnographic case studies, autoethnographies, video-ethnographies (Lichtman, 2006), and sonic ethnographies (Gershon, 2012, 2013). For my study, I employ an ethnographic research approach allowing for an extended immersion in the culture or group in order to develop the *thick description* needed to garner information on how people in the group construct and share meaning (Geertz, 1973; Glesne, 2010). Thick description goes beyond mere reports of an act (thin description) and “describes and probes intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, as cited in Glesne, 2010, p. 35). More generally, an ethnographic approach allows me to see sociocultural phenomena and how people act in the group or culture.

Heath and Street (2008) claim, “a primary job of ethnographers is to track, describe, and enumerate multimodalities as semiotic resources in their combinations—linguistic, gestural, kinesthetic, and visual” (p. 21). For my research purposes, observing semiotic resources is appropriate as the particular modality of yoga (Kundalini yoga) in some of the classes I study



employ Gurmukhi script for voiced mantra and meditations, static hand *mudras* (positions) and postures, active *mudras* and body movements, and *dristi* (focal points for the eyes). My key informant and many participants in my study belong to a subculture within the broader yoga culture: they are Kundalini yoga teachers. This is a niche yoga community, which befits an ethnographic approach as Lichtman (2006) highlights the fact ethnographers often choose subgroups, which operate outside the mainstream such as gangs, drug dealers, and psychiatric patients. Kundalini yoga teachers may not fit intuitively into Lichtman's (2006) list of subcultures; however, they are considered odd in the westernized yoga community. Kundalini yoga is different than mainstream modalities of yoga such as Vinyasa, Ashtanga, Moksha, and Yin. In my experience as a student and teacher of Kundalini yoga, some of the differences include the teachers' attire (most Kundalini yogis wear white, loose fitting cotton clothing), the voiced mantras for chanting practice, meditations with hand positions, and use of particular music. Kundalini teachers have access to several manuals with hundreds of different yoga *kriyas* (sets), which is markedly different than a set sequence of flow yoga done repeatedly in many mainstream yoga modalities.

While studying the Kundalini yoga teachers' culture on its own terms through participant observation from an *emic* (insider) perspective, this study enters the sites of study with research questions in mind: *How can mindfulness be understood as literacy, and what role can mindfulness practices play in transforming an individualized self into a sense of interconnectedness with others?* The questions serve as a guide, throwing light on issues I am concerned with. For qualitative research methods, Glesne (2010) and Lichtman (2006) recommend having a guiding question; however, for ethnographic research, Heath and Street (2008) recommend first familiarizing myself with the company I keep and getting to know

myself as a “constant learner—ever curious and open to what’s happening” (p. 30). In order to get to know the culture and familiarize myself with its members, I must embark on what Wolcott (1995) describes as “intimate long-term acquaintance” with my participants (p. 76). And with this acquaintance, my stance is ignorance in lieu of a preconceived knowledge base of the group I am studying (S. Schechter, personal communication, May 9, 2016). During my research, I get to know the educators as well as the spaces they inhabit. I began by attending participants’ classes and hanging out in the studios before and after classes. I took walks to markets or stores with participants, rode in carpools, buses, and subways with them. I went to their homes for dinner or tea or to meet up with them and their social networks of friends and family. I shared their life experiences with them, their teaching of yoga and meditation classes, as well as in their lives outside the class settings.

**Rationale for ethnographic data collection.** Culture facilitates human sharing of learned systems for defining and interpreting meaning (Erickson, 1985). In order to gather data of the spaces the educators live and work in, I conducted observations from an *emic* (insider) perspective over a period of time, approximately 6 weeks in each country including Chile, Canada, and India. These observations allowed for a glimpse into the teachers’ cultures. In order to be a full ethnography, I would need more time in each place. Nonetheless, my semi-structured interview data and observational data provided the integral components to explore my research question regarding how mindfulness-based practices, such as yoga and meditation, are social. The time spent with the teachers allowed me to build trust and a level of comfort with the teachers so that our interviews were more natural and casual. The interviews in Chile were conducted in a vegetarian restaurant over lunch after a visit to a rehab centre, and on a bus ride to a seaside town, and in a participant’s apartment lobby meeting room. The interviews in Canada

were conducted in coffee shops or restaurants of the participants choosing, spaces in which they were familiar with and comfortable in. And, the interviews in India were in outdoor seating areas, cafés, or, in one case, at a participant's ashram office. Some of the field data I collected were from observations at the participants' indoor and outdoor classrooms as follows: yoga studios, rehab centres, domestic abuse shelters, outdoor areas, ashram meditation rooms, and the banks of the Ganges river in India.

### **Ethnographic Data Collection in the Classroom**

Bloome (2012) contends that classroom ethnography is a misnomer because it “is not sufficiently broad to provide a holistic understanding of the ‘culture’ of a social group, an ethnography of that group” (p. 10). In other words, the classroom is unable to be isolated from the social and cultural context in which it functions. Bloome (2012) proposes that classroom research may employ ethnographic tools consisting of participant observation, fieldnotes, open-ended interviews, the collection of artifacts, and other qualitative research techniques typically associated with an ethnography, but it may not be an ethnography in itself. Adopting an ethnographic perspective is applying the ethnographic approach to a situation, which is less comprehensive than a full ethnography. The ethnographic perspective allows the researcher to make the familiar strange and make the strange familiar (Erickson, 1973; Glesne, 2010; Street, 2012). Ethnographic tools are ways to observe in order to comprehend the situation (Street, 2012, p. 39). The ethnographic perspective asks *what's going on?* and is about cultivating an understanding of an activity through someone else's eyes (Street, 2012). Erickson (1985) expands the question *what's going on?* to include five questions to inform my observations in the field:

1. What social action is happening in the setting?

2. What do these actions mean to the participants in the moment they are happening?
3. How are participants “in the immediate setting consistently present to each other as environments for one another’s meaningful actions?” (p. 13)
4. How is the happening in the setting related to happenings in other systems inside and outside the setting?
5. How do the ways of the setting compare with other ways of organizing social life in other places and at other times? (pp. 12-13)

Erickson’s (1985) questions are appropriate for my research since I observe mindfulness practices in classrooms as well as how the practices manifest outside the classroom. These questions directly address my research focus on mindfulness as a socially situated practice.

### **Participant Observations**

Ethnographic research is highly mindful (S. Schechter, personal communication, May 9, 2016). It is slow, methodical, and requires awareness to *what is* at the field sites. Following Wolcott (1981) I employed four strategies to guide my participant observations:

1. taking broad-sweep observations
2. making nothing-in-particular observations
3. observing for paradoxes
4. observing problems

Glesne (2010) suggests that observing for paradoxes and problems allows the researcher to look more deeply into the group’s interactions. As I observed, I kept a journal to record these fieldnotes following conventions outlined by Glesne (2010) and a physical example of a sectioned notebook provided by Schechter (personal communication, May 9, 2016) with the columns labeled as per Wolcott’s (1981) four types noted above. I put the paradoxes and

problems column together, making way for the fourth and final column for reflections. The reflections column includes personal and theoretical notes, where I wrote at will, any feelings or issues or ideas I was having while observing the cultures on their own terms. The reflections column was necessary to separate my biases and thoughts from the observational accounts of people and places. At the end of each week, I also wrote what Heath and Street (2008) refer to as “conceptual memos” (p. 79). These memos include generic ideas from particular events and questions raised in the reflections column of my notebook. These memos and the paradoxes and problems section led to my realizing and recording the divergences across the cultures in Chile, Canada, and India. I write about the three main and notable divergences along with the three emergent themes from participants’ interviews in Chapter Five: Themes and Divergences in Three Countries.

### **Self-reflexivity**

Conducting research on the human experience is subtle and personal as “the researcher is at the center of the process” (Hart, 1996, p. 140). Lichtman (2013) posits it is through the researcher’s “eyes and ears that data are collected, information is gathered, settings are viewed, and realities are constructed” (p. 12). Going into my research sites, I am influenced by my experience, knowledge, skill, and background as a certified Kundalini yoga teacher and meditator. Since I am a proponent of yoga and meditation techniques and since, based on previous experience, the teachers are generally welcoming and friendly, I am cognizant of the possibility of over-rapport leading to bias (Glesne, 2010). I aim to make the familiar strange (Erickson, 1973; Glesne, 2010; Street, 2012). In other words, I aim to be aware of my assumptions and expectations in my field sites, my analysis, and the writing of the words here. I continually observe my assumptions, expectations, and biases through what Lichtman (2013)

refers to as bracketing or making explicit my own views. During the research, my bracketing techniques included self-reflection notes and conceptual memos.

Writing reflections and memos allowed a space for philosophical wanderings. Di Paolantonio (2014) suggests philosophy as a return to wonderment and possibilities in the strange and unexpected: “whereas we cannot teach the pathos of wonderment in the same manner we teach a skill, we can conserve a time and place where the self-evidence of our purposes and of what we think we know can return to us as something strange” (p. 14).

Throughout my research, I reflect on things I think I know as well as uncover the strange within myself or within my interactions with others.

Through reflexivity, I reveal some of my self-perceptions, methodological setbacks, mental states, and general critiques of the field and fieldwork (Heath & Street, 2008). These notes serve as a kind of release valve, allowing me to vent or write selfishly (see Appendix E: The Researcher Becomes the Researched). This is a welcome balance to the rigour of more neutral ethnographic fieldnotes. As Mills and Morton (2013) note, “we live in self-reflexive times. We can no longer pretend that our research personae are separate from the places and contexts we seek to understand” (p. 2). Inevitably, in ethnographic research, the researcher finds herself as subject (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The research, the data, and the researcher’s involvement may become messy: “Insights get appropriated, reworked and transformed: they go places and become part of the messy realities of social life” (Mills & Morton, 2013, p. 2). The messiness of research led me to semi-confidently posit and coin ‘spatial literacy’ as well as be totally uncertain about it! In Chapter Seven, I explore the possibilities of coining spatial literacy and my self-reflexive doubts and confidence, in particular about communication with ever-elusive language. The research shaped me and I shaped the research; we were and are intertwined.

Haskell, Linds, and Ippolito (2002) poignantly question this paradoxical and sometimes uncomfortable entwinement: “In what ways are the researcher, the research participants, and the research setting shaping each other? Are they distinct entities, or only possible in relation? How do we under-stand their mutual interaction? As research? As knowing? As experiencing?” (p. 2). I would add: as transforming? Romanyshyn and Anderson (2007) believe that “re-search is a journey of transformation. What the knower comes to know changes who the knower is” (p. 117). In keeping with a researcher’s journey of transformation, Lamb (2016) asserts that personal inner growth and self-discovery is integral to the research process. Inner growth and self-discovery can be messy and being a doctoral student and researcher is unexpectedly tiring. I am not sure why this is. Are inner growth experiences painful in the same as the physical, external growing pains of my youth? Is self-discovery a bit of a let down? Perhaps cognitive burnout, heavy bouts of inertia, and a lack of contact with peers during my research year with much travelling played their part in my feeling tired. Doing this work is a privilege, a burden, exciting, and a long haul, all rolled up into one. I feel pressure to ‘do’ something, figure something out, posit something amazing, or, at least, ‘get it right’. At times, I am quite certain that I am uncertain about almost everything. I am glad I scheduled mini-retreats during the research in order to try and release the pressures of performance, as both an ethnographic researcher and a budding scholar.

### **Mini-retreats**

Lamb (2016) is a proponent of his students taking field trips into solitude for 24-hours during the course of a semester. In keeping with this example and suggestion, I took mini-breaks, scheduled and impromptu, throughout my Original Proposed Dissertation Timeline (Appendix C). These were 1 or 2 days off to do nothing, talk to as few people as possible, and take walks. In

order to cultivate silence and have time and space away from participants as well as my own thinking, I implemented techniques of *vipassana* or insight meditation (Lamb, 2016; Miller, 2016). During some these mini-retreats I severely curtailed, but not totally abstained from, communications, conversations, and media. After an initial increase of incessant thoughts, decrease of thoughts occurs so that one can experience and examine the subtle ever-flowing elusive presence of deeper feelings and sensations (Bai et al, 2016). By adopting such quiet practice in heightened solitude, the “researcher can develop an awareness of their subjectivities...[and enables] a more refined understanding of individual participants’ embodied subjective awareness” (Bai et al., 2016, p. 83). Bai et al. (2016) do warn that such embodied experience can be ambiguous and messy for the researcher who may desire clear and distinctive patterns and theories (p. 85).

On some retreat days, I did not do the *vipassana* process well; I would still feel compelled to write notes and memos as well as watch YouTube videos and hook into the social world even though I was ‘on a retreat’. The mini-breaks were as messy as the fieldwork, but they were necessary. I noted that several times in my notes:

I enjoy silent practice, solitude, and talking myself to a coffee shop. I enjoy the quiet of my apartment upon my return from coffee [I live in community with 14 people in Toronto]. There is so much talking during the day [for the research], and socializing, so my quiet mini-breaks are keeping me a hold of me.

‘Keeping me a hold of me’ seems an odd statement. As if I would unravel or be completely consumed by the field if I did not take breaks. I felt as if I could build a life in any of my field sites. While in the research process, sometimes I was not sure where the *emic* (insider) perspective stopped. The research and my personal life blended together, especially since I am a



yoga and meditation teacher and practitioner. The many roles I played during research included: teacher, mindful practitioner, researcher, and the one also being researched (see Appendix E: *The Researcher Becomes the Researched*). These roles all seemed interchangeable and transient, as if I was none of them, or all of them, but never just one of them at a time.

### **Self-reflective Phenomenology and Interview Foci**

Following Seidman (2013), my interviewing focus was on the participants' lived experience, which makes up the phenomena. My effort is to access the participants' lived experience through the words they choose in response to the questions I craft beforehand or in the moment of interviewing. Seidman (2013) asserts, "there is no recipe for the effective question. The truly effective question flows from an interviewer's concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward" (p. 95). This was a relief and situated this researcher in the *here and now* of the work as a process. When researching within interpretivist assumptions, the knowledge derived from the interview is a co-constructed evolving process between the participant and the researcher (Lichtman, 2013). My interview questions, in Appendix A, served as a guide to semi-structured interviews. I began with these questions in mind but allowed the interviews to be co-constructed with each participant.

I organized my interview questions with three sets of foci: a) focused life history; b) the details of experience; and c) reflection on meaning (Seidman, 2013, pp. 20-23). I use pseudonyms for all interview participants and the community members I write about in this dissertation. The last set of question in Appendix A are marked in particular for my key informant, Sonia, and her daughter, Grace, to get a sense of how success of mindfulness-based programs may be determined. Grace is a young entrepreneur and owns a yoga studio in Toronto and Sonia is driven to promote her yoga and meditation-based programs internationally. For my

semi-structured interviews, I had a total of 13 participants. I did one interview with each participant, which lasted from 45 to 90 minutes long. Lichtman (2006) explains that interviewing requires rapport and trust with participants, an understanding about why I am there and why they have been selected, as well as how I will use what I learn from them. An ethnographic approach to research allowed me to go slowly and build relationships with participants in each country prior to the interviews taking place.

### **Participants: An Overview**

**Recruiting participants.** It is clear to me as I navigated steps of entry to an ethnographic project that “micro level networks matter” (Simmons, 2016). Before officially recruiting participants, I obtained approval from York University’s Office of Research Ethics and Human Participants Research Committee. See Appendix B for the participant consent form. Then, I embarked on gaining entry to research sites and garnering willing participants. As the research year unfolded, I continued a careful building of relationships with participants in each research site. This placed me at the epicenter of ever-evolving micro networks within their cultures. If these moves and negotiations are not done with care and mindfulness, there is the potential for what Glesne (2010) terms over-rapport. I was cognizant of keeping relationships with yoga teachers congenial and professional – attempting to strike a balance between detachment and *going native* (Kanuha, 2000; Malinowski, 1922). In order to gain entry to classes of Kundalini yoga teachers, I began with my key Canadian informant, Sonia.

Sonia is a Kundalini yoga teacher-trainer and founder of the yoga and meditation-based wellness program for those with self-identified addictive behaviours. Sonia and I have been part of the same yoga and meditation community in Toronto for six years. In January 2017, she hired me as a research intern as part of a scholarship in conjunction with the Knowledge Mobilization

Unit and Faculty of Graduate Studies at York University. I finished my work as an intern with her in August 2017. Sonia agreed that I be a participant observer in her programs for my dissertation research beginning in October 2017 in Santiago, Chile and November in Toronto, Canada. Upon her suggestion, I contacted another Kundalini yoga and meditation teacher she knew well in Santiago. Pablo was willing to be my first participant in Chile, so I booked a flight to begin my research. After Chile I had planned to be in China, but I had a family emergency after a week in China. I explain in the following section my decision to reroute my research to India. I recruited participants organically through introductions that began in Canada and led me to Chile and India. In sum, I engaged in fieldwork in Chile, Canada, (almost China), and India with a total of 13 participants (see Appendix D: Demographics of All Participants in the Study) over my research year from September 2017 to May 2018.

**Santiago, Chile.** For 6 weeks in September and October 2017, I observed and interviewed three teachers of Kundalini-yoga and meditation programs in Santiago. They taught in Spanish, their home language, but spoke with me in English. I observed their classes at five sites: two yoga studios, two drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, and one domestic abuse shelter for women. I also observed two of these participants take my Canadian key informant's, Sonia's, 10-day course in October. Sonia's course was taught in English and translated into Spanish. See table below for demographic information. I had planned for my participants to have six or more years of experience as a practitioner and teacher of mindfulness-based practices.

Table 1: Participants in Santiago, Chile

Pseudonym	Age & Gender	Birthplace & Current Residency	Occupation	Years teaching yoga / meditation
Pablo	34 Male	Santiago Santiago	Director of not-for-profit foundation, yoga teacher	7
Carla	52 Female	Santiago Santiago	Photographer, tour guide, yoga teacher	1 year yoga; 12 years meditation
Helen	62 Female	Kingsville, Texas Santiago	Yoga teacher	40

Even though Carla has the least amount of teaching experience and was in the Kundalini yoga teacher training during the time of my research, she was my key informant in Santiago, and had 12 years of personal meditation experience. Carla was my “gatekeeper” (Sangasubana, 2011, p. 3) in Santiago, who granted me access to the yoga studio and Kundalini teaching community there. She spoke excellent English and often served as my translator and introduced me to the teachers’ community in the yoga studio where I started my research. Carla also introduced me to Helen, the most experienced Kundalini teacher in Santiago.

**Toronto, Canada.** In November 2017 for a 10-day program as well as in January and February 2018 for six weeks, I conducted fieldwork in Toronto. In January and February, I observed and participated in classes of four teachers of Kundalini-yoga and meditation at one location, an urban yoga studio. Grace is the yoga studio owner and the daughter of my key informant, Sonia. I knew these participants prior to doing research. I consider them my Kundalini teaching colleagues.

Table 2: Participants in Toronto, Canada

Pseudonym	Age & Gender	Birthplace & Current Residency	Occupation	Years teaching yoga / meditation
Deena	67 Female	Poland Toronto	Retired business analyst, yoga teacher	17
Grace	30 Female	Toronto Toronto	Yoga studio owner, yoga teacher	13
Neil	62 Male	Toronto Toronto	Musical event producer, yoga teacher	19
Sonia	61 Female	Toronto Owen Sound	Naturopathic doctor, yoga teacher trainer	41
Gabe	62 Male	Montreal Calgary	Retired lawyer, yoga and kung-fu teacher	25

The fifth Canadian participant is Gabe. He was one of my original yoga teachers in Calgary when I began yoga after surgery in 2006. I have been going to his Restorative and Yin yoga classes for 12 years. During my early days taking his yoga classes, while he was teaching, he

would mention doing yoga *for those around you*, not only for yourself. At first, I did not understand that I did yoga for others because I was the one stretching, sweating, and dealing with my agitated mind. I became curious about Gabe's message during his classes over the years. And, the message he delivered ultimately became my dissertation topic to query how mindfulness-based practices, such as yoga and meditation, are a social practice and perhaps socially situated literacy. He posits yoga is both personal and social, so I found it apropos to interview him as my fifth Canadian participant.

**An unexpected turn.** I had planned to be in Shanghai for fieldwork from the end of November 2017. In Chile, Pablo had introduced me, via social media, to a participant in Shanghai. She was my first interviewee and she introduced me to two others within the week I was there. It seemed unexpectedly easy to get three interviews in the first week. Perhaps, too easy. I accidentally deleted one interview from my device. I panicked about lost data and made a trip to the computer store to see if they could help me retrieve the data. They could not and I wondered how to get the data again. Should I re-interview the same participant? The next day, my worries about data morphed into more personal worry. Back in Calgary, Canada, my mother had fallen and fractured the T-12 vertebra in her lower spine. I made arrangements to return to Canada on the same day I received the news. Instead of research in China as I had originally planned, this was an unexpected opportunity to take care of my mother for five weeks. This became time to observe my own mindfulness-based practices and how they were a social practice in my micro-level social network. During this time of being my mother's caregiver and health advocate, I kept self-reflective notes on my mindfulness-based practices, behaviours and interactions with my mother and friends, as well as with health care professionals in myriad settings. Again, research, like life, proves to be messy with unexpected turns (Appendix E).

While I was taking care of my mother, I got an invitation to join a Canadian-Indian Kundalini teacher, Jyoti, on a 10-day *yatra* (spiritual quest) in India that involved daily Kundalini yoga and meditation. I rerouted my research and went to India instead of returning to China. I did not include any interview data from my week in China in this dissertation, but have included a brief selection, also in Appendix E, of self-reflective notes regarding my time in China.

**Various places, India.** After fulfilling my course directorship and teaching a six-week compressed undergraduate course at York University in January and February 2018, I flew to Delhi for my final international research site. I spent six weeks in India in March and April 2018. For the first 10 days, I was with a group of 14 Canadians, which was led by my first India participant, Jyoti, who is Indian-Canadian. After spending the first two days in the holy city of Amritsar and the Golden Temple, we travelled to Dharamsala - home to the Dalai Lama. An unexpected research surprise happened. We were able to attend the Dalai Lama's annual dialogues: *Mind & Life XXXIII: Reimagining Human Flourishing*. The Dalai Lama usually holds these annual by-invitation discussions with select scholars and educators at his home. This year, he invited too many people and the dialogues were relocated to the His temple. Daily, the Dalai Lama greeted us, along with about 40 public visitors each day, as he walked through the gates to the temple to attend the dialogues. Since the event was not advertised at the temple, the monks at the temple rushed to set up and accommodate us and other public visitors. Monks set up big screen televisions on the main floor, so that we could watch the discussions happening on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor with the Dalai Lama and his invited guests. This was an unexpected gift for my fieldwork. As well, our Canadian group was granted a private audience with one of the Dalai Lama's oracles for 45 minutes to ask any questions. Another research surprise - to sit and listen to an

oracle. I asked her part of my research question. I include data from my time at the dialogues with the Dalai Lama as well as what the oracle had to say in Chapter Seven of this dissertation.

After our time at the temple with the Dalai Lama, our *yatra* was over. The Canadian group dispersed, and I was on my own. During the *yatra*, Jyoti introduced me to other yoga teachers in India including one Kundalini yogi, two Hatha yogis, and Yogi Bhajan's long-term assistant and nurse, Sybil. Yogi Bhajan (1929-2004) was the yogi who introduced Kundalini yoga in North America in the late 1960s. Three years ago, Sybil became the administrator of Yogi Bhajan's estate property in India, which now functions as a yoga retreat facility. She has spent 40 years in the Kundalini tradition. I had opportunity to stay with her for four days. I have included some of her interview data in this dissertation.

Table 3: Participants in Varying Locations, India

Pseudonym	Age & Gender	Birthplace & Current Residency	Occupation	Years teaching yoga / meditation
Jyoti	40 Female	Calgary, Canada Vancouver, Canada	Administrator in plumbing/heating company, yoga teacher, India retreat guide	3
Karl	45 Male	Berlin, Germany Amritsar, India	Director of Resident Life, Miri Piri (International School)	22
Vama	38 Male	Deradun, India Rishikesh, India	Principal of yoga school, yoga teacher, ashram director and owner	17
Vasudev	32 Male	Small village, India Rishikesh, India	Yoga business owner, personalized retreats and yoga guide	7

I had originally planned to interview nine teachers, three in each country plus my key informant, Sonia, for a total of 10 participants. As the fieldwork unfolded, I had opportunity to add an extra interview in Toronto with the studio owner, Grace; my original yoga teacher in Calgary, Gabe; as well as Yogi Bhajan's long-term assistant and nurse in Anandpur Sahib, Sybil. These three extra interviewees added interesting perspectives including Grace's financial stress

in moving her yoga studio to a new location, Gabe's assertion that one does yoga for others, and Sybil's long term service with the yogi responsible for introducing Kundalini yoga to North America. Not having all my participants arranged prior to beginning my research in September 2017 allowed me to meet unexpected, interesting, and very relevant participants along the way.

**Rationale for international research sites.** My choice of fieldwork sites was guided by three factors. Firstly, my research began in two selected cities, Santiago and Toronto, where my key informant, Sonia, was teaching 10-day Kundalini yoga and meditation-based health and wellness programs in each city. She introduced me to another Kundalini and yoga meditation teacher in Santiago, Pablo, whose focus was also a wellness and recovery program, and who taught in community centres around Santiago, not just in the main yoga studio. From that introduction, the rest of my participants and the other sites of my research unfolded organically with introductions in China, my mother's injury in Calgary, Canada, and an invitation to India.

From the outset of my project, I had wanted to include cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives and that was done within three countries, Chile, Canada, and India. The second factor that guided my choice of research sites was the ability to observe educators who teach in English as well as non-English contexts. The teachers in Santiago and some teachers in India instructed in their home languages. Not understanding the languages in the participants' social networks enabled me to take fieldnotes without comprehension or logical awareness of what is being said. In this way, I was able to better disengage from language and meaning and engage in mindful awareness to *what is* in the spaces in between language. This *is-ness* without an understanding of the languages allowed me heightened awareness and access to the multimodal semiotic resources of gestures, kinesthetic experiences, soundscapes (other than language) and visuals – I was able to observe the spaces in between the people.



Thirdly, the three international sites allowed me to observe convergences and divergences regarding yoga as a socially situated practice across cultures in Canada, Chile, and India. The divergences became fascinating topics of how mindfulness-based practices are social but differing in Chile, Canada, and India. The divergences are an integral part of the findings. In Chapter Five, I weave emergent themes with divergences from the interview data.

## **Data Analysis**

**Approaching the data.** Prior to fieldwork, I had decided not to use a software program such as NVivo and rather combed through the interview data by hand, eye, and highlighter. There are polarized opinions on using software for coding (Crowley, Harre, & Tagg, 2002; Duff & Seror, 2005). Because the software is time-consuming to learn, for smaller research projects like mine with 13 participant interviews to code and analyze, it was more time-efficient to data-comb by hand, choosing “paper, pen and highlighter” over “screen, mouse, and keyboard” (Duff & Seror, 2005, p. 325). A drawback to the computer coding is being too close to the data, what Richards (2002) calls coding fetishism, rendering the researcher lost in hard data, where coding becomes an end in itself. Richards (2002) posits that, with such fetishism, the researcher is unable to move the data to a conceptual level. Instead of risking such technologically-inspired fetishism, I repeatedly read through my observational notes “page by page which provides the researcher with a more holistic conception of the content of the fieldnotes than that which would be possible with the more partial view provided by computerized data retrieval” (Erickson, 1985, p. 107). I printed all the interview data and hung it on my office walls in order to see all the participants’ data at once. The ‘holistic conception of the content’ is appropriate and in keeping with my framework of interbeing as well as drawing from spiritual research paradigms, practices and values. “The human brain (immersed in context for time and more time) beats any coding

system” (S. Heath, personal communication, May 21, 2017). Heath adds, “Only for very specific kinds of data analysis will a coding system give you the richness of interpretation possible from the human brain!” (personal communication, May 21, 2017). Also, I wish to pay homage to old-school ethnographers who have analyzed data without the aid of computer software in days gone by. In this way, I follow traditional ethnographies and the hand-eye approach to data analysis, prior to the onset of computer programs.

**Working with the data.** In order to organize and analyze the interview data, I employed the following strategies to approach thematic data analysis as recommended by Roper and Shapira (2000):

1. Code for descriptive labels or particular descriptions;
2. Sort for patterns;
3. Identify outliers or events that are not in keeping with the rest of the findings;
4. Generalize theories;
5. Continue memoing with reflections through the analysis phase of the research. This helps keep track of biases and assumptions.

I employed thematic analysis of data. As ethnography yields much data via observational fieldnotes, self-reflexive notes, and interviews, there must be rigour in organizing and sorting (Sangasubana, 2011). In order to move from data to meaningful concepts, I used what Lichtman (2006) refers to as the “three Cs of analysis”, which move from coding to categorizing and finally to concepts (pp. 166-170). On the printouts in my office, I colour-coded particular words and phrases and three binary themes emerged: 1) doing/being in a mindfulness-based practice; 2) the practices as inward/outward or individual/social, as well as; 3) the role of sound/silence. I categorized the prevalent words and phrases from my participants into these three categories

with a view to querying my research question regarding mindfulness-based practices as social practices. These emergent themes are explored in Chapter Five.

### **Limitations: Time, Costs, Risks**

Prior to fieldwork, I projected a dissertation timeline (Appendix C). The projected time for research in the field was eight months. I took a little over nine months due to my mother's injury half way through my research. Glesne (2010) warns timing may be extended allowing for delays and unforeseen events. Life and delays occur and unexpected surprises can make for more interesting research and extended timelines. I spent six weeks in Santiago and seven weeks in Toronto with my participants and a similar group of people or community of practice during those weeks. Because the hub of the practices was an urban yoga studio, a 'home' studio in Santiago and Toronto, I got to know the community in those studios. In India, there was no such studio hub. The participants in India are not a cohesive group in one community. This limited the amount of time I spent with each of the teachers. In India, I spent the first 10 days with Jyoti, the leader of the *yatra* I joined. Then I spent a week with Karl and Sybil in two differing locations. Finally, I spent three weeks in Rishikesh with Vama and Vasudev. At the end of my research time, Vama asked me to join his yoga teacher training group for another month, but at that time, I was out of time and money for the dissertation research year.

As Glesne (2010) points out, practical limitations to dissertation writing include time and cost. I spent approximately six weeks in each site. I could have spent more time in each country in order to immerse myself deeper into each culture of teachers and hang out with the outliers in each culture. The outliers, like Helen in Chile and Yogi Cash in India, were particularly interesting. I have included some of their stories here including Helen's double homicide and Yogi Cash's attempt to interrupt the business of yoga in Los Angeles. More time with these

people would have enriched the data. Because my research included international urban field sites in Chile and India, and almost China, the costs of travel and accommodations were burdensome to stay longer in each location. The local research in Toronto was more cost effective. Due to these limitations, I describe this work as a qualitative ethnographic study rather than an ethnography, which seems to require longer timelines in the cultures and field sites.

Since some of my fieldwork was overseas, I inquired regarding travel risks and obtained appropriate visas. In each country, Chile, China, and India, there were warnings on the Government of Canada (GC) website [www.travel.gc.ca](http://www.travel.gc.ca). In Chile, the warning was mild and advised taking “normal security precautions”. In China, “a high degree of caution” was advised due to “isolated acts of violence, including bombings and protests.” The warning for India was to “exercise a high degree of caution in India due to a continuing threat of terrorist attacks throughout the country at all times.” I experienced no problems as a solo female traveller in each country. The Safety and Security sections on the website for each country listed pick pocketing in Chile and India and petty crimes involving taxis in Chile. I experienced no physical pick pocketing or bag snatching. In Chile, I did have to check the amount of change I was given at the bus ticket wickets and coffee shops. I suppose that could be considered a non-physical form of pick pocketing as I was given less change after purchasing my bus ticket and my cappuccino. My communication at these times was limited due to my not knowing the language, so I used gestures to convey I needed more change, pointing to the numbers on the register or paper and pointing to the coins left in the dish or on the tray. These are small “risks”, but illuminate that risks may increase if the researcher is not aware of the environment she is in and the behaviours or actions that are happening on a moment-to-moment basis in a new space and place. I visited rehab centres and domestic abuse shelters in the outskirts of Santiago with my participants, so

was always with someone in outlying areas. In China, the taxi drivers sometimes looked as if they really did not want to take me anywhere. Not sure if taking me in their cab was a language hardship for them or if I looked unsavory. In India, I took local *tuk-tuks* (auto rickshaws) and hired private cars for longer journeys rather than buses and trains. The *tuk-tuks* were more expensive when I travelled alone than with an Indian participant. My choice not to take buses and trains may have sheltered me from experiencing petty crimes or issues of physical safety as a solo woman traveller. One of my ‘private’ drivers in India picked up two of his friends at a highway tollgate, though. My driver drove his friends about 20 minutes to the next tollgate and they exited the vehicle. Between my point A and point B destination, I guess his friends hopped a ride. I imagined how that ride could have gone awry, but it was fine with no problem except my momentary worry. Ultimately, despite the Canadian government travel website’s warnings, I felt safe during my research year in all sites of fieldwork including Chile, China, and India.

**Beyond limitations.** There are limitations or roadblocks or bumps in the road in research as I learned. There are also synchronicities and unexpected happenings that open up possibilities. I am not sure whether to call these happenings good luck or the Universe doing its thing. As it happened, my Canadian key informant suggested I go to Santiago, Chile to meet a particular teacher there. I mentioned this to a colleague at York University who is from Chile and sent her the address of the yoga studio in Santiago where I would begin my fieldwork. I asked her if she knew about that particular area. She and her husband responded by inviting me over for dinner in their Toronto home and during appetizers, she opened up Googlemaps to show me where their apartment was located in Santiago. On her phone, she scrolled a bit to show me the location of their apartment. It was four blocks away from the studio. Then they kindly offered me to stay in their apartment, as they would not be there when I was conducting research. This was a moment

of ‘being on the right track’, beautiful synchronicity, or very kind friends. It seemed a moment of right time, right place, right people. I felt supported by the ‘coincidence’ and generosity of my Chilean-Canadian colleague-friends.

Fieldnotes: *On my first day in Santiago, I walk the four easy blocks to the yoga studio to embark on my research. At the welcome desk, I pay for my month membership for unlimited classes at the studio and do my first Kundalini yoga class there. It is taught in Spanish. I don’t speak Spanish, but understand the cues well enough due to my years of Kundalini yoga practice. After class, I stay to talk to the teacher. He does not speak English but he happens to be speaking with a woman who speaks excellent English due to her job as a tour guide and photographer in Patagonia, southern Chile. She is also training to become a Kundalini yoga teacher. She becomes a participant in my research and my gatekeeper to the Santiago Kundalini teaching and socializing community. On day one, I meet a participant!*

I am not sure if these occurrences are coincidence or good luck. They are examples of unexpected synchronous surprises that can occur in the research process, which move researchers beyond limitations and expectations.

## **Chapter Five: Themes and Divergences in Three Countries**

This chapter reveals three main emergent themes in the interview data. The following three thematic binaries relating to my key question of mindfulness-based practices as a socially situated literacy emerged from the data: 1) doing/being in a mindfulness-based practice; 2) the practices as inward/outward or individual/social; and, 3) the role of sound/silence. I write them here with a forward slash to denote the closeness of the concept and its binary and their inextricable inseparability, which can be paradoxical. For example, there is a common idea or understanding of silence having a sound; the sound of silence is sung about by Simon and Garfunkel. Like the possibility of silence being noisy or deafening, the participants in my study talked about the misnomer of practicing meditation and yoga when one does not have to practice, one has to just *be*. Also, the common perception that meditation and yoga is done for the benefit of the self is paradoxical in that the practice, the *doing* or the *being*, may be entirely social and done for all others. In the following chapter, I present these paradoxical binaries from the cross-cultural interview data. I have interspersed the three themes with cultural divergences because the divergences are linked to the themes. As an ethnographic account, the divergences and themes make more sense being written and read together rather than in different chapters separating them. The first divergence regarding wearing turbans was apparent in my first research site in Chile. I begin with this visual, cultural divergence and alternate between divergences and emergent themes. The divergence/theme format also speaks to the inseparability of the concepts as they unfold in the following sections, as follows:

- Divergence One: To Wear or Not to Wear a Turban
- Emergent Theme One: Doing/Being
- Divergence Two: Yoga Mat or No Yoga Mat
- Emergent Theme Two: Inward/Outward or Individual/Social
- Divergence Three: The Business of Mindfulness-based Practices
- Emergent Theme Three: Sound/Silence

Prior to writing of divergences and emergent themes, this chapter begins by locating the reader with an ethnographic description of a fieldwork space – a yoga studio.

### **Beginning at a Kundalini Yoga Studio: An Ethnographic Description**

Fieldnotes from a yoga studio: *Many yoga studios are on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of buildings, with stairs, but no elevator. Walking up the stairs, I notice the walls are white, decorated with pictures of yogis or lamps in the shape of stars with the bulb in the center of the star, hanging down from the higher-than-normal ceiling. The lobby seating area includes benches with richly-coloured cushions to sit on – deep reds, bright blues and pinks pop out against the white walls. There is a filtered water machine for students and staff to fill up their water bottles. There are fresh flowers and a small potted plant on the desk area, and a person to greet students and sign them into their yoga or meditation class. There are no gendered change rooms. The gender-free washrooms suffice when students need to change their clothes. Students generally wear their yoga gear to the studio. The sound is silence or Gurmukhi mantra on a speaker system at low volume. The cost for a drop-in class is, on average, 20 dollars. The class usually includes a vast majority of women, over 80% of the class attendees. The women range from their early 20s to mid-50s and the few men that attend range from 30s to 50s. I suspect they are yoga and meditation students that can pay the fees to attend, take the time to go to a class, and walk up the stairs to get into the studio. I sign up with the woman at the desk and go up another flight of stairs to the main studio space. I sit near the two-foot tall wooden Buddha statue on the right side of the room. The statue is next to a picture of Yogi Bhañan and a four-foot potted plant. I wonder if there is a Buddha statue in every Kundalini yoga studio around the world.*

*As the teacher comes into the yoga room, she greets students with a quick wave of the hand and a nod of the head. She goes to the front of the class to prepare the teaching area. She*



*attaches the auxiliary cable from the stereo system into her phone and selects Gurmukhi mantra to play while she gets settled. She pulls out her notes that she needs in order to teach the kriya (set of exercises or postures). She is wearing black tights under loose fitting white cotton pants and a white long-sleeve top with a modest rounded neckline. It is chilly outside, so the tights underneath are a seasonal necessity. She is in her mid-20s. She is wearing a white turban. She removes her knee-length beige sweater-jacket. She puts her bag and jacket along the left sidewall of the studio. Then she comes back to the front of the class, sits cross-legged and closes her eyes. She looks like a calm, meditating, breathing Buddha for the last few minutes before the class begins. There are potted orchids on her right and a big potted plant on her left. Her yoga mat is covered with a cream-coloured blanket. She sits on a small round brown meditation cushion. She opens her eyes, looks at her iPhone, and then looks at the class. She says Sat Nam, which is a greeting for Kundalini yogis. Sat Nam means: I see the Truth in you, Truth as my name, or Truth identified. For tonight's class, there are nine students plus myself in the room, a total of eight women and two men.*

This is a Kundalini yoga studio in Santiago, Chile or Toronto, Canada. Both yoga studio sites could be interchangeable, except for a noted divergence - the teacher's turban.

### **Divergence One: To Wear or Not to Wear a Turban**

In Canada, many Kundalini yogis wear a white handkerchief, white headband, or a colourful scarf wrapped around the head. Out of 15 teachers on the Toronto Kundalini studio's website, three wear a white turban. In Chile, the teachers are required to wear a turban; all teachers listed on the Chilean studio's website are wearing a white turban. It's not a Kundalini yogic rule, rather a Sikh tradition. Kundalini teachers in Canada are encouraged to try some type of head covering. The teachers in Chile are required. All Kundalini teachers I met in Chile wore

a turban while taking a class or teaching. Some of them adopt it as part of their lifestyle even though they are not Sikh. In the Sikh tradition, after taking vows, some Sikh men wear a turban. Many Sikh women do not, unless they are a part of the Kundalini yoga community. One Canadian Kundalini studio's website offers *Turban 101* information and how-to-tie instructional videos. The rationale of wearing a turban for yoga is as follows: "Covering the head provides a sense of containment and focus while practicing yoga or while doing work that requires clarity of thought. It literally helps "keep your head together"" (Retrieved from <http://www.studiosatnam.ca/turban-101/>). There is no mention of Sikhism on the website.

There was a story circulating in the Toronto Kundalini yoga community of a prominent Kundalini yoga teacher-trainer from Los Angeles who was going to host a teacher training in Toronto and she required all trainees to wear a turban from the first day. Because of this requirement, many who had signed up dropped out and the training was cancelled. When I took my Kundalini teacher training course in 2013-2014, we were encouraged to try a head covering of our choosing and to note any differences in feeling or experience while doing yoga and meditation with or without the head covering. The teacher-trainers remarked that a tight head covering such as a turban, which wraps the frontal and occipital lobes, holds the small bones in the skull tightly while one is doing vibrational chanting and vigorous repetitive exercise. I tried different head coverings and in my experience I did not feel a vibrational benefit in wearing one. The head covering I chose kept the hair out of my face while I was practicing yoga. When I taught in a Toronto studio, I wore a headband as a head covering, as it was part of the uniform of yoga teachers at the studio.

When I am in Chile doing my fieldwork in a 10-day yoga course for recovery beyond addictions, 11 out of the 12 teacher-participants wear a white turban on the first day of the 10-day course. The one outlier who wears a pink headscarf is a beautician and wig designer.



Photo 1: Day one of Sonia's course near Santiago, Chile – All Turbans

I wear my usual headband to the 10-day course, led by my Canadian key informant, Sonia. I am the only one not wearing a turban. In the carpool ride after the first day of the course, one woman sitting in the front passenger seat turns around to inquire, “Stacey, you are a Kundalini yoga teacher, right?” “Yes,” I reply. “You took Kundalini teacher training in Canada, right?” “Yes,” I reply. “Then why you don’t wear a turban?” On this day, I feel less like a researcher and more like a rogue addition to the Chilean Kundalini community - an outsider trying, but failing, to do insider work. Instead of being a part of the Chilean Kundalini yoga teacher community by adopting the turban, I adhere to my Canadian ways and wear my usual headband. I explain to the three curious Chilean Kundalini yoga teachers in the carpool that turbans are an option for Kundalini teachers in Canada. An orthodox turban-wearer in the car remarks, “I have seen videos and teachings of the turban for providing a path to higher consciousness easier, faster.” For her,

it is a way to speed up or elevate her consciousness or enlightenment experience and, I suppose, the rest of us are slower and have less chance to be enlightened. I hold my tongue in the car not to argue my case for *not* wearing a turban. For the next nine days together for the course, two of the female Chilean teachers wear headbands instead of their turban and two male teachers let down their long hair and ditch the head covering all together. On the second day, Sonia comments to the group, “What happened to your turbans? Decided to take the day off?”



Photo 2: Day two of Sonia’s course near Santiago, Chile – Fewer Turbans

Sonia remarks to her trainees that she is one of the early Kundalini yogis in Toronto: “In 1976, I started teaching Kundalini yoga when I was 19 years old. I was a pioneer - one of the first yogis in Toronto to wear a turban.” She not only wears a turban for teaching, but daily as she has adopted the Sikh Dharma (way of living).

After the fourth day of the course, in heavy traffic in Santiago, one of my participants, Carla, unrolls the window and pops her turbaned head out in order to signal to the driver in the next lane that our car wants into the other lane. The other driver allows our car in and the Carla remarks, “The turban helped me do it. It works good in traffic.” By the final day of the course,

three teachers are no longer wearing their turbans. In my fieldnotes I wonder, *Am I a non-turban wearing influence? Have I started a head cover revolution or ripple in the fabric of Chilean Kundalini yoga tradition?* In my last 10 days in Chile, I realize my dissertation could be on the topic of the turban and the blurred lines of Sikhism and Kundalini yoga as well as the differences between Chilean orthodox Kundalini yoga teacher training versus head cover autonomy in Canada. The project could be called: *To Turban or Not to Turban*. I was a participant observer in Sonia's same 10-day program in November 2017 in Toronto. Out of 23 attendees, four wear turbans and by the end of the 10 days, one more begins wearing a turban.



Photo 3: Sonia's course in Toronto, Canada – A Few Turbans

Turban wearing, or not, is a fascinating divergence between the sites, cultural contexts, and individuals. Wearing a turban was not a topic in my interview list of questions, but one participant, Karl, from Germany, but living in India for 20 years, comments about what the turban signifies for him:

It took me almost 15 years [to get comfortable] with the beard and the turban. You know they are all tools. They are all symbols, things which help me on this path [of Kundalini

yoga and Sikh Dharma] but I could certainly live without my beard, turban, kara [Sikh metal bracelet], big Sikh identity because on a higher level we are all light. Using these Sikh tools ... is just one way, one approach. ... I really do enjoy having my beard [devoted Sikhs do not cut their hair as it is considered an extension of one's energy] and wearing my turban, not for how it looks, but for what it gives to me and for how I feel. And when I don't have it on, I feel like I don't have my pants on and that's okay too...hahaha.

Karl's approach to the turban is more neutral than the majority of the Chilean Kundalini yoga teachers I met, many of whom wear it daily for their work as teachers in the studio and in their private lives. One of my participants, Helen, who has lived and taught in Chile for 40 years, recently changed from wearing a turban to a simple headband. Helen is the original Kundalini yogi in Chile. Yogi Bhajan, the yogi responsible for bringing Kundalini yoga to the west, sent Helen to Chile in 1979. She gave up her turban a few years ago after a financial dispute with the administrative body of Kundalini yoga in the United States. Yogi Bhajan died in 2004 and now the governing body of teacher trainers is run by a handful of Yogi Bhajan's disciples who won bitter court cases after Yogi Bhajan's death. Upon meeting Helen at a café, she tells me the story of the Kundalini association wanting more royalties from her teacher training programs. She says she was offended by the association's demand that she pay more royalties, she refused to pay an increase, and stopped paying her royalties altogether. She says she was tired of "kissing ass" to an "unethical" association. Helen recounts the story of the association's reaction to her not paying royalties; they said to her: "You can leave if you don't want to pay. And, if you leave us, we have resources, and we will utilize them to break you and destroy you." Helen, a plucky American from Texas, says she responded to the association, "Give it your best shot." After the

upset with the association, she removed her turban and now leads Kundalini teacher trainings under a different head covering and different organizational and governing body for yoga teachers. The turban, the symbol of being in the group, was removed when Helen felt disowned by the group. Socially, the turban had made her recognizable as part of the Kundalini tribe in Chile. Now, she is less recognizable without the turban, but people in the community of practice definitely know her name. She is well known in the Chilean Kundalini community for her fight with the association over royalties as well as killing two men in 2017 (see Chapter Five in this dissertation, *A double homicide*).

A new teacher but seasoned meditator, Carla, wears the turban only when she is taking a yoga class or attending her teacher-training course in Santiago. Carla comments how she used to worry about wearing the turban and being mistaken for “one of those Muslim guys.” She recalls going into a pharmacy near the yoga studio and the clerk remarked, “Oh, you are one of those yogis! Do you go to the yoga studio around the corner? I want to go soon.” Carla says she received a discount that day from the enthusiastic pharmacy clerk. Carla continues, “Now, I like wearing [the turban]. It feels supportive, especially for my meditations.” Carla is not wearing the turban when she tells me the story. She has her curly greying hair tied back in a ponytail. She goes into the back room to get more paraffin to fill the heater in her living room. She is not wearing the white garb of the Kundalini yoga teacher. It is her day off. She is wearing khaki pants, a navy blue sweater, and a bright blue down-filled vest on top. The vest matches her blue glasses.

Comparative observations from fieldsites: In the Canadian Kundalini yoga studio, wearing the turban is optional for the Kundalini yoga teachers; a head covering suffices. In the Chilean Kundalini studio, it is non-negotiable for teachers - a turban is a must. In India, the



Kundalini yogis I meet, if they are in the lineage of Yogi Bhajan, are generally orthodox in their practice of turban wearing. The Indian Hatha yogis I meet have no head coverings.



Photo 4: Vama's course in Rishikesh, India – No Turbans

In India, I meet Kundalini yogis in an international school founded by Yogi Bhajan; they are all wearing tightly tied white turbans and do so daily as part of their lifestyle as yogis following Sikh Dharma (the Sikh path or way of life). The yogi from Canada that leads our group in India, Jyoti, is a Sikh and Kundalini yoga teacher, but she does not wear a turban. She wears a headband when she teaches yoga or meditation while we are in India together. Students wear a headband or a shawl to cover their head.





Photo 5: Jyoti's class on a rooftop in Amritsar, India – Varying Head-coverings

The verdict is out on wearing a turban. It is a complex topic or, as Karl suggests, a simple symbol or tool that may help one's lifestyle and practice. Yoga means union or yoke. The yoking or union-ing that is yoga is a feeling or experience of oneness with God or the Universe or the Divine. Some say the turban is essential to do the yoking. Some say the turban has nothing to do with the infinite self and is not necessary to experience union with the Divine. The turban does, however, provide the wearer with a symbol of how she would like to be perceived within each context while the finite self exists and is in social engagement and living with others.

### **Emergent Theme One: Doing/Being**

Wrapping a turban is a *doing*, an action. A turban is generally a five to seven-foot long cloth and wrapping it successfully is a practiced skill, so that it stays wrapped and on the head. Sybil, who I meet at Yogi Bhajan's estate property in India, takes time to show me how to properly wrap a turban. On the first day I meet her, she has a lime-green turban on. It is fashionable, piled high on her head, with a high v-point on the forehead. She wears large square black-rimmed modern eye glasses. On my third day with her, she wraps a turban on my head.

The long cloth is light orange cotton with gold thread running length wise through it. She says she likes the turban on me: “You look younger. It gives you a face-lift. You look 10 years younger.” Sybil’s commentary almost makes me want to continue wearing a turban. If I wrap (*do*) the turban around my head, I will look (seemingly *be*) younger. Do/be. The first theme through the interview data is of doing/being.

All of the 13 participants talked about ‘doing’ a practice like yoga or meditation, but then *not* having to do anything at all; rather allowing ones self to *be* and let God or the Universe flow through them. Vama, a yoga and meditation teacher in Rishikesh, India, talks about the paradoxical passivity of doing a practice:

You can take care of a lot of your issues by just being silent. Sit and watch. Just be passive. For a half hour, if you have time, just passively sit back and be silent. Don’t think anything. Don’t try and create anything here. Just let it be a stream, like water, that is going without your control, without your interference.

In Vama’s sentiment there is a *sitting back*, which is a doing in order to allow a being, without interference. It takes a doing to experience the being. This is a causal relationship – or a paradoxical one. For many of the teachers I interview, there is an awareness and commentary of both doing/being as simultaneous and intertwined.

Sybil comments that the *sadhana* (daily spiritual practice) is a doing by the yogi, but the *sadhana* is actually doing the changes on the yogi. *Sadhana* (the doing) creates a human being, who has heightened awareness of simply being. Sybil mentions the habit that the long-term meditators get into: “You don’t think much, you just do it, you keep doing it. The *sadhana*, you don’t know it, but it’s changing you. You just do it and then you go home.” Sonia mentions the transformational phenomenon of *sadhana*’s active effect on people: “People start transforming

and they don't know what hit them." For participants in the study, *sadhana* allows for a "hit" of awareness that is beyond their control. They are "hit" with an increased awareness or experience of suddenly syncing with something larger than the finite self. If one does *sadhana*, then Sybil posits the body is in a "rhythm with God or the Universe, tuned up, and in balance." She says it is a tune up, not a save-all; it does not solve all one's worldly or human problems. Sybil says,

It's fascinating. There is a duality. You still have to work on your neurosis. It's not gonna go away with *sadhana*. . . . You have to do the work, but it gives you the strength to do the work or it opens you up so you can see what you need to do. It's a process.

Sybil also asserts that once the yogi is steeped in the doing of the practices over time, "you don't have to work at it. If you do, do, do all the time, [Yogi Bhajan] says you become doo-doo. . . . You don't do it, God does it, it goes through you. You don't actually do anything." Sonia speaks of *it going through her* and finds herself as a conduit:

Then I find myself in situations where I'm like a conduit and it's effortless and the reason I can do so much is because there is an almost an effortless to it, it moves through me, I'm not thinking about it, I'm not planning it, I mean I do, but I don't. It's like I just have to show up in the moment with the right intention and be willing. Just be willing to do whatever comes through.

This state of *being*, which includes an openness and willingness to receive infinite energies, happens with the *doing* of practice. Karl warns if "you stop using the technology [yoga and meditation], the effect fizzles. You stop practicing and it starts fizzling." According to Karl, what fizzles is the awareness of something bigger than the finite self along with the ability to uplift self and others:

You do your [practice] and you can carry it forward with others. . . . You don't do your

[practice], you are still a nice person and still a spiritual and human being, but it might be much harder to extend yourself and uplift those around you.

Karl alludes to the inextricable connection of doing a practice so that one can be with others in the world in a certain way – in order to “uplift” self and others or stay afloat in times of crisis and uncertainty. Jyoti talks about surrender once a *sadhana* is established and one has steeped in the practices:

To be fully present with yourself through mindfulness, and then as you are present with yourself, allow the Universe to work through you. When the Universe works through you, then ultimately, it is yoga, because you are living it, breathing it all the time. That union is within you.

Jyoti says she knows life is going to work itself out, problems will resolve. If she “kind of flips out”, she has compassion for herself and others and “finally you have to let go, and let God.” For Jyoti there is doing and then a “letting go” in order for God or the Universe to work. Sonia says she has found a balance between the doing and being:

Because of the practice, I’m very comfortable with sitting and doing nothing and this is interesting because if you look at my life from the outside, it would seem like I’m a whirlwind of action, which I am, but I also have the capacity to sit still, be totally present [within the whirlwind of social activity].

For the participants, a balance of feeling calm within life’s storms is due to long-term practices in the studio or on the yoga mat, which have infused their life off of the mat. Vama, a Hatha yogi who grew up in India with a yogic family and Hindu background, says mindfulness-based practices are not something one simply does on the weekend or in a once-per-week class. Overtime, once the practices have “hit” the practitioner, the practices keep a person integrated

with a *doing* that leads to an integrity of *being*, and then, in turn, another mindful *doing*. It is as if the do/be of *sadhana* is cyclical and intertwined and cannot be separated. Then, the balance of do/be/do allows for easier operation in the world: "...some sort of integrity is there with you always. You don't get fragmented or broken so easily because your spiritual pillar is in tact. That is very important for a person in moments of distress." Vama stresses the integration of yoga for all aspects of living: "It is very difficult to say, 'now I'm in yoga and now I'm not in yoga'. ... There is no point of exit." Gabe, my original Restorative yoga teacher in Calgary, sums up the paradox of the practice:

The main thing is to not underestimate the transformative effects of the practice of yoga. The key is that it has to happen beyond thinking about it, analyzing it, even studying it too much. You gotta just let it happen, but trust that it happen through the energy you feel, through the effort you are making on the mat. It will transform how you deal with the outer world and how [the world] is perceived, without knowing that that is what is happening. ... All you gotta do is maintain your effort when you are on your mat, everything else will fall into place.

For Gabe, the mat is literal as people do practices on mats, in studios, in Canada. Gabe gestures to an eventual doing of the practices off of the mat: "The transformative effect was a beginning of the undoing, of the letting go process off the mat. I'm just trying to work into a rhythm on a day-to-day basis of a sense of undoing things." Gabe undid his job of 20 years. He was a stressed lawyer who decided to live more simply and became a full-time yoga and kung-fu teacher. He says the "undoing" occurs daily as his awareness of daily movements and moments: "from the moment I get up, to what I eat, to my yoga practice, go do a private session, go do a yoga class, have a coffee, just trying to find a rhythm that allows all that undoing to occur." Neil, also in

Canada, has a similar story. After starting meditation and yoga practices, he quit his high-paid marketing job, simplified his life, and now works as a fulltime yoga teacher trainer and events producer for mantra and sacred sound concerts. For five out of eight of the Canadian and Chilean participants, the practices, which started on the mat, transformed what they did in the world for their livelihood. For Indian participants, their practices did not start on a mat. The process of coming to live or be in union (yoga) with something greater than their finite selves began in the home and continued outward.

### **Divergence Two: Yoga Mat or No Yoga Mat**

Many Canadian students of yoga maintain their efforts on the yoga mat, in studios, or in their homes. This effort on the mat is similar in Chile. People do yoga in studios, rehab centres, and domestic abuse shelters in order to prime themselves for a different kind of experience off the mat in the outside world. These places often provide the physical yoga mats for people to use, or some people bring their own. In India, the only literal mat I used was one I brought with me, from Canada. In India, I did not come across a yoga studio or go to an organized yoga or meditation class setting other than in Rishikesh, which is referred to as the yoga capital of the world. In Rishikesh, there are many non-Indian students taking yoga teacher training courses, so there are yoga schools and ashrams offering early morning practices – on one's own mat. In three other cities in India, yoga or meditation was done impromptu, on carpets pulled into a courtyard, in grassy areas without mats, on rooftops, and beside the Ganges river in sandy dirt.

On an afternoon excursion, our Canadian group is in a private van listening to the leader of our *yatra* (spiritual journey), Jyoti. She is speaking of the lineage of Sikh Gurus and gives history and some of the deeds of the Gurus. She concludes by saying she read somewhere that yoga is every breath. She comments that yoga as every breath sums up the lives of each Guru as

they lived and breathed their yoga, their union with the Divine, with their infinite nature beyond a finite body. Later in the week, when we are on a long and windy road in the same private van to the Himalayan town of Dharamsala, people are feeling tired and carsick and starting to complain about the circumstances. Jyoti comments, “This is yoga. India tests you in many ways.” A fellow traveller, a yoga and meditation student with about a year of practice, sitting in the seat behind me whispers, “I’d rather do a physical *asana* practice [than be on these sick-inducing roads].” A student’s practice on the small mat is supposed to help with the big mat of life as Jyoti comments: “The small mat helps you in the larger life. We have to have a practice to do that.” Travel in India is challenging, whether it is long distances or in a busy urban setting. Another Canadian on the *yatra*, George, notes the beeps of the vehicles weaving in and out of traffic in Amritsar, India. In the midst of what seems chaotic, George discerns audible organization or sonic communication between drivers. While we were in a taxi, George suggests, “Three beeps is a warning, one long beep is ‘move over’, and a short beep is ‘watch out, I’m still here.’” George may have expressed his spatial literacy (reading the road space). He says his ability to interpret the meaning of the beeps could be from his experience living in South America. This, I think to myself, could be another type of literacy – a resonant literacy or reading of sounds in the social space. The Indian yogis assert this discernment of beeps could be considered union or yoga, a yoking with what is going on all around one’s experience. Vama comments:

It is not a question of whether I am thinking in a yogic way or that I’m not thinking in a yogic way. That duality has ceased. This I can say. I’m not boasting, just presenting facts to you. Whatever a person thinks, it’s just yoga. Whatever a person does, it’s yoga. Whatever a person feels, it’s yoga. This is how it works.

All of life, including what one feels, is yoga for the two Indian Hatha teachers as well as the Indian-Canadian leader of the *yatra*. When I ask Vama about the feeling of anger and whether that was also yoga, he gives an analogy of steam:

The first misconception is that anger is something that is always uncontrolled. Anger can be like steam. If you put your hand in a steam pot or a steam boiler, what's gonna happen? It burns, of course. The same steam when you sit in a steam room, a spa, can heal, exfoliate, clear out blockages in your pores. Is there a difference between these two steams? ... There is no difference in the water, where the steam is coming from, but the way we put it to use, that's the difference.

Vama also utters contradictory and dualist statements, "I have the mind, I am not the mind. I have the body, I am not the body. ... I have the mind. I also have this ability to control it as an objective interface. I can modify the mind." For participants, the modifications happen in a dedicated practice on a literal or figurative mat.

In Canada and Chile, yoga seems more relegated to the studios, to the mat, to be done at a certain place and time, to be scheduled in one's calendar. The mat in Canada and Chile is literal. In India, the mat is figurative or India itself may be one giant yoga mat. Vama explains, in India, children grow up in the philosophy of living yoga, of interconnected nature. The yogic philosophy is passed on in texts, stories, folklore, "subliminal spiritual seeds" activated from mother or grandmother. Then some young people go on to study *asanas* (yoga postures) later, then *pranayama* (breathing), and finally comes meditation. This sequence of yogic learning is the opposite in most cases in Canada and Chile where focus on the *asanas* comes first, followed by *pranayam* and mediation. Then, perhaps philosophy is studied or as Gabe, in Canada, says the awareness or consciousness comes later: "The yoga practice seems to invite a beautiful



awareness of consciousness which has a transformative effect. [It transfers] to whatever you are doing off the mat.” All my participants in Canada and Chile started on the mat and now are living and being differently off of the mat. For the Indian participants, they felt they began the practices at home, in school, and on the streets. Now, the Indian yogis are teaching on the mat, predominately for non-Indian students. They also stress to their students that the streets outside of their yoga schools are where yoga philosophy and practice really comes into play. It is not only a personal, individual practice. Once realization moves from on to off of the mat, the practices become more social and a living practice for the students of the participants. Eventually, this is what “hits” or dawns on the practitioner – the idea, feeling, or experience that the practices do not stop when one is off of the mat and out of the studios. While I talk to Jyoti at our guesthouse outdoor dining area, she sums up where yoga mats are:

It’s one thing to get on the mat and we can practice and we can bend every which way, and do all that, but then it has to come off the mat ‘cause there’s a yoga mat in your class and there’s a big yoga mat out there.

### **Emergent Theme Two: Inward/Outward or Individual/Social**

*Peace begins with me.*

I sometimes co-facilitate yoga and sound workshops at a yoga studio in Toronto, which has this phrase, *peace begins with me*, on the walls in the upstairs waiting lounge. The lounge is like a deluxe living room space, similar to ones depicted in the magazine *Architectural Digest*. The large black cursive font decal with this message of peace beginning with me is above the large light grey sectional with deep seats and full cushions. There is a filtered water station and plants in white macramé hangers. It’s a cushy place to begin with me. These words are not on every yoga studio wall. The studios and non-studios I do my research in do not have writing on

the wall. Nonetheless, along my research journey, the writing on this upscale Toronto yoga studio wall rings true. My participants remark unanimously - the first step in a spiritual or meditative journey is going inward. Jyoti remarks that yoga and meditation studios offer safe places for students to start: “It’s important to have spaces so that people feel safe in a container [in order to do their personal practice].” Vasudev in India talks about finding an inner *guru* or inner teacher: “No one can bring you [to] the light. Someone can give you the signal, [and then] you can find the inner way.” The signals can often be external, like writing on the wall or sayings from a *guru* (teacher). *Guru* in Sanskrit means teacher, but the teacher does not have to be external. In fact, my participants share that it is the good external teachers that signal the student to go inward to find the *guru* within oneself. Vama suggests “experience is the key and yoga sincerely believes in having experience, not having information, but having experience first hand.” Yoga teachers make their students “realize and experience things”, related to yoga or union. Vasudev asserts, in order to experience and realize, “you need to do the practice, *sadhana*, whatever you feel comfortable and genuine for you. Physically, you enjoy, mentally you enjoy, spiritually you enjoy.” It may not be enjoyable at times and, as Helen points out, one must “do the dirty work of really going inside and facing inner demons, reality and truth.” Sybil concurs with more specific details of the mind-clearing that a mindfulness-based practice offers if done regularly:

You gotta tune [yourself] up every single day. When you do *sadhana*, it cleans out the garbage in your mind and your mind isn’t going at 50 miles an hour and thinking of dumb, stupid stuff and worrying. ... It’s all your fears, insecurities. You gotta clean that up. You gotta clean your psyche, scrub it. ... And admit, yah, you are a jerk. Look at what you just said or did and watch yourself. Be aware.

Grace also comments on the need for regular practice:

When I am doing it everyday, everything is so great. I have no problems.... [Mindful practice puts me in] a state of calm and resilience so that I'm not affected negatively by stressors so that I can get to creatively finding a solution instead of getting bogged down by hopelessness.

Karl asserts with practice, one is more aware of internal workings and “we become mindful of our own internal processes and we are aware of what’s going on [with ourselves].” And what is “going on” within the self is sometimes uncomfortable. For the participants, finding an inner *guru* means finding and using the dark shadow side to get to the light, illuminated aspect of self, which my participants refer to as the Truth of who one really is. In Kundalini yoga classes, the word *guru* is broken down into parts by the teachers: *gu* means dark and *ru* is light; and there is ecstasy (*wahe*) or and exclamation of wonder when one is going from darkness into light. For Kundalini yogis, the transition from darkness to light can also be expressed from ignorance to Truth of who one really is. Here, I use capital letter to denote the mysterious Truth that evades argument and language, not an arguable philosophical truth – although some may argue truth and Truth could be the same. The practices my participants have done for years increase their awareness of the *gu* and *ru* within as well as the tricky mind at play that may cause them havoc:

[A mindfulness-based practice] increases your awareness. It ups your sensory intake, kind of what you notice, what you are aware of. You have more space to observe, inside.

– Grace

I connect. My connection is being able to be aware of my own mind. ... Sometimes I have days that my mind like gives me a hard time and at least I realize what is happening!

– Deena

Helen gets more particular about the kind of havoc that can take place in the mind when in rigorous long-term practice:

That which can produce a change is *sadhana*, but that power of *sadhana* requires a self-restraint and self-control. I may not like someone, but I'm not going to go punch their lights out. ... [In your practice] you have to learn to sit on your anger and fear long enough to understand what is happening, but not long enough that it burns and distresses you. ... You should be scared of *not* doin' [your practices], scared of *not* having a relationship with God. And, I don't mean that in a happy happy, hippy hippy, mystical magical, bullshit way. I can smell that from a mile away. That won't uphold what is really going on [in a dedicated practice].

The burning that Helen describes is the burning off of the *gu* (the darkness) to be aware of the *ru* (lightness). For participants, yoga (union) gets one to merge with the Truth, with one's infinite nature, which is a non-verbal experience or felt-sense of that which is beyond the finite self, beyond the finite body to a connection with the indescribable vastness or the infinite or God. Helen posits, "yoga is union [with infinite], but the way to get from finite to infinite, union, is by controlling the waves of the mind, until you create an enormous wave that consumes the negative waves." Sybil concurs and comments once one has a strong practice, it radiates out, without much effort:

You don't have to work at it. You don't have to say, oh, I was compassionate. No, it has taken over, God takes over, and speaks through you. ... [If] you listen to your own mind, you will suffer. Have God's mind and don't think. You don't have to do anything. Let God do it.

Gabe asserts the effort is one-directional and the work is with the self. The social takes care of

itself as a result of the personal practice:

There is one direction [of practicing] and that direction is inward. As a result of that, this energy within us, this chi energy, this life force will automatically move beyond just you by the deeper you go in. So, it is a one-directional effort; it's inward.

For these experienced teachers of mindfulness-based practices, the *sadhana* was practiced on the mat until it seeped into their every day life. For the participants, yoga is their life, not a scheduled practice. Vasudev comments, “whole life is yoga actually, complete life is with yoga because the yoga starts from the pranayama, inhale and exhale, it never stops,” until one stops breathing.

**A double homicide.** As mentioned above, Helen points out that one must “do the dirty work of really going inside and facing inner demons, reality and truth.” About eight months before I met her, Helen shot and killed two of four intruders in her home outside of Santiago. She was upstairs in the bedroom when the break-in occurred. Men came into the bedroom and beat her down with the butt of their guns and tried to tie her up. She recounts:

I thought to myself, good, they are beating me. They are distracted. I am down on the floor and can inch toward the bed. I keep a revolver under the pillow, you see, so once they thought I was down, there was no question, to get the gun and kill them.

She shot one intruder in the bedroom five times and killed him. The other one in the bedroom, she shot once. He ran out, but died in the backyard. The other two intruders ran and escaped. She remarked that killing people was an “adrenaline dump.” She went into “protective spirit” as her spouse and two of her yoga students were downstairs at the time. She recalls in the moments inching toward the gun under her pillow, “God, so this how I’m going to die? I never would have guessed!” She says afterward the double homicide:

I fell into a depression and my mind screamed during those six months in meditation after killing those two guys. It was this way for six months (she holds her hands to her face and opens her mouth wide with a silent scream) but I kept [meditating]. I had to or the darkness would've overtaken me.

Helen recalls meditating and seeing uncomfortable darkness within herself. She thinks there was a possibility to begin liking the act of killing, for the “adrenaline dump.” She says it might be easier for her to do it again. At the time of the interview, she says she continues to battle with these thoughts and dark possibilities.

Carla, also in Santiago, but not having killed anyone, remarks feeling the darkness within herself as well:

I realized I have something unknown in myself, dark, like another person inside, I was afraid at that moment and I began to search and I think it was the *sombra*, the shadow.

Carl Jung talked about it in psych. This is the other part we don't know. Then I realized we always have a double discourse. We are always reacting in a different way or thinking a different situation. I saw for the first time the duality inside of me. I was worried. I wanted to find out what it was. It was unconsciousness.

Carla equates her dark shadow side to unconsciousness and unconscious behaviour, which is an aspect of the self as is the lightness. The teachers I interviewed strived for lightness, or at least a balance and awareness of *gu* as well as *ru* operating from within. As Vasudev mentions, “no one can bring you to the light.” According to the participants, one has to find a balance within and allow light and dark coexist within. This allowance is what makes meditation difficult and uncomfortable at times as the shadows are there for the meditators.

***Ahimsa (non-harming).*** I hear the story of the double homicide on my first meeting with

Helen. Carla happens to see her in the restaurant Carla and I are dining at and Carla goes to say hello to Helen. Carla introduces me and Helen is open and eager to talk. Hearing her story that day after lunch is draining. In my self-reflexive notes, I write:

*This was an intense afternoon. I had lunch with Carla at the veggie restaurant and she spied Helen sitting at the back of the restaurant with one of her students. The impromptu meeting and receiving of a horrible story was draining. I need quiet time, to stay in the apartment, make a meal, bathe, and slide into the comfort of a warm bed. A fully unexpected and overwhelming research day. Exhausted.*

Feeling overwhelmed hearing Helen's story, I decide to take the next morning and afternoon off from my yoga studio visit. Imagining Helen sitting in horrific meditations, screaming in silence, after the double homicide disturbs me.

There is a concept in yoga, *ahimsa*, which refers to non-harming or non-violence. *Ahimsa* refers to the non-harming of other sentient beings, as well as the non-harming of the self. While sitting with Helen, she mentions she had no reservation in killing the intruders to her home because of her "protective spirit." She also mentions the adrenaline rush being enjoyable and she has envisioned the satisfaction of killing again in her daily meditations. This made her meditations painful because she was taught through her yogic discipline not to harm, but to defend. In the ultimate defense, she says it was easy to kill two men. What was not easy for Helen, was visualizing killing again and liking it. She says after six months of counseling, the visualizations of enjoying killing subsided; however, she remarks, "I'll never go out unarmed." She pulls out a switchblade from her pocket, opens the blade, and quietly, gently, slowly places it in the centre of the table. She sits back and repeats, "I'll never go unarmed. Ever." Carla says to me the following week after Helen tells me her story, "[Helen's] like a warrior." Carla continues

and talks about having seen pictures of Sikhs with guns, like rifles, for the Sikh practice of Gatka (a martial art with weapons). I visualize Helen - the spiritual warrior.

Vama explains *ahimsa*:

*Ahimsa*, which is non-violence, and that is straightforwardly not being in a conflict with the people around you. *Ahimsa* does not mean not being violent, rather it means being in love, appreciating and admiring the world and its existence. Protect, defend. Defense and offence - every living being has got their birthright to defend their survival....As long as I am in this body, I have to sustain it. ... Defending is not an outright act of anger. It is a very intelligent act, how to protect yourself.

Warrior-spirited Helen gets about 40 applicants each year for the new intake of Kundalini teacher trainees. After interviewing each applicant for at least two hours each, she accepts a maximum of 15 trainees. She says she prefers quality rather than quantity and defends her strict and rigorous intake rules and processes. Helen runs a tight teacher training regimen for her students and she says this is a practice of *ahimsa*. She loves what she does and loves her students, enough to kill to protect them. One day after taking one of Helen's classes, we walk outside together. She has a student escort her to the car. She is still leery of walking the streets of Santiago alone, even though she has a switchblade in her pocket. The police gave her surveillance for six months after the homicides, as the police feared retaliation from the families of the men Helen killed on her property. Before putting her yoga teaching manual into her bag, she shows me the instructions in the teaching manual for the meditation we did during class. The meditation is called *All Facets of Woman*. Helen points to the page, "see, it includes anger, the parts we don't wanna see or admit." The meditation has repetitive hand gestures including prayer pose, hands cupped to receive, as well as hands like lion claws while the tongue sticks out, an



aggressive or powerful gesture. It is an emotive and dynamic meditation taking one through all facets of emotion. Helen is adept at reading the negative or more difficult emotions as she became literate of this darkness within her self. The pictures in the manual remind me of Helen, having demonstrated all facets, including the ultimate defense of self, spouse, and her students.

**Applying mindfulness-based practices.**

*You have to be able to understand what the hell is going on  
in order for [the practices] to be applied.*

*– Helen, participant in Santiago, Chile*

According to participants, the application of an inner practice is external. It becomes a social practice unless it is held in reserve for the finite self, which, as participants remark, is at best difficult and at worst selfish. Helen says these spiritual by-passers exist. People who do the practice, claim they are spiritual by doing a practice, but do not apply the teachings to their real life: “After 35 years of practice, they are not really doing it. They have thrown in the sponge. They are like zombies going through the paces.” Helen, in Chile, continues with a scenario of a social context:

What if you go out and meet an ass at the shopping market? ... If we meet the same asshole, we have different reactions. ... What is it I’m most grateful for on the spiritual path is my anger doesn’t control me anymore. I control my emotions [when I’m with people]. I still feel [my emotions] but can still be neutral. There are moments for fear and anger. They have their place. [With a practice], you get to choose.

Karl, in India, similarly says:

It really does not serve any one if they are an ass and I’m an ass back. We have then a whole lot of asses, so that we don’t need. You can be the one person who can take that

and balance that and don't fall into that trap.

Participants remark that their practices give them awareness, discernment, and moments of peace throughout their days. These skills or abilities allow participants to live differently in the world – with neutrality. Carla tells a story of her sister noticing changes in her reactivity:

I manage conflicts better now. My sister said to me, 'Carla, you have developed very much some skills that you didn't have before.' It is getting better. Before I was very reactive and mad and had hate, a lot of emotions. Now I feel more neutral.

Neil also mentions neutrality when faced with difficult others; for him, the biggest shift in himself is “connecting the dots and see how [the practice] applies in my life. It's about the way I am in certain situations. I have a little more perspective and am a little less reactive as time goes on.” Participants Grace and Gabe, both in Canada, talk about non-reactivity along with detachment. Grace says with practice she sees more “open and bright” people on the street. She notices people with lightness in their eyes. I ask, “What about the guy you meet who is rude?” Grace replies, “Just walk around them.” Gabe remarks, “I don't have anything to do with them, so I try not to get mad at them, try not to have any sense of retribution, um, but just simply detach.”

**Button pushers: Family, friends, and students.** Detachment is not only for strangers on the street. Participants also mention having a sense of detachment with family members who push their buttons. Gabe remarks:

So I have family members that I have detached from because I felt that they did not have my interests in mind, so I detach. As opposed to putting up with negative energy and letting it grind away, at some point you've gotta just say, 'I don't have time to do this. This is not within anybody's interests'. ... I'll not let anybody keep pressing my buttons

if I feel that is what they are doing.

Neil says his family was disturbed a few years ago that he was “getting more into his practice.” He dealt with it “by being as neutral as [he] could” and set boundaries for his mother in particular. Neil recounts asking his 92-year old mother not to comment negatively about his wearing a turban or growing a beard. Neil says he didn’t want to detach from his mother, so he set boundaries and said to her “this is what I am, this is what I do, this is how I look. That’s that and I don’t want to hear anymore about it because it’s not changing.” Overtime, Neil’s mother said less about his choice to quit his high-paying job, do sacred-chant event management, grow a beard, become a Kundalini yoga teacher-trainer, and start wearing a turban. His mother has softened since Neil got married to a woman who also is a Kundalini teacher, wears a turban, and lives within Sikh Dharma. Sybil also recounts a story of family pressure:

Yogi Bajan always said don’t go home ever, your parents are gonna pull you back. It doesn’t mean that they are bad. They want you who you were, by your other name. They don’t want you in the turban. My brother would say, ‘Why don’t you put on your jeans, put your hair down, and come visit your mother?’

Sybil says she could not sustain family visits for long and within 24 hours she was “a wreck”, so she decided to never go back.

Similarly, but not as drastically, both Neil and Gabe say they had to detach from friends or family members or set boundaries. As well, they both quit their high stakes careers in advertising and law. The more mindfulness-based practice they did, the less comfortable old behaviours and relationships were. Neil says he was dealing with difficult clients and even though his practices “opened up a new way for [him] to get to a place of neutrality and calm,” he ultimately left his career and started anew in his 50s. Neil, Gabe, and Jyoti also remark on their

circles of friends changing. Now they have circles of friends with similar interests and mindfulness-based practices. Their circles changed with their practices as they spent more time in new communities of practice. For example, Neil currently has “a single friend remaining from pre-yoga days.”

**Doing yoga for those around you.** Vasudev, a Hatha yoga teacher in India, is an outlier when it comes to the topic of detachment. He says one cannot ethically detach. He explains there is a sense of obligation to the rude or violent person in a community, whether it be family member or a friend. He talks about a scenario in a family with six or seven people, someone is going to be angry or be violent at certain times. I asked Vasudev how to deal with an angry or violent person. He remarks:

You need to bring back the person [after the incident], to serve him with real love, he can feel it. Show him this is wrong. ... If I treat him like shit and be with him more mad, he's gonna be more aggressive and one day he's gonna leave the family. ... [In violent situations], first we need to save ourself, second we need to show him some example, not to leave, but take time and slowly slowly bring these people love. Show him the right way, then he can understand.

Vasudev says it is the hardest kind of union or yoga, with difficult people and it's easy to detach by leaving the person. He says “taking time with the person [is] social union.” He says the situations are always contextual, depending on the family or group. Not everyone will take the time and not every angry person is ready to see a different way, yet Vasudev is adamant regarding the ethical importance of not detaching and not leaving the rude or violent person on his own.

Vasudev and his Italian-born partner, Laya, are also outliers in the types of programs they

offer in Rishikesh. There are many yoga teacher training schools, which cater to large groups in Rishikesh, but Vasudev and Laya are interrupting the yoga school system there. They offer individualized programs to spend time with individuals or small groups of spiritual seekers. They find an appropriate accommodation at an ashram for their guests, and then they spend time with them doing yoga on the banks of the Ganges river, meeting locals to learn simple cooking methods, and experiencing yoga as a living practice. This is not an accredited 200 or 500-hour course for a yoga teaching certificate. Vasudev and Laya teach living yoga. Their guests also accompany them on daily animal outreach. They travel the streets of Rishikesh on motorbikes and when they see an animal in desperate need, they stop and assess the situation. They have bags of dog food and bottles of water in the saddlebags of their motorbikes. They feed undernourished animals. Vasudev shows me a video on Laya's phone of their recent rescue of a street cow with a badly injured leg. Vasudev recounts,

The cow could not stand, so we called our friend with a flatbed truck, asked around and found six or seven people to help lift the cow onto the flatbed. We took the cow to an animal shelter out of town and so the cow's leg could get treatment.

For Vasudev and Laya, this kind of effort is part of their daily rounds in Rishikesh as their *seva* (selfless service). Vasudev explains:

This is yoga off the mat. We see the dog on the street, they have maggots inside the body.

We just cover our nose and leave him on the street, but our karma is to take him to the doctor, help him. He cannot explain you anything. We need to help.

When people come to study with or learn living yoga from Vasudev and Laya, their guests have an opportunity for awareness:

[With us, people can] see what is the environment. They can see the tree, river Ganga.

They can see the street dog, street cow, birds, where he is living as a yogi. They see poor people living in the tents, on the streets. We show all this, we show reality. This is consciousness.

Vasudev and Laya never work in a school or studio environment. No mats. All the yoga and *seva* is along the river and on the streets. Vasudev says, “you need to touch someone’s heart, then you become social. If you not touch someone’s heart, how you gonna be social? Impossible!”

Back in Canada, Sonia also mentions heartfelt connection of love toward being social: Sensing and being awake to the potential that is all around and the need that is all around and things spring forth; that is all it is. Then connecting people out of love and recognition and respect...and then just holding it energetically, giving them positive feedback, thanking them, expressing gratitude, supporting them, letting them know I trust them and believe in them and then we have a community.

And, the heartfelt connection of love first extends to the self in a way that embraces compassion for the dark, shadow aspects of self. Helen, in Santiago, explains:

Spirituality without compassion is like a glass of milk with one drop of poison; it’ll go down real smooth, but it’ll end up killing you. [One of my teachers] says as you become more spiritual, you see everything...but what keeps you from going nuts...compassion. Compassion is the key. What upholds the spiritual realm is truth. What sustains it is compassion. So, your ability to recognize it, you are honest enough to see yourself at face value and still love yourself.

For participants, if one has love, acceptance, and compassion for the shadowy self, then one may extend love to others. Karl, in India, illuminates with a story of the students he teaches:

[The students] can say whatever they want and I’m good with that. It changes with 16-17

year old boys. There is some residue there from my time and I can certainly get caught up in it with them but with the rest of them, the kids, it's very easy to have them go up, go down, yell, scream, cuss, and keep a smile on my face and be like, hey I love you anyway, it's okay. I have to stay neutral to my benefit because I'm the one who walks away with a smile on my face rather than thinking 'oh my god...that kid was a horrible human being.'

Jyoti comments we have choices and we can see light or dark in others and the self, "as we're living in this world...every moment we have that choice, every breath we have that choice, consciousness of life, to see the light in the darkness, to see the love in the fear."

Sybil says it is the hardest realization that the spiritual path is not sweet and lovely. She says, "you ultimately don't change that much, so you have to love yourself as-is and then in relationship, it becomes a bigger challenge to love yourself and then you add a spouse." Karl remarks how Yogi Bhajan always talked about how the highest form of yoga is marriage:

You have someone who will always mirror you at every single corner, no matter if you feel good, if you're bad, if it's early, if it's late, it doesn't matter. Your mirror is always, always there and that is challenging and that is the practice of mindfulness for me every day.

One of Karl's biggest mindful challenges is "to be able to allow feedback from [his] wife." And Karl's kids and his students at an international school in India also know how to push his buttons. He says, "I try to consciously remind myself when my buttons get pushed that it's about me. It's not about the other person. It's a tricky one because it's so much easier when it's about the other person." Sybil also remarks on marriage:

It's the hardest thing you will ever do. I don't care who the guy is and most guys on a spiritual path do not have it all together. ... Once you are married, it's extremely

challenging. Especially when they are obnoxious. To just not say one word [is difficult]. With long-term mindfulness-based practices, for the participants, there is in-the-moment personal reflection within social situations. This is possible if one can remain neutral and out of reactive states. It is not as Helen points out “happy happy, hippy hippy, bullshit.” Mindfulness-based practices put us face-to-face with dark aspects in self and others. Participants illuminated that once a heightened awareness happens rather than reactions, one can ebb and flow in the social realm with more calm and grace.

Gabe sums up the personal and social in these four statements:

- Alls you gotta do is take care of your energy, your inward journey. Your mindfulness and that will automatically go beyond just you. And, that will be felt by everybody around you, and you’ll just be there, as opposed to trying to think your way through it.
- Take care of your energy in a mindful manner and that energy will go to everybody beyond you ... that energy will beyond and be helpful to everybody else.
- Have awareness of what is happening. Any stressor that you are dealing with in life, when you step back and say oh wow, look how I reacted and look how that has effected me and then you deal with it. That’s the journey.
- It is an inward journey, solely, one directional journey.

As the writing on the fancy yoga studio wall asserts, *peace begins with me*. According to the participants in this study, that peace then radiates out naturally, without effort as “you’ll just be there” and then when you screw up in the social world, you go back inward. For participants, there is a cycle of inseparable personal and social revolutions, in perpetuity.

### **Divergence Three: The Business of Mindfulness-based Practices**

The personal inward journey has been commodified and is a business for many of my



participants. Out of 13 of my participants, 10 make their living from mindfulness-based practices of teaching meditation and yoga, training yoga teachers, and hosting retreats. In Chile, two out of the three participants make the practices their business. Helen makes her living from yoga teacher trainings and has done so for 40 years. Pablo is trying to make a living as well, working as the managing director of a foundation that supports outreach projects under the umbrella of the main Kundalini yoga studio in Santiago. He says he barely makes ends meet now, but it is getting better. I tried to set up an interview with the owner of the studio in Santiago, Noa. She did not answer my phone call or emails, nor did she respond to my Chilean key informant's request I meet with her. I was able to go to one of her early morning meditations from 5:00 to 7:30 a.m.. Carla says it is a rare occurrence when Noa leads the morning *sadhana*. Many people show up and afterwards there is a line-up to speak with Noa. Afterward, I talk with Carla about Noa's beloved personality and teaching style. Also, according to Carla, Noa is building a million-dollar home in Santiago, meanwhile the director of her not-for-profit foundation, Pablo, is financially struggling. During my second week at the studio, I am asked to supply teach the Friday night Gong meditation. The regular Gong player is going to be away for a few weeks, so the regular Gong teacher asks me to fill in as I have experience playing Gong and leading meditations. I agree and the regular Gong player informs me that it is a by-donation event. I am not paid, and the proceeds go to the foundations for outreach initiatives, which bring yoga and meditation to rehab centres and domestic abuse shelters in the outlying areas of Santiago. Both Pablo and Carla talk about *seva* (selfless service) being important. I am not sure if the owner, Noa, is increasing her own profit margin by taking advantage of the *seva* of her yoga teachers or if this is a rumour. I talk with one of the foundation's yoga teachers, Sofi, who does her *seva* once a week at a domestic abuse shelter, which is almost two hours from her downtown Santiago

home. Sofi works full time in a corporate job as a financial officer, teaches three times per week at the yoga studio, and goes to the domestic abuse shelter to teach yoga and meditation every Friday, as her *seva*. She works extra time during the week at her full-time job so that she can leave the office at 3:30 p.m. on Fridays to get to the shelter by 5:30 p.m. She comments, “it is my *seva*. I have a regular job from Monday to Friday, but I take off early Fridays to go to do the work. It’s like I’m leading a double life.” I meet her at a subway station platform; we take a subway to the end of the line, catch two buses, and arrive about 15 minutes early for class. She explains that one of the students from this class is now taking the teacher training course under the foundation’s scholarship program that Pablo runs. The 75-minute class includes a few yoga postures, a short meditation, and is more like a counseling session. The women who come to class talk to Sofi about their relationship and family issues. Sofi is performing *seva* not only as a yoga and meditation teacher, but seemingly as a counselor as well. Pablo, Sofi’s partner, does similar *seva* with outreach yoga and meditation programs in two rehabilitation centres for drug users and his role is similar to Sofi’s. He goes to the centres to teach a few yoga postures and does a short meditation of three to five minutes because, according to Pablo, the attendees’ attention spans are short and they are unable to do longer meditations. Between the yoga poses and the meditation, Pablo has discussions with the attendees about their struggles. Pablo is an ex-cocaine user, so he feels well suited to going and talking to the people in rehab, mostly men, about 90%, in the room. Sofi admits that she wasn’t comfortable speaking at length with the women at the shelter when she began because she didn’t have experiences in common with them. Now, two years later, she feels more confident to talk with the women about their relationship issues. She says this confidence came overtime with her own yoga and meditation practice as well as getting to know the women at the shelter. Both Pablo and Sofi have no professional

counseling training, but the government of Chile has agreed to support the foundation's programs. The foundation conducted research on the benefits of yoga and meditation in at-risk populations and the government has given the foundation approval to approach centres that deal with at-risk populations. When I ask the secretary at the foundation about the government support of these programs, she says she doesn't know how much the government gives to support the programs. She just knows they have a government letter of approval to take with them when they approach a rehabilitation centre or domestic abuse shelter. In sum, the business of yoga and meditation in this particular yoga studio in Santiago seems to support not-for-profit community outreach ventures, and perhaps finances Noa's lavish new dwelling.

In Canada, the yoga studio I did research at is a for-profit business that offers yoga, meditation, mindfulness and various other workshops regarding one's journey inward. The owner of the Toronto studio, Grace, is the daughter of my key Canadian informant, Sonia. I ask Grace and Sonia about the success of their programs and what success meant to them. Grace, the young owner, says succinctly, "Making enough money to live off of and flourish." She paused. I wait as 21 seconds pass (in our recorded interview) and then Grace adds, "and being kind." Later, in a yoga teacher training module on 'the business of yoga, Grace tells a group of yoga teacher trainees that she makes a modest living as a studio owner. She specifies that last year she made \$30,000 CAD and it is not an easy or lucrative business to be in. Her mother, Sonia, has recently financially supported her daughter to move to a new location on a busier street in a popular area of Toronto. Young Grace talks about feelings of being overwhelmed and hopeless during our interview, which is squeezed in between her teaching of a class and a meeting with a client, a potential renter of the yoga studio space. Of marked note, Grace uses the word "hopeless" four times in our interview. I want to ask Grace to expand on the hopelessness, but

she has to end the interview to go to her next appointment. I never have the chance to broach the topic again with Grace.

When I ask Grace's mother, Sonia, about what makes one of her yoga and meditation programs a success, Sonia remarks:

At the end, we ask people how they feel before they leave [a 10-day yoga program or 10-month teacher training program] and they say they've found a new family, they've connected to themselves, they now have a path that they were looking for, they have teachers and a body of teaching that they feel they can abide by. That's huge.

Sonia does not mention making money and flourishing as her daughter does. However, other yoga teacher trainers in the Toronto community comment that they are not allowed to offer trainings in Toronto because it is Sonia's territory. The two other qualified teacher trainers were mentored by Sonia and only allowed to offer trainings outside of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and further afield. Sonia has a waiting list each year for her teacher trainings, but that list is not shared with the two other trainers. I suspect in the mindfulness-based practice business one cannot make a living unless one is territorial, and Sonia is feeling the pressure to protect her earnings. Whereas Gabe, not a studio owner, but a fulltime yoga and kung-fu teacher, mentions he is "making just enough to survive, to live, relatively comfortably, not looking for more of it, uh, just trying to find a rhythm, a pattern and a rhythm that causes less and less disturbance." It is part of Gabe's ethos not to disturb others around him. He does not seem territorial about his classes, has no website or social media. All of his classes are word of mouth and very well attended. Of my Canadian participants, only Deena holds yoga and meditation classes as outreach or *seva* at a women's shelter in Toronto. However, in 2017, the board of directors at the women's shelter wanted to see the research attesting to the benefits of the particular Kundalini

practices that Deena was offering. At the time of my interview with Deena, says she is not teaching at the shelter but trying to gather the research to appease the board of directors there. Besides Deena, who is retired, and Jyoti, who has a fulltime job, the three other teacher-participants I interview and observe in Canada do not offer yoga and meditation as *seva*. It is their livelihood.

In India, yoga is wider than territories and livelihood. Territories or boundaries exist in Rishikesh, the capital of yoga, among different schools of yoga. The boundaries are drawn by the lineage and forms of the practice established by particular teachers. For my Indian participants, even though it is their livelihood, yoga is not as much of a money and success concern. They view yoga as informing life in general as well as making a modest living. Vasudev and his partner take private clients, rescue cows, and feed dogs. Vama has started a yoga school/ashram concerned with teaching more yoga as a philosophy and lifestyle as well as the postures. Although, in order to give his students a 200-hour certificate, he says he has to succumb to the yoga teacher training as a business in order to pay his property rental fees. Vama takes a maximum of 12 students per monthly cycle whereas other schools in Rishikesh take up to 70 students. Vama keeps his training groups small in order to keep them intimate and more like a family. In 2019, he plans a move to another property, which allows him to teach small farm management, working with the land, growing vegetables, and cooking as part of his yoga teacher training. Sybil, who was Yogi Bhanjan's nurse for 30 years, currently earns \$1,000 USD per month to take care of Yogi Bhanjan's estate in India. Part of her job there is renovating the rooms so that she can accommodate up to 60 guests. She wants to keep the rates lower, approximately \$52 USD a day, including meals, for people to come for yoga and meditation retreats. Jyoti, Indian-Canadian, has a full-time accounting job but leads *yatras* (spiritual journeys) to India two

times per year because she loves to do it. It is not a significant income generator for her, but the retreats cover the cost of her airfare in order to visit her son, who goes to school in Punjab.

In Rishikesh, I meet an outlier who is disrupting the business of yoga. Yogi Cash is a yoga teacher and photographer. He calls himself Yogi Cash in order to play with his own persona as a spiritual-type of teacher. I initially see his flyer posted above a bench I am perched on at an outdoor laneway café. I am intrigued by both his name and his beautiful photography on the poster. I check his website and learn he also teaches yoga in Rishikesh, on the banks of the Ganges river, at the end of a pathway, in a grassy knoll. His classes are all by-donation or pay-what-you-want. I contact him and we meet arrange to meet on the other side of the Ganges river. On a similar bench along a similar walkway, I tell him about my research and he is eager to tell me about his beloved project to deliberately interrupt the way yoga is run as business in the west. He is starting with his hometown of Los Angeles. With his friend in LA, Yogi Cash is building a mobile phone application (app), which lists all the yoga classes by donation and outside of studio settings in the Los Angeles area. There is no set fee for the classes they will list; they are all pay-what-you-want and they are not necessarily bound by a retail space or set location. Yogi Cash says he wants to see yoga in more parks, outdoor spaces, and community centres that are open to the public, accessible to anyone, and any price point. He says he is tired of seeing yoga and meditation prices averaging \$25 USD, so he is attempting to disrupt the current business model of yogic offerings. He says ultimately he would like to see the whole system crumble, so he is doing his part, offering by-donation classes on the banks of the Ganges and developing an app to highlight yoga and meditation options outside of the studio settings where *peace begins with me*. Yogi Cash seems to think peace begins with us, outside the tyranny of set systems and business models of offering mindfulness-based practices.

### Emergent Theme Three: Sound/Silence

*The sound of silence. The sound of self emerging.*

– Richard Wagamese, *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditation*

The final emergent theme is the role of sound (mantra) and silence. Informed by findings from my concurrent ethnographic study at an ashram in 2017, I decided to add questions to my semi-structured interview list to ask my participants in this study regarding the role of sound and silence. For the meditators at the ashram in my 2017 study, sound/silence was a key component to their mindfulness-based practice in the early hours of meditation between 5:30 to 6:30 a.m. as well as in the outside world (Bliss, 2018). I also have personal interest in the topic of sound and silence because I am a student and teacher of Gong (percussion instrument) and holistic resonance. I have been playing symphonic Gong for four years and the more I play, the more I feel the mysterious and potent possibilities of holistic sound as well as the rich, full silence after a Gong sound session. I asked my doctoral research participants questions about the role of sound and silence based on a personal and scholarly hunch - that the quality and quantity of sounds and silence play a large unexplored role in literacy studies. Of all my participants, 11 are all versed in Gurmukhi mantra through the practice of Kundalini yoga and meditation, and the two Hatha yoga teachers in India are versed in Sanskrit mantra.

**Mantra.** In my experience, beyond Kundalini yoga classes, mantra is an underexplored part of yoga and meditation at mainstream studios in Canada that offer *asana*-based (posture-based) practices and silent meditative practices. Participants remark there is something special and distinct about mantra, which includes the vibration of the sacred language, or sacred script. It is not a language that is spoken, but sung or chanted. Vama explains, “when we say *Om*, it is not something I’m speaking. It is something I’m resonating. *Om* is not a word.” Vama continues that

*Om* is a vibration and the mantras are curative and target certain realms of our being:

Mantras have a specific system in the ancient yogic cultures. They are used at different levels, from physical, to moving inward, and more subtle. For Vasudev, they play a very strong role for physiological and psychological benefits and they alter your system.

Vasudev is equally adamant about mantra not being logical or seeable:

When you chant the mantra, the five metals create the creation in the physical body. The wind you cannot see, the voice you cannot see, and the neural system. The brain understands, then heart, heart feels, then you are right. We cannot see this. It's vibration. According to participants, the vibration of mantra can be utilized internally via thought waves, hummed or chanted, or listened to. Jyoti recites her chosen mantras in the evening or if she is "doing dishes or something mundane." She also puts mantra on the stereo in the car when she is driving. She says mantras are embedded into her experience from living with parents who also recited or sung mantras regularly. Jyoti mentions the paradoxical nature of mantra as "every mantra brings you back to that space of silence within yourself and you can access that deep level of your soul." According to participants, mantra helps one reside in silence.

**Silence.** Vama suggests silence is integral to integrate experiences in life:

Silence is a tool for assimilating everything you have taken in, that you have done.

Silence brings your nervous system into a [state of calm], with least stimulation. Before you start, and after you finish, at least 15-20 minutes of silence must be observed in order to assimilate and digest anything you have spent your time with. In life, it has got a really good role to play. You can take care of a lot of your issues by just being silent. Sit and watch. Just be passive.

Jyoti also mentions silence as a way of integrating experience, whether it be a mindfulness-based



practice of a life event: “To integrate I feel you need silence. To kind of tune into that space in your self and let things flow.” Vama explicates tuning into silence may not be easy for beginners of a mindfulness-based or meditative practice: “[It] is a difficult task as most of us are not conditioned to be silent.” Chanting mantra focuses the mind to become fixed or one-pointed so as to experience relief from being inundated by a constant stream of thoughts. Vasudev also explains, “One silence is negative, people are worried, people can’t be there long. One is positive silence. You stop your mouth. You don’t need to speak and [then you] feel it.” Carla mentions her enjoyable silent lunches with her 91-year old mother:

My mother doesn’t speak very much when we have a lunch. After lunch we have a rest on the sofa and she’s almost sleeping and I have my silent time at home everyday. I feel fantastic, totally happy with that silence, and no stress; it is peace.

Karl, in India, but born in Germany, finds his ability for silence strikes a necessary balance to living with a talkative Mexican partner as well as having kids:

It’s easier for me because my wife is Mexican. She talks a lot, so I’m the more silent one to create that balance in our relationship. So, that is kind of a gift for me because of a cultural difference. ... And, especially working with my own kids, sometimes not saying anything or two words is much more powerful than giving a whole lecture. ... To really be able to accept that it is okay to shut up and that it is okay to give less and by giving less, to have them experience more. It’s more valuable because it is less.

For participants, doing less, saying less, and becoming less and less leads to the state of *shuniya* (*shunyata*), or being empty and full at the same time.

***Shuniya (shunyata): Being zero.*** With sustained and long-term practice with silence, participants comment on the state of *shuniya*. Jyoti explains *shuniya* and its elusivity:

*Shuniya* is that state of bliss you feel when you are in silence. You drop into that zero space and there is nothing; that is *shuniya*. That is done when you are not controlling it. It is somehow done organically. When I'm trying to control the silence, I'm like okay, 'get into *shuniya*' or 'get into silence' - it doesn't work, and then suddenly, it'll just come.

Helen explains in order to get to *shuniya* "you need altered state of consciousness. ... You need meditation." Sonia says, because of her long-term practice, she can go to *shuniya* and be comfortable with the state of nothingness, being and doing zero:

I'm very comfortable and sitting and doing nothing and this is interesting because if you look at my life from the outside, it would seem like I'm a whirlwind of action, which I am, but I also have the capacity to sit still, be totally present and be okay with zero, nothing.

Pablo explains the paradoxical quality of the state of *shuniya*, "when you are all and you are nothing at the same time." Sonia finds it a playful and generative state:

When I go to zero, there is a sense of play and fun and curiosity, like okay, what does the Universe want now and let's just see where this is going to go. And there is a trust, so there is a letting go and a complete faith and trust in the process and flow, even though I don't know the outcome.

Sybil explains that one goes to *shuniya* "so you can let God in." Sybil says "we block God all the time" and *shuniya* is a God-state. Sybil comments when she talks to people, "they don't want to experience *shuniya* because they want to be somebody. They are into their personality; they are into their character that they think they are. Yet, they are not. You're not a person at all."

Similarly for Helen, *shuniya* is seeing "the world through the eyes of the Gurus, through the eyes

of Christ or Buddha.” For participants, the state of *shuniya* takes away their personhood to reveal a lofty and mysterious state.

Grace describes *shuniya* as a technique to enhance one’s stillness and be “very very very present.” For Grace and other participants, it is as if *shuniya* is a God-state or a state of being presence within presence. Presence within presence may be a confounding wordplay, but no more vexing than understanding or expressing what a God-state may be. Gabe calls *shuniya* “the undoing” when one “zeroes out” and takes the philosophy of the middle road, without judgment, with complete contentment, having no desires and “needing less and less and less.” Gabe says once *shuniya* is a state that is experienced, “you’ll live but you’ll minimize what you are doing.”

## Chapter Six: Discussion

### Returning to the Primary Research Question

Using the findings from my research and turning to the philosophical lenses of Hanh (1993) and Levinas (1969), in this chapter I return to my research question: *How can mindfulness be understood as socially situated literacy, and what role can mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga play in transforming knowledge of individualized selves into interconnectedness with others?* In this chapter, the second part of my research question is broached first followed by a discussion of mindfulness as socially situated literacy. I invert my original question so as first to discuss the role of mindfulness practices and then turn to a broader question of mindfulness as literacy:

- 1) *What role can mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga play in transforming knowledge of individualized selves into interconnectedness with others?*
- 2) *How can mindfulness be understood as socially situated literacy?*

After using the findings to explore mindfulness-based practices as they gesture toward interconnectedness, the second part of this chapter advances a concept of mindfulness-based practices as a new model of literacy. I term this newly proposed model *spatial literacy*. In a self-reflexive turn, the final section of this chapter returns to interconnectedness and offers a retrospective on the difficulties and ethics of language, highlighting the yogic precept of *ahimsa*, or non-harming. I conclude the final section by proposing *ahimsa* as central to spatial literacy.

Apropos to the first part of my question concerning the role of mindfulness practices, while teaching a yoga class in Toronto, Deena says to her students, “how we act to others is how we act to the self first. We need to create a space between an event and our reactions.” In order to create internal space and realize interconnectedness with others, participants remark that they

meditate on their own, perhaps on a yoga mat, while walking along the street, or sitting on the subway. Participants suggest that interacting with self and interacting with others are not separate endeavours – how we act with others is how we act toward the self and vice versa. In this chapter, I begin with an analysis of the data pointing to creation of spatial awareness, which, in turn, ignites the process of transformation from an individual self to a self inextricably linked with others. Throughout this chapter, Levinas (1969) and Hanh (1993) serve as philosophical lenses in analyzing the data and exploring how mindfulness-based practices transform the practitioners from awareness of self to an awareness of interconnectivity with others.

In this chapter *connectivity* and *interconnectivity* are used differently. The term *connectivity* is used for self and others in relationship as separate, as per the Levinasian (1969) conception of self in relation to others and the Other. The term *interconnectivity* relates to Hanh's (1993) concept of interbeing, where self and other are inextricably linked beyond the finite physical experience. The interconnectivity that is felt and experienced by participants is discussed in four parts: breathing and pausing, spatial awareness and responsibility, felt sense, and belonging.

### **Transformation From Individualized Self to Interconnectivity with Others**

*Recognise the other person is you.*

– Yogi Bhaian

Eight out of 13 of my participants are Kundalini yogis and learn from Yogi Bhaian's teachings. One of his teachings is to *recognize the other as the self*. There are no guidelines in particular for participants to come to an embodied understanding of this precept, except for a personal exploration of myriad meditation, yoga, and breathing practices. Mindfulness-based practices allow the practitioners to feel or gain a heightened awareness of subtleties of

interconnectivity.

**Breathing, pausing, and reading self and others.** The third emergent theme from the data, the theme of sound/silence, creates opportunity for participants to feel inter-connected through the breath or the air all around, which we share. Jyoti comments, “yoga is every breath you take.” For Vasudev, “whole life is yoga actually. Complete life is with yoga because yoga starts from the pranayama, inhale and exhale, it never stops. Yoga always with your life [because you are breathing].” For participants, one’s breath is inextricably linked with others’ breath. According to participants, and echoed in Hanh (1993), we are in the thick of all of it, together. “We cannot just be by ourselves alone; we can only inter-be with everyone and everything else” (Hanh, 1993, p. 48).

Participants speak of the spaciousness that mindfulness-based practice creates for them - a pause is created. Participants first meditate on pauses while breathing. Pauses can be observed at the top of each inhale and the bottom of each exhale. Pauses are also noticed and experienced between movement and not-movement in yoga postures and exercises. Participants remark that, in the pauses, they get to know their true self, beyond the finite self, including the body. (The *getting to know the self* is what I refer to as *reading* the self, thoughts, feelings, reactions, explored more in the next section of this chapter, which broaches mindfulness as a literacy.) Once the rudimentary practices of noticing pauses between breaths and movements are mastered, the participants, long-term meditators, move to an understanding of self and others being linked through a deeper understanding of the awareness of one’s own thoughts and reactions.

Sonia explains that having awareness of one’s own thoughts and reactions can lead to an ability to “read” other people: “Read the other person when you are listening to them. When you sit with someone and deeply listen to them, you listen with your whole body as the ear.” This

comment is confusing as it evokes two senses (hearing – ears, and reading – eyes) with one organ, namely, the skin. Sonia’s multi-sensorial explanation of reading and listening with the whole body is a holistic approach to the practicing of being and interacting with others. This description of listening with the skin is what Oliveros (2005) refers to as “deep listening.” When in conversation with others, Oliveros (2005) suggests, “receive with your whole body what is being said” (p. 15). For participants and sound scholars (Gershon, 2011; Oliveros, 2005; Schafer, 1977), the experience of deep listening (or perhaps deep reading) of self, other, and social spaces involves the whole body and a spatial awareness.

**Spatial awareness and responsibility.** Participants talk about responsibility beginning with recognition of our personal spaces and then in interactions with others. Deena explains in class, “the way we communicate tells us how we are and what kind of garbage we are carrying. So, we begin by bringing our inner witness online.” Participants begin being aware with their reactions within their social networks. The awareness is of their internal mindfulness practice of taking pause before reacting. The participants view this practice of pausing as well as other mindfulness-based practices they have embodied as a responsibility. Neil remarks about the responsibilities in his role as a teacher:

The more I teach, the more responsible I come to be and feel about [mindfulness-based] teachings. As a teacher, ... I think in many ways it has affected my own sense of my place in my social world. ... I feel that the responsibility is there all of the time.

Grace says she feels responsibility *because of* the presence of others, in spite of her mind fluctuations:

I become very present and focussed and um, I become a holder of the space for everyone else in the space, which is great for me because it means that I don’t really have

to experience the fluctuation of my own mind. I'm a present person for everyone else. In this way of being there *for* others, Grace embodies a Levinasian separate self as she feels responsible to and for others. Here, I suggest, from a Levinasian perspective, Grace is being taught responsibility through contact with or facing her students. Levinas (1969) explains, "[teaching] comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain" (p. 51). Gibbs (2000) clarifies Levinas' position: "Responsibility cannot rest in my own relation to myself—because I cannot be my own teacher" (p. 31). In this way, Grace is teaching others a yoga class, yet being taught responsibility for and because of the students in her class.

Vama, a participant in India, states he can be responsible to others by first upholding his "spiritual pillar," being responsible to himself to do his daily *sadhana* (spiritual practice). If a spiritual pillar of mindful practice and mindful living is intact, Vama claims one does not become fragmented or broken, and therefore one is strong for the self as well as others. While Levinas and Vama would agree that responsibility is for others, Levinas (1969) says we have been fragmented by the presence of others and communication with others in a "trauma of astonishment" linked to the alterity, or shocking difference, of the other (p. 73). Besides regarding the Other as a teacher, Levinas does not broach how to deal with the shocking astonishment of others, but Vama offers an antidote: keep a strong "spiritual pillar" in order to face others in social realms.

Next, I turn to participants' input regarding responsibility to others through the framework of interbeing or interconnectivity (Hanh, 1993) with a brief mention of the epitaph at the beginning of this section: *Recognise the other person is you*. Why keep a strong "spiritual pillar" as Vama suggests, and maintain a mindfulness practice? There are two perspectives: 1) practice is inward and for one's own benefit or peace of mind, and 2) practice is for others, as well as



one's functioning in the social realm. If Yogi Bhajan's precept, *recognise the other person is you*, is considered, then these two perspectives of self and other are unified in this way: I am the other, therefore, what I do for myself, I do for the other. What I am for myself, I am for the other. Vama asserts, "a yogic viewpoint is establishing a harmonious relationship, and if there is disharmony, then doing efforts [is essential] to bring back the harmony." The doing/being theme of the data speaks to the inextricable link between the being-ness of a pillar as the self and the doing-ness of relations with others. Karl elucidates this point by commenting that he keeps his practice up so that he can remain balanced, and that balance is due to the *on the mat* work that influences his social realm:

It's hard to separate the two [yoga on the mat and life off of the mat] because everything is one, our life and our practice, our social interaction, it all becomes one. ... There is no 'it's so nice to be in bliss here on my yoga mat' but when someone is not saying something nice to me, then I lose it. So, I really always remind myself that it is a one package deal.

According to participants in the study and as expressed above by Karl, life with self and others is a "one package deal." For Hanh (1993), "if we look deeply into our mind, we see the world deeply at the same time. If we understand the world, we understand our mind. This is called 'the unity of the mind and world'" (p. 4). For Hanh (1993), the reasoning behind mindfulness practices is to "be aware of what is going on in ourselves and in the world" on a daily basis (p. 28). "Every act—even eating a sandwich or spending money—is an occasion for us to practice awareness. We must practice in each moment of daily life and not just in the meditation hall." (Hanh, 1993, p. 28). Hanh (1993) also asserts we hold responsibility for others by being in the world and, in this way, we belong to others as we are a part of others, inextricably linked and can

not be by our self, alone.

Hanh (1993), having coined the term interbeing, posits we are all inextricably interconnected with our breath and the elements such as earth, air, and water. For Hanh, we cannot be separate and in our inherent oneness, there lies our responsibility to be ethical for self and other as one. For my participants, there is responsibility to uphold one's "spiritual pillar" and *sadhana* (daily practice) in order to be able to deal with "asses" or "uplift" others. In other words, there is a responsibility to uphold the practice, done by the self, for uplifting engagement to happen with others. For participants, there seems to be a separation of one's own practice and the impact on others. However, there is an elusive experience that participants talk about – the sense or experience of *no separation* between self and others. It is a paradox and a problem that runs through the interview and observational data – participants talk of the separateness of self and other, as if each person is a "pillar," yet they mention oneness with something larger than their personal pillar or personal self. Sonia mentions being "in the process and flow," of having "trust" and wondering, "what does the Universe want now?" Sybil tries to explain that a person is "not a person at all." Sybil surmises we can let God in to do work through us, or our pillar, but "we block God all the time" by being a separate person wanting to be a "somebody" instead of interconnected through God or Universal wisdom. Jyoti says, "when the Universe works through you, then ultimately, it is yoga" – or union or interconnection with something larger than the finite self. Jyoti also says, "finally you have to let go, and let God."

**Felt sense responsibility and "having-the-other-in-one's-skin."** My participants agree there is interconnectivity between self and others through a felt sense experience of something greater than they can logically explain – this is a felt sense of God or the Universe and that we are all connected, both physically as human beings as well as spiritual beings. Here felt sense is

defined as a fuzzy sense of something, which is unable to be described with logic or words (Gendlin, 2004). Felt sense experiences cannot be proven or talked about clearly as they are too elusive. Felt sense is also described as embodied knowing inner wisdom (Rappaport, 2013). For participants in my study, responsibility lies within an embodied felt sense of something greater than their finite selves – an interconnection with God, the Universe, or “a flow.” For participants, the responsibility to others is more than a written ethical rule or logical awareness. As Sonia mentions, even though she doesn’t logically “know,” “there is a trust, so there is a letting go and a complete faith and trust in the process and flow.” It is a thread for participants – they have a felt sense of interconnection with self, others, and something greater, and in that connection there lies responsibility to uphold the “pillar” of the self in order to interact socially with others, and keep up their connection with God, the Universe, or the “flow” with their mindfulness-based practices.

Participants also mention feeling responsible as finite beings, as mindfulness-based teachers, to uphold their personal pillars for others. The data also gestures to participants having a logical and ethical awareness of a separate self from others. Neil and Karl mention being responsible to the yogic teachings, them selves, their wives, as well as their students, as if these are all separate entities. Neil says, “as a teacher, ... I think in many ways it has affected my own sense of my place in my social world. ... I feel that the responsibility is there all of the time.” Grace is grateful to have others in her classes to teach in order to be responsible for herself through teaching others. And, in Canadian participant Sonia’s 10-day yoga for addictions course in both Santiago and Toronto, responsibility is embedded in the title of a module in the training book: the module is called *I am responsible and accountable to my self. I am responsible and accountable to others*. The title of the module seems like self and others are separate, yet the

yogic precepts in the training book, based on Yogi Bhajan's teachings, have the underlying precept of recognizing "the other person as you." The responsible to self and others in the yoga course is paradoxical – the self and other are both connected through being separate individuals as well as interconnected through being one in the same.

In contrast, Levinasian responsibility to others is due to difference, or alterity, rather than sameness and a felt sense of the other as the self. For Levinas (1969), because there is a conceptualized *me*, all others are different: "Alterity is possible only starting from me" (p. 40). If I drop the *me*, as per the yogis, sages, and my participants, then alterity does not exist. For Levinas (1969) that one-ness or sameness is broken with the concept and experience of *I* and *thou*. Levinas (1969) indicates that, because of the alterity of the other, I am responsible to the other. According to Levinas (1969), I recognize my responsibility in the face of others and the Other, and I am taught by others, who are radically different from me. Curiously, Levinas (1989) writes of being-in-one's-skin *and* having-the-other-in-one's-skin as an amplification of responsibility: "To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of the other" (p. 107). Substitution is an element in Levinas' work in which identity inversion seems to create the very position of the yogis, sages, and my participants – the position that *I am the other*. Levinas (1989) explains substitution as an indescribable state:

Substitution is not an act; it is a passivity inconvertible into an act, the hither side of the act-passivity alternative, the exception that cannot be fitted into the grammatical categories of noun or verb, save in the said that thematizes them.

This active passivity is akin to the inextricable link between doing/being or actively doing a passive mindfulness practice as expressed in the data. It is an in-between experience difficult to

describe.

Further, “having-the-other-in-one’s-skin” could be considered as a felt sense experience. Here I wonder about the Levinasian concept of substitution and have unresolved questions. For Levinas, if I can substitute the other in my own skin, can I get a felt sense glimpse of the other as myself? Regardless of my questioning of the felt sense, Levinas (1989) asserts the separation of self and other is necessary for responsibility. Being separate and responsible, there remains connectivity between self and others. The responsibility and connection is likened to devotion for the other, and not the self:

A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself (Levinas, 1989, p. 83).

The responsibility is because of the relationship or connection with the other. For Levinas (1989), society becomes a community when the others’ concern is my concern in a “love of the Other” (p. 225). Community is spoken about by participants as being in their *sangha* or *sangat*, which is derived from Sanskrit *sangh*, meaning fellowship or association. In the following section, I discuss belonging to a community as integral to interconnectivity with others.

**Belonging: Interconnecting in solitude and with others.** Participants remark on being in community and a feeling of belonging to like-minded groups in their community yoga classes, meditation groups, or yoga-training programs as well as a kind of belonging in their solitude. Participants’ sense of belonging and connecting is two-fold: 1) internal – connecting “to themselves” and belonging to something greater than the finite self such as “God,” “the Universe” or a “flow” (discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter), and 2) external - belonging to a *sangha* or community in social spaces.

Through a meditative practice, participants build a type of strength in solitude, which is not a lonely space but rather full and re-generative. As examples, Vasudev mentions the physiological and psychological benefits of reciting his mantra in solitude and Jyoti chooses to use mantra as a practice while she is “doing dishes or something mundane.” Vama suggests sitting in silence “has got a really good role to play. You can take care of a lot of your issues by just being silent. Sit and watch.” Participants highlight the necessity of fertile solitude so that they maintain a sense of awareness and belonging that is not bound to self or others. The sense of belonging is a felt sense of being a part of something larger, beyond the finite self – a connection to “God,” “the Universe,” or a “flow.” For participants, belonging to something greater than their physical selves gives them strength so that they may go out in the world to be with and interact in social spaces in which they may belong or not belong with others.

Beyond connecting with something greater than the finite self within their personal mindfulness-based practices, participants connect with others in their *sangha* or social communities. Grace comments on the sense of belonging with a social group in her yoga and meditation community:

It is a social practice in the moments when we are singing [or chanting] together, you feel a sense of group belonging and, if you get to know people after class, if you chit chat you create a sense of connection with other people, you feel like you are coming somewhere where you belong.

Grace continues and illuminates the decrease of personal, petty grievances due to a larger sense of community engagement:

When you get a bunch of people practicing and then doing stuff outside of practice together like running a festival or putting on an event or doing something outside of [the

personal], the sort of communication and conversation level is elevated. There is a higher goal in mind besides petty grievances. All of those petty grievances and that stuff is still there, but I feel like people are more, or have more of a priority of working through them and not getting stuck.

For Grace, “not getting stuck” in grievances enables her enhanced sense of belonging and getting along with those in her *sangha*. Grace’s mother, Sonia, comments that her programs are successful when participants feel as though “they’ve found a new family and they’ve connected to themselves.”

Participant Karl likens the ability to belong and connect to a practiced intuitive skill, which connects him with others. Karl says he has “developed the kind of intuition to be able to really see people and really connect to people and really be able to uplift them.” Karl explains the connection between himself and others: “I see your issue, exactly, it’s right there, glass clear. As we are all human, we tend to project that back on ourselves, so I can see everybody so clearly, I must be seeing myself, too. That is where the joke starts.” Karl laughs as he continues talking about how the other is a mirror for his self: “you have someone who will always mirror you at every single corner.” Karl sees the other as a mirror for himself. According to Karl, if he does not like the other for certain behaviours, words, or characteristics, it must be something in himself he is avoiding or wants to detach from. Seeing unappealing characteristics in others may be the most challenging aspect of accepting interconnectivity with others. If we are all interconnected, then the others’ unsavoury parts are our unsavoury parts. The easy pill to swallow within the conceptual framework and practice of interbeing is that the others’ goodness is also our individual and collective goodness. The tough pill to swallow is that others’ not-so-goodness is also our own. We may not want to belong to the not-so-good group of people and

admit sharing their characteristics, such as anger or hate.

Hanh (1993) does not espouse divorcing one's self from anger and the unsavoury but rather to be mindful of it all: "to practice looking deeply [at the unsavoury] is the basic medicine for anger and hatred" (p. 33). Hanh (1993) suggests if we cannot transform anger immediately, it is best to leave the situation for a mindful walk. For Hanh (1993), looking deeply and then planting seeds of compassion within the anger can be transformative. Hanh likens this to lotus seeds in the mud in his talks with *sangha*. No mud, no lotus; lotus flowers do not grow without mud, just as compassion and kindness do not grow without existence and acceptance of anger and hatred.

Participant Vasudev's comments on maintaining relationships with difficult family members or friends are in keeping with Hanh's sentiment of facing, not divorcing, difficulty. Vasudev is adamant that one must take time to be in social union with difficult others, whereas Gabe and Sybil felt the need to detach from difficult family members. This divergence highlights the individual practitioner's interpretation of belonging and responsibility to others. For Vasudev, it is a responsibility to maintain in union or connection with all others and "touch someone's heart" to bring the difficult others back to a sense of belonging within their family or social group. For Gabe, Sybil, and Neil, it is a responsibility to maintain one's own peace through detaching from difficult others, namely their family members or friends who do not support their practices or respect their boundaries. Deena also mentioned she had left a difficult relationship with her husband after a few years of yoga practice. In Karl's case, he was strict with his students at the international school in terms of upholding the rules, but he allowed them to say what they need to say, yell, or be "asses" at times. Karl didn't eschew the students' behaviour; he let it pass, and as far as I could tell, the students respected and trusted Karl as well



as felt they belonged at the school. It is interesting to note that five participants, Gabe, Sybil, Neil, Grace, and Deena, mention maintaining their own peace rather than remaining in contact with difficult others, and three participants, Vasudev, Karl, and Sonia, stay in connection with difficult others. It is Karl's job to be with difficult teenagers; Vasudev is adamant that one should not give up on difficult relationships with others; and Sonia mentions she had allowed a using drug addict to join her yoga for addictions program, despite having a strict rule that participants be clean, or free from drug usage, during her program. By contrast, when I ask Grace about meeting a rude person in the street, she says, "just walk around them" and, for his part, Gabe remarks, "I don't have anything to do with them, so I try not to get mad at them, try not to have any sense of retribution, um, but just simply detach." The data are divergent on this point and highlight the fact detachment is not so simple. There is a distinct divide on this point and unanswered questions, including the following: how connected should one remain with difficult others? And, if we are interconnected, is the difficult other an uncomfortable reflection of our self? Is detaching ethical in that it causes less harm or disturbance with difficult others? And, what is the ethical mindful thing to do?

My research question asks *what role mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga play in transforming knowledge of individualized selves into interconnectedness with others?*

Connectivity or interconnectivity are dependent on how one thinks or embodies self, others, and something greater, be it with God, Universe, or living in a flow. As discussed in this section, over time, for participants, mindfulness-based practices foster feelings of connection with self and others in community, belonging to a grander sense of self including God or the Universe, as well as varying levels of responsibility to self and other. Mindfulness-based practices *increase* participants' *awareness* of connections within themselves and with others, as well as increased

possibility of felt sense experience regarding interconnectivity with all others and the Universe. For Hanh (1993), Levinas (1969), and my participants, we are all linked, albeit differently, either by breath or responsibility, whether borne out of sameness or alterity. In sum, as evidenced by the data, mindfulness-based practices substantially increase one's awareness beyond notions of individualized self toward connection and interconnection with others and something beyond self and other. What interconnection entails depends on the participants' experiences in their communities of practice, including their yoga and meditation social networks as well as within relations with friends and family.

### **Mindfulness-Based Practices as a Socially Situated Literacy**

**Toward a spatial model of literacy.** In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the part of my research question that asks *how can mindfulness be understood as socially situated literacy?* I analyse whether skills of mindfulness-based practices, skills of recognizing, feeling, and experiencing self and others, may be conceptualized as a type of literacy. Here, I argue for a new model of literacy – a spatial model of literacy. In this model, being literate of self and others requires the skills identified by my participants including the ability to step back, detach, and neutrally observe self, others, and contextual, social environments in a way that is beyond logical awareness and includes a deep listening (Oliveros, 2015), or a deep “reading” of self and others, as participant Sonia suggests.

Contemporary scholars are beginning to consider contemplative and mindfulness-based practices as systems such as inner technology (Hart, 2008) or inner curriculum (Ergas, 2017). Soloway (2015) sparked my research questioning and curiosity with his proposal of mindfulness as literacy. Soloway (2015) likens mindfulness to literacy because, as he explains, it is a skill to build. Besides being a skill, I explore how mindfulness-based practices may be considered a

form of literacy and, in this way, expand on Street's (1984) models of literacy as autonomous and ideological. The model I posit here is a spatial model, which encompasses the reading of interiority, or one's thoughts, feelings, and reactions, as well as exteriority, or the social realm. The spatial model includes mindfulness as literacy and functions as a supplementary concept for contemporary literacies such as social emotional literacy (Matthews, 2006), moral literacy (Herman, 2008), and existential literacy (Arman, et al., 2013), all aforementioned in Chapter Two of this dissertation. In order to discuss aspects of mindfulness-based practices as a spatial form of literacy, in the following subsection I take up the following three areas: the reading of one's multiple minds; *getting out of the way* as a skill; and literacy of sound/silence.

**The reading of multiple minds.** The Kundalini yoga teacher-participants speak of three minds – positive, negative, and neutral. Their practices allow them to observe these minds, in the form of thoughts, while self-talk is happening as well as when in communication with others. In this sense, the participants are reading their own minds when in solitude as well as in relation with others. Thusly, the participants may be construed as mind readers. According to participants, positive mind encompasses thoughts including good news, hope, and elation while negative mind includes thoughts that are not bad per se, rather protective and critical. Neil comments, "I can recognize more easily when I am kicking into my very powerful default negative mind mechanism in interactions with other people." Neil's ability to read and discern his thoughts is a form of being literate. It is considered a meditative skill to be able to detach from thoughts long enough in order to categorize them and utilize pauses between thoughts and actions. Neil's mind-literacy is not only gained solely on his own with a solitary meditative practice. His spouse helps him become literate of his mind(s): "I'm getting called on it [the negative mind] more often by my lovely and talented wife and that's great." Because of Neil's

practices and heightened awareness, as well as because of his intimate social network with his teacher-wife, Neil comments he has become and is continuing to become increasingly more literate with his negative and positive minds and when these minds come into play. If marriage is the “highest form of yoga,” as union-ing of self and other, as Karl mentions that Yogi Bajan suggests, then I surmise Neil is practicing his yogic dogma. Neil is open and amenable to learning about aspects of his mind(s) from his wife. Neil says to his yoga students in class one day, “positive, negative, and neutral minds help us living in the real world, being able to function in the world.” The neutral mind, which discerns messages from both the positive and negative minds, helps Neil deal with unexpected happenings while teaching a class. During one of Neil’s classes, while he is delivering his key points of the lesson, the clock falls off the wall, a banner falls down, and his co-facilitator drops her binder open. Neil continues to teach, seemingly unfazed by the surrounding disturbances. During Deena’s yoga class one day, she speaks to the students about the neutral mind as “stillness and balance, being present, aware, attentive, drawing from both negative and positive sides and then assessing neutrally. Neutral mind operates from clarity, openness, non-attachment, forgiveness.” According to participants, the neutral mind is honed by their long-term mindfulness-based practices. For participants, neutral mind is a naturally unfolding by-product of their practices, which helps with their social realms, as Deena explains further: “when we accept the self with compassion, we begin to respect others’ views and the need to control and be right decreases as we work from the neutral mind more and more.”

Carla in Santiago talks at length about managing conflicts better. Carla mentions being aware, or literate, of her sister’s lifelong bold moves to push Carla’s buttons. Carla says she is becoming less reactive over time and other participants also comment on the interactions

between self and others shifting over time with a mindfulness-based practice. There is a literacy being created with these cases; when behaviour shifts, from reactivity into neutral mind assessment, it is directly linked to being skilled or literate in reading one's own reactions, thoughts, emotions and then taking pause to respond or not. These shifts in one's heightened awareness or spatial literacy are slow and take time, similar to becoming literate in a new language or linguistic code. This type of literacy involves an invisible language or code of thoughts, feelings, and reactions created by the mind(s). Spatial literacy requires being literate of the processes and movement of the minds, as well as the content of the thoughts. In a similar fashion, Vygotsky (1962) describes the ebb and flow between thoughts and words: "the relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought" (p. 218). I posit participants in this study are literate in the movements of the mind(s). In Carla's case, she says, "before [my practices] I was very reactive and mad and had hate, a lot of emotions." Because of her mindfulness-based practices, the emotions do not cease, but Carla is literate in reading her thoughts, processes of emotions, history with her button-pushing sister, and the present moment simultaneously before she reacts. I posit her spatial literacy includes reading all of these processes within seconds of interactions as well as being aware of her processes. Once spatially literate, through the participants' increased skills to read themselves, they have, over time and with mindfulness-based practices, reinvented their engagements in socially situated contexts.

As another example, Carla's friend comments on Carla's greying hair when we bump into her friend at the market; her friend exclaims, "I didn't recognize you! I thought, who is this old woman?" Carla explains to me later this would have caused a negative-mind, critical reaction prior to her honing mindfulness. In Chile, Carla's greying hair may be interpreted as letting one's

self go, in a negative way. Carla is now literate in the opposite thought or code of the positive mind; she is letting herself go to be more natural and health conscious, free from dyes, perfumes, and socially conditioned pressures. For Carla, societal pressures are giving way to a new way of thinking and being for herself. In the most severe example in my study, Helen in Chile was able to use her spatial literacy in the direst of situations, while being beaten by two intruders in her bedroom. She was able to go beyond fear into a deep reading of the situation. She surmised that it was good the intruders were distracted by beating her. During the robbery, her positive mind was strong and was able to over-ride the negative situation with both positive mind, thinking it was good they were distracted while beating her, and negative mind, having ample “protective spirit” to get the gun from under the pillow. She recounts, while they were beating her, she inched over toward her revolver. She maintained focus and composure and was able to carry through the ultimate defense of herself and her loved ones in her home. I argue Helen had a spatial literacy of her self, others, and the situation due to her long-term mindfulness practices. She was mindfully literate, with heightened awareness of all goings-on in the moment, during ultimate duress. During Helen’s ongoing meditation practice after the double homicide, for six months, she was continually reading the dark parts of her mind including repetitive thoughts that she might like to kill again. She continued her spatial literacy of her inner thoughts and feelings as they kept unfolding for her in the months after the event. Carla also mentions being aware or reading the “double discourse” within her self. At the time of the research, Carla was becoming more literate with her light and dark sides, her positive and negative minds, the *gu* and *ru* within her self – her inner guru.

These examples from my participants’ lives may be considered a literacy of mind codes – positive, negative, and neutral. The language of self awareness, in this case positive, negative,

and neutral minds, over time turns into a literacy of self and others, and therefore an experiential understanding of the myriad ways of being and thinking, both in suffering and in joy. Karl calls this the “development of his intuition.” For participants, mindfulness-based practices ignite a process of being intuitively aware of both the self as well as what or who is beyond the finite self. This heightened awareness over time transforms the mindfulness practitioner into becoming spatially literate of self and others. Having awareness of, or being literate in, positive and negative minds, the participants’ neutral mind is cultivated over time. The awareness and engrained literacy of a neutral mind allows participants to engage with others differently, with less reaction. The new literacy of neutral mind is useful so that, as Karl elucidates, when he meets “an ass at the shopping market”, he does not become an “ass back”. Karl speaks about working with teenagers at a yoga-based international school in India: “Its very easy to have [the teen-aged students] go up, go down, yell, scream, cuss, and I keep a smile on my face and be like, ‘hey, I love you anyway, it’s okay’.” The participants do their *sadhana* (daily spiritual mindfulness practices) until, and so that, their proficiency in observing self and others seeps into their social lives. In this way, spatial literacy, which is cultivated through mindful awareness, decreases collective, social *dukkha* or suffering. And, as mentioned earlier in this section, reading others may be done differently, as Sonia explains: “read the other person when you are listening to them. When you sit with someone and deeply listen to them, you listen with your whole body as the ear.” I posit the participants are fully functioning as spatially literate using holistic embodied mindfulness practices to read all their minds.

**Mindful skill building: Getting out of the way.** Soloway (2015) posits, “mindfulness is a literacy we are all capable of developing through practice. Just like learning to read a book, mindfulness is a literacy of learning to read the present moment as it is – minus the storylines we

typically attach to experience” (p. 83). Participant Helen in Chile comments skill building is like building a house: “You cannot build a house if you’ve got two bricks and three pieces of wood. You cannot. So, the consciousness works with what is has to work with and that includes what it came with.” In other words, one begins with a little awareness, and if one does mindfulness-based practices, conscious awareness, or literacy, of self and others is expanded. This is similar to becoming literate in a language. For example, I know a few words in French, I use them while in Montreal and then fall back onto my English. I am not fully literate in French yet. If I learn more words, I may speak more words. Similarly, if I have more mindfulness-based practice honing my conscious awareness of self and others, I may begin to utilize more of this spatial literacy with self and others. But if I have more consciousness awareness or spatial literacy, paradoxically, I begin to be less reactive and controlling, and more responsive and “let things flow.” Vama suggests the conscious practitioner passively sits back and becomes silent, not trying to think or create. In this way, the practitioner gets out of the way in order to allow a flow to happen. Vama explains, “just let it be a stream, like water, that is going without your control, without your interference.” Gabe similarly says, “all you gotta do is maintain your effort when you are on your mat, everything else will fall in to place.” After and during the maintenance of one’s mindful efforts, the next step toward honing spatial literacy in the social realm is to get out of the way so that something greater than the finite self is witnessed. Once witnessed, then there is practice (on the mat, with one’s self) and then application in the social world (off of the mat, with others in social spaces). This is akin to me learning French – I do not sit back in phase one of language learning. I try to learn, to remember words in French, then apply them in role-play or social situations. Language is not held in the bounds of the classroom walls just as mindfulness practice is not held within the bounds of the mat or studio. Jyoti comments, “it’s one thing to get



on the mat and we can practice and we can bend every which way, and do all that, but then it has to come off the mat....” The participants come off the mat and their practice next is to remember to sit back when in social situations. It is a paradoxical passive/not passive engagement with others – remembering to actively sit back is a doing/being process. And, as the philosophers Levinas (1969) and Hanh (1993) and my participants all suggest, there is ethical responsibility bound up with doing/being with others. The literacy of in-between spaces and consciousness is held up in ethics of responsibility, in relation with others. Helen illuminates, “it’s not enough to do the yoga and meditation. The intelligence is then placed at the service of consciousness so all the intellectual information is then placed in service of those around me.” Jyoti further elucidates, “when I’m sitting with someone, I really want to tune into them - what am I saying, what are they saying? I don’t wanna be busy looking at my phone, you know what I mean? I wanna be fully present.” In tuning into and being “fully present” for others, participants remark on a subsequent “uplifting” of others in their being-ness presence.

Next, I query if mindfulness literacy and getting out of the way functions in order to uplift others. In my literature review, specifically on pages 38-39, I provide a list of how literacy functions. According to Mikulecky (1990), there are several functions of literacy, which include illuminating the ways of God and humanity, selling soap, and spawning creativity. Mikulecky (1990) also writes, “literacy, by itself, wields no magical transforming power over learning and life” (p. 24). If literacy can be expanded to include spatial awareness of the flow of consciousness, one’s own thoughts, and relations with others, Mikulecky (1990) is mistaken on this point. There *is* a magical quality to literacy, as I have explored in the previous section. The quality of spatial literacy allows one to read minds and function differently, one could say optimally, with any and all others, whether it be a former friend who comments on you looking

older, greyer, or intruders beating you with the butt of their guns. There is also a magical quality to having an elevated spatial literacy, one that is quite difficult here to explain. Jyoti mentions the impact of this type of perhaps magical social engagement with one of her teachers from a level two Kundalini yoga course:

When [the teacher] talks to you, he looks you right in the eyes, and when he talks to you, you don't even remember what you're gonna say. It's like okay, I'm good now, hahhahaha. You get that sense that it's all good. Him being present, that feeling like you don't have to figure anything out, just that you are being listened to. I want more of that. I want to be present for myself and for people.

Jyoti's teacher is deeply listening or reading her, and he does not speak a lot. That feels good, and uplifting, for Jyoti. Her teacher leaves space in between, without extraneous speaking or information. Jyoti's teacher may well be highly literate in the spaces in between, literate in silent mysterious places or spaces, which generate uplifting engagements with others. In the literature and popular discourse, mindfulness-based practices have gestured to increased health and well-being for the individual; however, as in the example above with Jyoti and her teacher, the increase in well-being is also palpably shared or co-experienced in the social spaces with others. Spatial literacy may well be the stuff of magic, and a profound way of being and functioning in the world.

The magic of spatial literacy can disappear, however. Participants concur that mindfulness-based practices, which include certain stillness of the minds and reading of embodied spaces, are potent and generative, but difficult for some to understand or experience, and they can dwindle. As Karl suggests, he must continue practicing or the effect "fizzles". When he practices less, he becomes less spatially literate. Spatial literacy must be maintained,

like learning a second or third language; one must practice to keep it up. For example, if I am immersed in French-speaking culture, living in Montreal, I become more versed in social literacy. When I am in Toronto, not speaking French, my language skills diminish. I argue this is the same for spatial literacy of mindfulness-based practices. For the effect not to fizzle, one must be immersed in the practice with one's self as well as in social spaces. As Karl mentions, his daily *sadhana* keeps his "spiritual pillar in tact" in order to keep being a pillar for others, uplifting others, and doing/being optimally.

Helen comments, "Patanjali [a yogic sage] said yoga is not for everyone. If it is an immature being, they do not have the capacity to quiet the waves of the mind because they don't have the capacity of stillness." The capacity of stillness is honed over time with mindfulness-based practices. Learning mindfulness-based practices, like learning a language, is a balance between being ready and having desire to learn, having means to do so, and the context to do so, and then applying what has been learned in myriad social contexts. Participants comment that if they do not practice with self and others, they lose the benefits – the awareness, magic, and responsive attentiveness are lost. The building of one's language and literacy skills take time, similar to building skills in mindfulness-based practices towards heightened awareness, as Vasudev suggests: "Quick is never gonna happen. ... Everything's gonna take the time. Passing out is quick. Everything else takes time. Sun comes slowly to kill the darkness."

**Literate in sound/silence.** One of the skills slowly built with mindfulness-based practices is apparent in the third emergent theme from the data – participants are literate in sound/silence. In particular, five participants are literate in Sanskrit mantra and eight participants are literate in Gurmukhi mantra. Participants recite mantra internally or externally. According to participants, mantra clears the mind of chatter, clearing the multiple minds away, so that

participants may experience silence or perhaps *shuniya* (a state of emptiness/fullness or being zero). Mantra is a tool used by participants. Helen explains, “a mantra will not produce an altered state. Mantra or mind projected is a tool for meditation. All a mantra does is it will redirect flow of thought, but not create an altered state of consciousness.” Mantra allows participants to clear the mind of thoughts, which, in turn, opens up possibility for silence and stillness for the participants. Participants comment mantra prepares them to receive messages or work with a flow of consciousness after the still, silent opening is created. Participants then are able to sit back and receive or be open to the flow. Sonia explains, “consciousness is coming through us, it just needs a little bit of direction. [We] create the holding tank for it and it happens on its own.” Like the participants in my study (Bliss, 2018) at an urban ashram, conducted concurrently with my dissertation, the participants of this study concur – silence is not empty; it is like a pregnant pause, full of possibilities. Karl remarks that silence is more valuable because it is less. The participants are skilful or literate in silence, as they have built their practice to become literate of the fullness of silence.

### **A Return to Interconnectivity: Self-reflexive Notes on Language and *Ahimsa***

i stu,,,,,m b l e in this lan guage.  
i fa ll down in this lang ua GE.  
i am p & a & I & n = in this lang / uage.  
my (mouth). Heart. arms are losing muscle + in this l  
a n g u age.  
My body does not \$ recognize the taste \$ of this –  
language-.  
i long

---

in this LANGUAGE.  
I am not/ {myself} in this l anguage.”

– e.n.g.l.i.s.h./ for all of us who are held  
captive

Like waheed (2013) I feel a struggle with the language I use in my dissertation in order to argue toward spatial literacy. I argue the nuanced reading of sound/silence and interconnective spaces, experienced within and due to mindfulness-based practices, is a literacy. This position or argument is fraught with language, which has shifts in meaning, yet must be as exacting as possible in this dissertation. In particular, literacy and mindfulness have multiple and shifting definitions, as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. As a self-reflexive ethnographic researcher, I not only ask *what's going on* in the participants' personal and social experiences, but also examine the "structural and personal conditions, which help us [as researchers] understand the knowledge we create" (Dean, 2017, p. 10). In particular, I add this section in order to self-reflexively ask *what is going on* with the language I use to describe the participants' lived experiences and the concept of mindfulness as literacy.

At the *Provoking Curriculum* conference in February 2017, when I asked a professor who practices and writes about mindfulness if it could be a form of literacy, she paused a moment and then answered, "No, it can't. It just can't" (C. Eppert, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2017). In 2017, I began to wonder about the alchemy of the terms - mindfulness and literacy - as well as the intersection or difference between thinking mindfulness can or can't be a form of literacy.

According to Vygotsky (1962), consciousness floats all possible thoughts: "the relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought" (p. 218). Vygotsky (1962) asserts we choose words from a flow of consciousness and make bundles of thoughts into communication. In other words, all my words, sentences, paragraphs, and sections here in this dissertation are thought-bundles. Like C. Eppert's reaction to my question, the reader may think mindfulness and literacy do not belong

together. Through the data and a scholarly trail in multiliteracies, I posit mindfulness may indeed be a literacy that adds ethical responsibility within literacy and mindfulness studies. Street (1984) posits two models of literacy, autonomous (literacy unto itself) and ideological (literacy for social purpose), and here I add a model of spatial literacy (literacy of self and other and in between-ness). Cazden, et al. (1996), the New London Group, redefine the process of literacy to include multiple streams of meaning-making such as the linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, *and spatial*. Spurred on by the emergence of contemporary forms of literacy such as social emotional literacy (Matthews, 2006); moral literacy (Herman, 2008); existential literacy (Arman, et al., 2013), Soloway's mindfulness literacy is worth considering more deeply. Through long term mindfulness-based practices, my participants have built skills of heightened awareness of self and other, which has transformed them from living as mere individuals to living more consciously with others, including their families, friends, and students. For some participants, they have ideas and a felt sense that they are the other, or at least mirrored by the other. Yogi Bajan asserts one is the other. Hanh (1993) writes we inter-are. Levinas (1969) posits we can never really know the other. Perhaps Yogi Bajan, Hanh, and Levinas are all pointing to the same ethical direction – that of caring for the other, regardless of sameness, oneness, or radical difference. As Todd (2009) elucidates, even though Levinas' words are not couched in care and empathy, his discomfiting philosophy “is a relentless examination of the ways in which violence plagues our lives and our capacities for responding in the face of them” (p. 20). For all three of these philosophers, Yogi Bajan, Hanh (1993), and Levinas (1969), our human capacities include moving toward awareness of responsibility for others. They go so far as positing our human capacity includes devotion to other as the self or others as radically different. Whether in language of sameness or alterity, there can be responsibility, devotion, and possibility

to ultimately embody *ahimsa* (non-harming).

Regardless of one's language choice to express thought-bundles, we have to live with each other, be social, use language(s) and our multiple literacies. Part of the language or literacy that participants are using with a mindfulness practice is *reading* self and others in myriad ways. Reading others includes awareness of something elusive and greater for participants of this study - a reading of God or the Universe. Language to describe our readings of self, other, and something greater is elusive. The terms God is perhaps more fraught and contested than the terms literacy and mindfulness. I avoided asking my participants what or who God is when they mentioned God. I spared my participants, and myself, the trouble of answering the question. As a yoga Kundalini teacher, I suspect the participants would say what Yogi Bhajan said in some of his lectures and books, which has become a familiar saying in the Kundalini yoga community: "If you can't see God in all, you can't see God at all." Because of the limited scope of language, and among other reasons, discussion of God can be a juggernaut.

Vama, in India, speaks about the difficulty of language:

This is a linguistic difficulty that we have to use relative terminologies. Language can't be absolute and that is why Sanskrit never wrote down things. Sanskrit is always sung because in singing it's easier. You can take liberty when you are in poetry.

Vama also commented that I could not take liberties writing a dissertation; he said I had to be exacting, yet "language can't be absolute." It is difficult to be precise here as there are elusive variables including the terms of mindfulness and literacy, my reading of the data and seeing of emergent themes, as well as my research from an *emic* (insider) perspective, which is complex. Most elusive of all may be my thoughts as they are mere bundles I have put together from a flow of consciousness, according to Vygotsky (1962). I could rewrite the whole dissertation with the

same data set and it could be entirely different. This is difficult exacting work or poetic musing. Although I am not entirely taking poetic license in this dissertation, I am taking the liberty to discuss something more than we can perhaps describe within the limitations of language. I argue for a spatial model of literacy so that we can individually and collectively be challenged and open up to something new, something that may be possible, something that language cannot capture in exacting documentation and argument. According to Levinas (1969), language is a breakage of totality:

The relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the other to me. In other words, language is spoken where community between the terms of the relationship is wanting, where the common plane is wanting or is yet to be constituted. (p. 73)

The “common plane” of mindfulness as a literacy has yet to be fully constituted. I discuss, using language which separates, mindfulness-based practices toward a union or interbeing, but that union, for Levinas (1969), will never be constituted. However, Levinas (1969) does maintain there is an ethical condition or bond between expression, with language, and responsibility. Like self and other, what is possible and impossible within the limits of language may be inextricably linked by responsibility.

This dissertation discussion is a beginning of possibilities in conceptualizing mindfulness as literacy (Soloway, 2015) not only as a skill to build but also as an ethical responsibility to others. Here, I attempt to open the possibility of a spatial model of literacy which supplements literacies that encompass the felt sense experiences, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and mindfulness-based practices that propel us toward a new way of being and functioning in the world, with self and others. My arguing for spatial literacy may be like what Van Maanen (2010)



calls ethnography - “something of a mess, a mystery, and a miracle” (p. 251). Within the possibilities of the messy mystery of spatial literacy, as well as the experience of inexplicable moments that mindfulness-based practices afford the participants in this study, there lies something greater than the individual self. Within this conceptualization lies an ethical underpinning that we are all responsible for each other. Spatial literacy gestures toward ethical interaction, underpinned by *ahimsa* or non-harming, and a way of being and acting which embraces harmony. These concepts of *ahimsa* and harmony in-between self and others take practice and time to unfold – for the concepts to be practiced, one may need mindfulness literacy.

Participant Vama asserts the yogic way is integrating aspects of self and other and interacting with both is a learned art over time. He continues, “once you learn this art, you see how they are balanced nicely.” Hanh (1993) proposes the term interbeing to describe engagement with the world and others after one has established a mindfulness practice. For Hanh (1993), there is no separation of our mind and our world: “if we look deeply into our mind, we see the world deeply at the same time. If we understand the world, we understand our mind” (p. 4). Once one realizes the mind-world connection, Hanh (1993) posits we transform the self first. “Once we get in touch with the source of understanding and compassion [within and for the self first], this transformation is realized and all our actions will naturally protect and enhance life” (Hanh, 1993, p. 5). Hanh (1993) also asserts it is only after a mindful practice and realization of the interconnection between self and other that we may experience “a harmony between ourselves and nature, between our own joy and the joy of others” (p. 5). According to Hanh (1993), mindfulness practices are integral as “the purpose [of mindfulness practice] is to have peace for ourselves and others right now, while we are alive and breathing. Means and ends cannot be separated.” (p. 6) In other words, there is no separation between means and ends or

self and other. Similar to the participants in my research, Hanh (1993) posits the individual's seeking and individualized practice is the first step in this realization of interconnectedness. Once realization of interbeing occurs, participant Gabe suggests it is not so much what we are doing individually and collectively, rather *how* we do it. Are the things we do done with care or do they cause suffering to self and others? Gabe explains:

The key to that effort is the feel of the energy of the people around you. When you feel there are 20, 30 people [in the meditative space, like a yoga class] that have all come here and realize they are here to support you, life is great, and you feel you are there to support them, so you maintain your effort. That is the key to this sense of the energy together, and working together and realizing everybody is supporting each other in this journey.

Gabe speaks of "supporting each other." In light of my earlier discussion of language, I wonder what supportive language sounds like? How may we collectively and individually cultivate language of support? Would it be a natural by-product of mindfulness literacy? Perhaps, once one is mindfully literate, the *how* of one's actions alleviates social *dukkha* (suffering). Gabe explains the transformative impact of mindfulness-based practices:

[Mindfulness-based practices] will transform how you deal with the outer world and how it is perceived without knowing that that is what is happening. To me, that's the beauty of it, is that it happens at a level beyond thinking about it, but stay at it, stay at your practice and feel that transformative effect just through the effort.

Vama posits, "For a real sustainable world and relationships, [mindfulness-based practices] are the most important thing a person needs." For Vama, the practices lead to love:

In relationship, the first thing is love. *Ahimsa* [non-harming] is love. I am in love towards existence. I am in love towards life. ...[there is] a psychological shift from *himsa*

[harming] to *ahimsa* [non-harming]. That is how yoga comes from inside to outside. There is a sense of responsibility to care for others, and be gentle, as Wagamese (2016) poetically suggests:

walk gently  
ON THE EARTH  
and do each other  
NO HARM  
(p. 34)

Hanh (1993) suggests contact with suffering is key for one's mind to realize our collective experience of suffering (p. 17). Sonia, Gabe, Helen, and Vama mention that the world is in trouble, the planet is in crisis, humanity and the earth are suffering. Vama asserts, "we have to propagate [mindfulness] principles. Now is the time because we are in need. The world is desperate." Gabe suggests we collectively, through our individual practices, "let the transformation keep happening and hopefully then it spreads like a genesis, you know, through your city, through your community, and ultimately then through your world." The genesis has already started with people practicing mindfulness-based practices.

A spatial model of literacy allows for persons to be situated in the dynamic in-between-ness of self and other. With sustained practice and a new model in which the practices are conceptualized as a spatial literacy, the spread and legitimization and ethical need to relieve social *dukkha* (suffering) will ensue. Like the moniker on the fancy yoga studio wall, peace may indeed begin with me, and once more people are spatially literate, peace may proliferate beyond the self. Mindfulness literacy may yet prove to be felt sense language in action, an ethical language moving one individually and collectively toward *ahimsa* (non-harming).

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusions**

### **“The Future of Being Present”**

On the newsstands from September 2018 to June 2019, there is a special edition of Time Magazine titled *The New Mindfulness: Living, Thinking, Being*. The glossy cover of this 96-page magazine features a thin young woman in prayer pose, hands held in front of her chest. The second page features a trim young man on a beach. Both subjects in the photos are fit, white, and smiling. In the table of contents, there is no mention of *ahimsa* (non-harming) or mindfulness for others or in community. The first section in the magazine is titled *The Future of Being Present*. It highlights the stress of technology on individuals and mobile phone apps that may help one meditate as well as how mindfulness is beneficial for individuals such as students taming their digital stress, firefighters under pressure, and soldiers after war. In other words, the focus is on managing the current stressors built in our systems of fast-paced modern living. “The New Mindfulness” in Time Magazine does not include interconnectivity with others. It is as if “peace begins with me,” like the moniker on the fancy yoga studio wall, and after that, there is no further consideration beyond the self – no consideration of others.

### **Divergences in the Data and Conceptual Frameworks**

For the 13 mindfulness-based educators in Chile, Canada, and India, peace begins with themselves as individuals and, over time with their mindfulness-based practices, transforms into new ways of interacting in their social spaces, as highlighted and discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six of this dissertation. Despite divergences across cultures and personal experiences, the data gleaned from participants gesture toward mindfulness as a social practice after a long-term mindfulness-based practice has been established. Participants comment on how they interact differently with others after becoming acutely aware of their thoughts. Their social

practices with others become less reactive. Illuminated by the three emergent themes, doing/being, inward/outward or individual/social, and sound/silence, participants are *doing* differently after *being* mindful. The doing/being is reflected in their individual awareness as well as interaction with others.

This study has revealed four core divergences, discussed among the emergent themes in Chapter Five:

1. wearing a turban, or not;
2. where mindfulness-based practices are done – on the yoga mat or off of the mat;
3. the business of mindfulness-based practices;
4. detachment, or not, from difficult others.

These divergences have varying levels of implications for answering my research question: *How can mindfulness be understood as socially situated literacy, and what role can mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga play in transforming knowledge of individualized selves into interconnectedness with others?*

Based on participants' personal and cultural beliefs, they may wear a turban, or not. This is an interesting divergence that could be its own dissertation topic exploring visual cues, symbols, and meaning making among Kundalini yoga and meditation teachers across cultures. Although wearing a turban does not suggest interconnectivity, it does denote one's connectivity within a more orthodox segment of the yogic group. In fact, wearing a turban, or not, may create tension among members in the community. From an *emic* (insider) perspective, when I see a Kundalini yoga and meditation teacher with a turban, it cues me to quickly and visually *read* them as more orthodox than the teacher that does not wear the turban. For participants, the turban may be a tool, part of their identity, or necessary for enlightenment; however, none of these uses

of a turban imply interconnectivity or literacy. I posit spatial literacy begins with what is experienced or felt deeper than the visual – a deep listening (Oliveros, 2015) or deep reading entails going beyond visual input, as my participants gestured to through the data presented and discussed in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

The second and third divergences, doing mindfulness-based practices on or off the yoga mat and the business of yoga, imply levels of possibilities in connectivity with others, depending on the cultural or personal system one operates in and from. For example, in India, meditation and yoga is a part of living, outside of studios and off of the yoga mat; mindfulness-based practices are done anywhere, on rooftops and along the banks of rivers. Some courses and classes are free for attendees but some, particularly teacher training courses, are costly and accredited under an American governing body. Some by-donation classes are open to any and every body along the banks of the Ganges river while other costly programs are welcoming to others who can afford the programs. Who is welcome or who is connected depends on the cost of the program and where it is held – an expensive studio or a grassy knoll. In this study, participants in India claim mindfulness-based practices cannot be separated as on the mat or off the mat; practice happens on *and* off the mat. For participants, the practices include every breath in a doing/being/doing/being cycle in perpetuity with others in social spaces. A few marked outliers, Yogi Cash, Vama, and Vasudev, are implementing programs that advocate for supporting and learning of interconnectivity between self and others: Yogi Cash is building a mobile phone app to list by-donation meditation and yoga classes outside of yoga studio settings; Vasudev offers courses customized to small groups or individuals, which include learning about and living yoga (union) in the streets of Rishikesh; and Vama is building a new ashram and teacher-training program to include sustainability and small-scale food production. These three

are examples of individuals working toward promoting the learning of interconnectivity through mindfulness-based practices. In Chile, participants take the teachings of mindfulness-based practices out of the studios into rehabilitation and domestic abuse shelters, and this form of outreach may be construed as promoting a moderate level of connectivity with others. The outreach programs are free for less affluent attendees and taught by more affluent teachers who volunteer their time. Further research and discussion regarding affluence would illuminate privilege in the teaching and learning of mindfulness-based practices. In Chile, my participants were not wealthy; in fact, all three of them lived in modest apartments. The Chilean yoga studio owner, who was too busy to meet with me, was allegedly building a million dollar home. I did not stay long enough to investigate further. In Chile, there is possibility of studying the ethical and social impact of affluent teachers going into economically depressed suburbs.

In Canada, the participants teach primarily in for-profit yoga studios, with little outreach, and more emphasis on the self, which may be due to the cultural milieu and current popular belief in mindfulness. The popular discourse of mindfulness-based practices is that they benefit the self, as noted in the special edition of *Time Magazine* cited at the beginning of this chapter; there is little inclusion of others within mindfulness discussions. The divergences of on/off the yoga mat and the business of mindfulness-based practices imply levels of possibilities, not probability, of outreach or connectivity with others in community. In India, the felt sense of interconnectivity is high, in Chile it is moderate, and in Canada it may be considered low as students in studios practice diligently on the mat for their own benefit. In sum, a sense of connectivity or interconnectivity with self and others varies across cultures and personal beliefs about mindfulness practice. When the spaces vary culturally, socially, and ideologically, this is where the frameworks of Levinas (1969) and Hanh (1993) are helpful and generative. Despite

and across cultural variances, the discourse of these two scholars is focused on responsibility to others, beyond the self, whether through alterity or difference (Levinas) or interbeing or sameness (Hanh). I posit spatial literacy is a skill or awareness that runs through/under/around that which divides. Mindfulness involves paying attention to an experience, no matter if the experience is divisive or unifying, from moment to moment: “Knowing what you are doing while you are doing it is the essence of mindfulness practice. This knowing is a non-conceptual knowing, or a bigger than conceptual knowing. It is awareness itself” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 16). Thus, spatial literacy includes an embodied awareness and a non-conceptual knowing or reading of experiences. As evidenced by participants in this study, experiences of doing/being mindful increases one’s awareness of common humanity, despite and across all cultural variances as well as ideological and ontological commitments.

Personal and cultural commitments and beliefs also inform participants’ views on the fourth divergence of maintaining a relationship or detaching from difficult others. Participants’ connectivity, or not, with difficult family members or persons they meet depends on whether their commitment is aligned with maintaining peace for the self only, or working toward care and harmony for and between self and others. All four divergences imply possibilities in levels of connectivity or interconnectivity between self and others. The divergences did not gesture toward mindfulness as a literacy. The divergences served to highlight the precarious possibilities in connectivity between self and others.

In this dissertation I have explored the data through the diverging lenses of Levinas (1969, 1989) and Hanh (1993) to see how belief and language shape responsibility and feeling connected to others. Drawing on the Levinasian (1969, 1989) connection to and responsibility for the Other through radical difference *and* Hanh’s (1993) inextricable interconnection with the



other, my conclusion yet suggests both frameworks suggest responsibility to others. They do so in three ways:

1. gesture toward care and non-harming of others, despite divergent ontological commitments and divergent language;
2. suggest a pressing need for ethical social interactions;
3. support a move toward a fundamental shift in the current popular discourse of mindfulness-based practices, a discourse currently primarily concerned with self.

By suggesting a new model of literacy, spatial literacy, I am encouraging a paradigm shift – for mindfulness-based practices to be conceptualized, discussed, and practiced with concern for both self *and* others.

### **Further Research Possibilities**

The special edition Time Magazine mentioned at the beginning of this chapter highlights the established paradigm of mindfulness with a focus on self as a resilient subject to engrained systems of the neoliberal agenda (Binkley, 2014; Purser & Milillo, 2015; Reveley, 2016). My study did not broach the creation of resilient mindful subjects and racialized mindfulness. Further research is necessary to reveal mindfulness programs “for maintaining the status quo rather than effecting transformative change” (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p. 4). Also, there is a current gap in the research exploring race and mindfulness-based practices. One attendee of the 10-day yoga and meditation program in Toronto commented to me one day at lunch: “Originally I was uncomfortable being of [east] Indian descent in yoga classes taught by mostly white teachers. It was weird – that white bodies led me back to an Indian practice.” I did not have a chance to broach the topic from the opposite perspective in India with Vama, Vasudev, and Jyoti, all of

Indian descent teaching predominantly white students. Further research questions linger: How can the current model of teaching and learning mindfulness-based practices be interrupted in order to cultivate inclusivity and interconnection? How can the embodiment of mindfulness-based practices interrupt neo-liberal agendas in education? Does spatial literacy create an environment for “spontaneous right action” as political acts toward social good and challenging current social order?

**Sound/silence for social transformation.** A member of the Canadian *yatra* in India, George, commented on the busy streets of Amritsar in the taxi cab: “three beeps is a warning, one long beep is *move over*, and a short beep is *watch out, I’m still here*.” George had just landed in India and was in the cab for about 10 minutes before he surmised the meanings of the beeps. George quickly became literate in Indian beeps, perhaps based on his previous knowledge of beeps in his home country of Brazil. In the cab with George, I had another scholarly hunch: If literacy can be conceptualized spatially, then it follows that a type of *resonant literacy* is possible. Sound scholars understand the potency of soundscapes (Gershon, 2011; Murray, 1977; Oliveros, 2005), and I suggest there is an opportunity for scholars to explore socially situated literacy of sound, or what I surmise may be resonant literacy. Participants in this dissertation study comment on the power of sounds, including music and mantra. Neil mentions the impact the beautiful music played in his initial yoga classes as a student:

In *savasana* [relaxation at the end of a yoga class], we listen to this beautiful music and that allowed me to relax, be present and still and there in a way that I hadn’t before. And, that is what held me to the practice and kept me coming back. I didn’t have a yoga body ... I was aching all the time, but I loved *savasana*, not just the laying down, but listening to this incredible music.

The music Gabe chooses while he teaches is less about what he likes and more about not disturbing others:

Music can be therapeutic, can be nice, silence can be nice as well, so either the chanting or music that is sung in a different language or Sanskrit or chants, bells, or vibrations, less and less of what I like and more and more of what I feel will not disturb anybody.

A few key comments from participants may propel studies in sound/silence and deep listening:

- The sound of *Om* is the combination of all sounds in the Universe.

– Gabe

- If you listen deeply, the sound wave...you are just there into *shuniya* [emptiness/fullness].

– Deena

- There is something to be said for repeating the vibrations, sacred prayers, and mantras and compositions in the original language it was spoken. Sound creates vibration. Sound creates form. Sound creates intention and manifestation.

– Sonia

Furthering the exploration of the third emergent theme in my dissertation data, sound/silence, will allow for insight in how social spaces may be interrupted and perhaps healed with sacred scripts (Sanskrit or Gurmukhi) and sound as well as generative silence.

### **At The Dalai Lama's Temple**

In India, I was fortunate to be in Dharamsala while the Dalai Lama was hosting the 33<sup>rd</sup> Mind and Life Dialogues: *Reimagining Human Flourishing*, with scientists, educators, and scholars. I attended each of the 4-day dialogues at the Temple of the Dalai Lama. Each morning, I stood along the pathway to greet the Dalai Lama when he arrived, and bade him goodbye each

afternoon as he departed. He took time to greet the visitors each morning along the walkway. He did not say anything to anyone. He was silent, walked with care, made eye contact with people, touched people's scarves or their hands, and he stopped a bit longer to touch the head of a baby swaddled in a cloth in a mother's arms. The first morning, while everyone was waiting for his entrance, I stood beside a local photographer. The photographer and I chatted about the photographer's work, documenting events at His Holiness' Temple. The photographer asked what I was doing in India. I said I was travelling with a group of Canadians and that our *yatra* (spiritual quest) was called *Journey into the Compassion Heart*. The photographer said, "And, what are you doing exactly?" I replied, "meditation, yoga, and happily seeing the Dalai Lama today." The photographer paused a few seconds, turned to look at me, and asked, "what do meditation and yoga have to do with compassion?" I was taken aback, that a northern Indian photographer for the events at the Dalai Lama's Temple would ask me, a white Canadian, to explain the connection of yoga (union) and compassion. Perhaps for the photographer, yoga is a series of exercises, rather than a *sadhana* (spiritual practice) toward a sense of interconnectivity or compassion. I did not embark on a long conversation with the photographer to find out more of his thoughts on yoga and meditation. We waited quietly, side by side, for the Dalai Lama to arrive.

Jyoti, the *yatra* leader and one of my participants, asked the office of the Dalai Lama if our group could have a private audience with His Holiness. The office declined the request, but booked us a 30-minute audience with one of the Dalai Lama's oracles, Khadro-la. I asked Khadro-la to address a part of my research question: *How is mindfulness a social practice?* Khadro-la responded, through her translator, with imperatives:

Be the observer, like a spy of the mind. Find wisdom, mindset. Sense consciousness.

There is no more clinging and suffering with a mind that realizes ‘no-self.’ A confused mind binds us to suffering. Compassion and love is our best wealth. Rely on and trust the Universal mind. Seek help with a spiritual mentor. Have analytic reflection on the causes of suffering. Those who only do meditation are like pigeons sitting on a wire. It is important to do your practice in daily living.

Khadro-la’s response reminded me of Helen in Chile commenting that some meditators are simply doing their routine: “They’re not doing it. They have thrown in the sponge. They are like zombies going through the paces.” According to Khadro-la and Helen, meditators are like zombies and pigeons if their concern is only for the self and does not include others.

At the Mind and Life Dialogues, educators from The Institute of Social and Emotional Education in Montreal, Sophie Langri and Tara Wilkie, talked of striking a balance of personal practice, social practice, and ethical community engagement in their 3-part framework: 1) The “Me” domain – understanding and regulating the self as well as developing self compassion, foundational for a map one’s internal world; 2) The “You” domain – including social awareness, relationship skills, mindfulness as a social practice, and conflict resolution; and, 3) The “Us” domain – appreciation of interdependence, responsible decision making, development of a spirit of cooperation and celebration of shared human values. Spatial literacy allows one to move from the “Me” domain to the “You” and “Us” domains. Without a literacy of mindfulness that includes others, without considering spatial literacy, I posit we remain stuck in the “Me” domain, as evidenced by the special edition of Time Magazine’s “New Mindfulness.” The new *ethical* mindfulness entails a move from “me” to “we,” and until the news reports on the ethical move, we are operating under a system of the neoliberal agenda for mindfulness, where self help in an energetically draining system is encouraged in order to keep up with systematic pressures. On

the second day of the dialogues, He asserted, “Thinking creates a lot of problems. We need more heart. If we don’t care about others, there will be no joy. Warm heartedness is a key factor. Analyze yourself, have conviction, then live. Live an affective life” (The Dalai Lama, Mind and Life Dialogues, March 13, 2018). The Dalai Lama summed up the second day of the dialogues by wondering what education in the year 2030 would look like. He said it must contain compassion and empathy for each other as well as trust in each other.

Spatial literacy, proposed in this dissertation, gestures toward generative possibilities for education in 2030, an education that is concerned for both self and others. Conceptualizing a spatial model of literacy is interruptive to the current discourse in mindfulness education. A spatial model of literacy is an invitation for educators and students to personally and collectively consider an ethical, thoughtful practice in service of both self and others, towards care and *ahimsa* (non-harming) to our collective humanity. This dissertation is a small move towards building awareness of the interconnection and spaces between self and others. Here, I highlight the need for a continued attentive discussion toward an ethical foundation for a new model of literacy – a mindful model of spatial literacy.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### a) History – Personal Demographics and Yoga & Meditation Program Information:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where were you born?
4. Where do you live now?
5. What is/are your vocation(s)?
6. How long have you been a yoga and meditation teacher?
7. What circumstances led you to teach yoga and meditation?
8. Currently, where do you teach?
9. What languages do you use when you teach?

### b) Experience – Being a Yoga & Meditation Teacher and Personal Mindfulness-based Practices

10. Tell me a little about your general experience of being a Kundalini yoga teacher?
11. In the yoga and meditation program you teach, what is/are the focus/foci?
12. When you first started teaching Kundalini yoga, what did your personal practice look like? What kind of yoga and meditation practices did you do?
13. Currently, what kind of yoga and meditation practices do you do?
14. Do you do any other mindfulness-based practices?
15. What is the role of yoga and meditation practices for your inner life and well-being?

### c) Reflections – Interconnections

16. What is the role of yoga and meditation practices for your external life, *off of the yoga mat*?
17. How would you describe the connection of personal practice and your interactions with others (including students, friends, family members, people in your community)?
18. What role does Gurmukhi play in your teaching and in your personal life?
19. What role does silence play?
20. What role does *shuniya* (being or becoming zero) play?
21. We have discussed a lot of topics during this interview. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about you and your experience as a Kundalini yoga teacher?

### d) Additional Questions: For Key Canadian Informant, Sonia, and her Daughter, Grace

1. What do you consider a successful program for the educators and participants?
2. What is an example of an internal success (for the self)?
3. What is an example of an external success (taking into account one's social life with family, friends, and community)?
4. What are your priorities in your work in these programs and with these students?
5. What motivates you in your work in these programs and with these students?

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_

**Study Name:** Interconnections Between Self and Others: Building an Ethical Foundation for a Mindful Model of Literacy

**Researcher:** Stacey (S.A.) Bliss

**Purpose of the Research:** To study the practices and perceptions of Kundalini yoga and meditation educators. The research inquiry includes observations and questions regarding the intra-personal and the inter-personal.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** Part 1: Allow Stacey Bliss to participate in your yoga and meditation program as a participant observer over an agreed period of time. Part 2: Answer interview questions during one or two in-person interviews with Stacey Bliss. Estimated time is up to 45 minutes for each interview. The interview(s) will be audio-recorded.

**Risks and Discomforts:** Other than bring up some new thoughts and considerations about your personal and teaching practices, we do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** The study will benefit the scholarly community and beyond in understanding of a group of educators who use practices such as yoga and meditation. You may benefit from your personal insights based on the questions asked in the interview(s). Results from the research will be published so that others may learn about such practices. Upon your request, I will provide an electronic pdf copy of the study once it is on file and online with York University.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and no gifts or monetary incentives are included with participation. You may choose not to answer questions and to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with researcher, Stacey Bliss, and York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Stacey Bliss, or York University. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

**Confidentiality:** All information gathered during the research process will be held in confidence to the greatest extent possible and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The observational data will be collected by Stacey Bliss using pen and notebook. The interview data will be collected with an audio-recording device. The interview transcript will be stored on Stacey Bliss' computer with a lock code until December 30, 2020 when all data will be deleted. This Informed Consent Form will be safely stored in a locked facility with the primary

researcher, Stacey Bliss until December 30, 2020, after which it will be shredded. The research will be published in Stacey Bliss' dissertation document and possibly in future scholarly articles. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito, either by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx extension xxxxx or by e-mail xxxxx. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, York University, phone xxx-xxx-xxxx.

**Legal Rights and Signatures:** I (\_\_\_\_\_), consent to participate in Interconnections Between Self and Others: Building an Ethical Foundation for a Mindful Model of Literacy conducted by Stacey Bliss. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix C: Original Proposed Dissertation Timeline

Task	2017					2018			2019	
	Jan-Apr	Apr-May	Jun-Aug	July-Aug	Sept-Jan	Jan-Apr	May-Aug	Sept-Dec	Jan-Mar	Mar-June
Read Associated Literature										
Write Proposal										
Finalize Draft Proposal										
Defend Proposal										
REB Ethics Protocol										
Ethics Approval										
Source Participants										
Prep Interview Questions										
Participant Observations										
Conduct Interviews										
Data Transcription										
Data Analysis										
Write Preliminary Findings										
Outline Dissertation Chapters										
Write/Discuss/Revise/Edit										
Defend Dissertation										XX
Take a Break / Retreat				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Apply for SSHRC Post-Doc										
Apply for York Post-Doc										

### Appendix D: Demographics of All Participants in the Study

Pseudonym	Age & Gender	Birthplace & Current Residency	Representing country for this study	Occupation	Years teaching yoga / meditation
Pablo	34 Male	Chile – Santiago, Chile	Chile	Director of not-for-profit foundation, yoga teacher	7
Carla	52 Female	Chile – Santiago, Chile	Chile	Photographer, tour guide, yoga teacher	1 year yoga; 12 years meditation
Helen	62 Female	Texas, USA – Santiago, Chile	Chile	Yoga teacher	40
Deena	67 Female	Poland – Toronto, Canada	Canada	Retired business analyst, yoga teacher	17
Grace	30 Female	Toronto – Toronto, Canada	Canada	Yoga studio owner, yoga teacher	13
Neil	62 Male	Toronto – Toronto, Canada	Canada	Musical event producer, yoga teacher	19
Sonia (key informant)	61 Female	Toronto – Owen Sound, Canada	Canada	Naturopathic doctor, yoga teacher trainer	41
Gabe	62 Male	Montreal – Calgary, Canada	Canada	Retired lawyer, yoga and kung-fu teacher	25
Jyoti	40 Female	Calgary – Vancouver, Canada	India	Administrator in plumbing/heating company, yoga teacher, India retreat guide	3
Sybil	75 Female	Massachusetts, USA – Anandpur Sahib, India	India	Administrator at Yogi Bhajan's estate; former assistant & nurse to Yogi Bhajan	40 years with Yogi Bhajan (not teaching)
Karl	45 Male	Berlin, Germany – Amritsar, India	India	Director of Resident Life, Miri Piri (International School)	22
Vama	38 Male	Deradun, India – Rishikesh, India	India	Principal of yoga school, yoga teacher, ashram director and owner	17
Vasudev	32 Male	Small village, India – Rishikesh, India	India	Yoga business owner, personalized retreats	7

## **Appendix E: The Researcher Becomes the Researched**

**One week in Shanghai.** *November 27, 2017, after a 14-hour flight from Toronto to Shanghai, I ask a clerk at the information desk in the arrivals concourse the best way to get to the area I am staying in central Shanghai. The bus. The ride is 22 Chinese yuan, about four Canadian dollars. The man in the bus line, originally from Malaysia, asks, “Do you have Chinese in you?” Similarly, I was asked when I lived in Japan if I had Japanese ancestry. No. “Japanese grandparents?” No. “On one side of the family maybe or cousins?” No. Well, maybe. I begin to doubt my known heritage and feel strong dejavu. Am I in China or Japan or China? And, what year is it? A combination of the warm bus to downtown Shanghai and jet lag makes me feel comfortable and sleepy, so I fall asleep intermittently. The dark skies are sprinkled with light, temples ablaze with neon lights on their iconic architecture. I arrive at the downtown bus depot not too far from Jing’an Temple in the core of Shanghai.*

*At my rental apartment, I eat sushi I bought at the 24-hour convenience store across the street, and crash for six hours. When I wake up, I drink a cold milky black tea from a can. I peek out the blinds and the streets are dark and quiet. I start watching a documentary called Yoga as Architecture of Peace. If yoga is considered architecture or a technology (as in Kundalini yoga), then why not conceptualize mindfulness-based practices including yoga and meditation as a socially situated literacy? Seems so clear that it is possible. Why not? Then I panic. What if I can’t find anyone in Shanghai to observe and interview for my study? I have an enormous feeling wash over me after my brief panicky thought. I reorient to a thought and a deep feeling that I’m not really in control of all this, whatever ‘this’ is. It all seems to be happening as an ongoing architecture of a bigger sort. Sleepy. I doze off watching architects of peace on my computer screen.*

*I wake up to the movie credits reeling on the screen. I google – Best café in Shanghai. I walk about 20 minutes to get an Americano coffee at Sumarian. They also serve breakfast bagels with egg and melted cheese. I sit at the long bar with large open windows along Shaanxi street. It is a busy street, with a lot of bicycles parked in front of the café, and pedestrians waiting for buses stopping to let off passengers. It is cool out, Shanghai in December, but the windows have been slid wide open. People are wearing sweaters and scarves inside the café. A very old man, maybe 100 years old, walks by on the sidewalk directly in front of the counter I'm sitting at. He is arms-length away. I could reach out to touch his arm if I were bold. He is walking in slow motion, arm in arm with a young woman. Maybe his granddaughter, care giver, or friend. He gives me a half-toothed grin as he goes by. His companion also looks at me and then says hello in English. While I watch the old, old man continue to walk, I shed a tear. I think of my mom, who is 81 years old and wonder if she'll live until 100.*

*I feel calm watching the street from the counter, looking out. Amongst the early morning busy-ness, there is a lot of silence and stillness. Palpable silence between the street noise - honking scooters, bells on scooters, birds in the trees, whirring cars going by, rustle of bags in woman's arm, the coffee grinding behind me, chatter of younger women and older women enjoying companionship of their friends at the coffee shop, taking selfies on their phones together, and laughing. There is silence between all of it. Japanese refer to this ever-pervading silence all around everything as ma. Across the street, a yellow leaf falls off of a tree. As it begins to fall, it catches my eye. I feel the fall and hear the crisp leaf edge touch down on the bricked sidewalk. A leaf rests on the hard surface.*

**Mother's fall.** On December 5, 2017, I called mom because I didn't hear from her when I had expected. She had fallen a couple hours earlier in her foyer. She said she went down hard,

tripped on the rug while putting her coat away after her morning walk. I could tell something was wrong from her voice – the timbre and tone of the voice changes when someone is in extreme pain. Her timbre was curt, as if she was holding the breath in, to ease the pain. After my brief, worrisome conversation with mom, I called Air Canada and arranged a flight back to Calgary that evening. After her fall, I was lifted up into the sky in order to be re-routed. I arrived in Calgary, picked up a Jeep rental vehicle, went directly to the hospital, and spent the next five weeks as a care giver for my mother.

**Mindfully caring for others.** For five weeks, I became my research focus. I wondered if my mindfulness and yogic practice was ready to take on the call of caring for my mother. How would I interact and interconnect with her? Below are excerpts from two weeks of raw fieldnotes highlighting mindful and not-so-mindful moments while caring for my mother:

*Dec 6 - Fly back from Shanghai, pick up mom at the hospital. Mom is in the waiting room. She has been released with a Tylenol 3 prescription. The emergency doctors did no X-rays and have released her. Argh. I'm so tired; I can't fight the hospital and mom is in pain and wants to go home. We go home but it is painful for her through the night. She can't find a comfortable resting position and can't walk far on her own. I help her to the bathroom when she needs to go.*

*Dec 7 – Make breakfast, call mom's GP, set up x-rays at near by clinic, call medical supply store regarding getting a walker, set up mom as comfortably as possible to watch TV, and then escape for some solace – a meditation class at noon at YP yoga studio, my 'home' studio where I began my practice many moons ago. The meditation class today is good. Totally relaxes me. I nod off a bit, jetlagged. Class calms me and I start menstruating – 4 days late. Stress or perimenopause? I don't know – they seem the same.*



*Dec 8 – Mom’s x-rays at the clinic are hard for her to handle. Getting in and out of the car and sitting are all very unpleasant. She had to lie down in the waiting area chairs while I went to get a wheel chair from a different floor of the hospital. I go to yoga in the late afternoon - Flow and Restore. I cry during the class as well as afterwards while I compliment the teacher on her delivery of the lesson. In class, I was able to release built-up pressure and emotion – yoga as release valve. And, added bonus, I felt no pressure as a not-so-able bodied person. The teacher was, to my estimation, a compassionate practitioner.*

*Dec 9 – Take care of mom, the morning routine. Then escape again – for a coffee in the northwest of the city a far north coffee shop with Teresa, who I met at Bergamo Curriculum conference in Ohio last year. It was the best feeling after months of solitude and on-the-road research to visit with a scholar and reconnect with her, talking about scholarly life, research, bumps in the road. So good, so needed. Intellectual exchange. Teresa called me a “good daughter” for coming to take care of mom. I wonder about the label of “good.”*

*Dec 10 – Our family friend, Dr. R, prescribed heavier pain meds for mom. He is not her regular doctor. I’m finding ways to help mom. The x-rays showed little conclusive result. Her GP is on vacation; the supply GP thinks it could be muscular. I use an f-bomb with the doctor. “Then, why is she in so much f\*cking pain? It doesn’t make sense that she can’t sit, walk, or lay down without extreme pain.” The doctor is upset and offended that I f-bombed, “Don’t swear at me.” I apologized and said it wasn’t directed at her. I’m upset that my mom is in pain and not getting answers, or being taken seriously that she is in extreme pain.*

*Dec 11 – Waiting for appointments to go for more tests. Same pain level.*

*Dec. 12 – Mom has been suffering now for a week with back pain. Difficult time. Next steps are more tests, including a nuclear bone scan - yikes - to detect all events/things in the*

*bones, the spine in particular. It is such a slow process to narrow in on something conclusive.*

*I'm helping mom with daily tasks and it is heart wrenching to see her struggle and in deep pain. I'm coping aka taking self-care by walking in the mild weather, marking papers a bit for SRS's course, and going to Restorative or Yin yoga teachers' classes that I've gone to off and on for years. I cry in the yoga classes. It is safe there. At home with mom is tricky space of giving care and not freaking out.*

*I have come face to face with a big test to work my mindfulness practice with a woman who has pushed my buttons for years - my mom. In general, family can be quite good at that – pushing buttons – as they know us well and we can be all things, kind and unkind. Family members tolerate a lot of sh\*t. This is the moment when the rubber hits the road or perhaps a Universal test of my genuinely understanding, feeling, or embodying mindfulness practices in real-time practice - with my mom while she is in great pain.*

*Overall, I feel a fascinating and unexpected shift in my experience with my mom this time around (she has had two other falls and injuries previously, not as serious). I feel more detached but at the same time more love – a kind of love with no neediness attached to it. It's a strange thing, a paradox, and I think somehow this speaks to how mindfulness practices are social - as if I cannot really 'be' in relationship with love without first being mindfully detached. Research continues...on myself.*

*Blue skies in Calgary. All that being said, I'm currently easing my emotions with chocolate-vegan ice cream and an Americano. Needed an escape from intensity with mom over getting the extra set of keys we ordered from Villa, her apartment, back in October. I complained to the office that it has been two months since her application for an additional set of keys. Mom didn't want me to "upset the apple cart" and said, "I don't want you to do that." I did it anyway*

*because I want my friend Gina to have a key to mom's apartment in case of emergencies. I felt like giving the Villa office personnel a large piece of my negative mind, being so frustrated at their slow process. I remained calm in the office while the receptionist got the extra key and paperwork together. I came back to mom's apartment and she said, "I can't believe you could make me so upset." She was shaking, on the verge of sobbing. I said, "I'm not making you do anything or feel anything." I felt like that wasn't the right thing to say. Then, I showed her the keys. "Just keys. We need an extra set." I set them on the table and left to go for a walk. I stop at the drugstore to get some "Calm," a magnesium ionic powdered drink, and then parked myself in Waves coffee shop with a choco-vegan ice cream from a micro-creamery (so good) and an Americano. After the icecream, I did a bit of my grading gig. All the while, breathing, very aware of breath moving through my body. I can't escape the breath – it's always there.*

*I feel too aware of my drama and others' drama. I'm aware of my bullshit and it hurts me, and my mom in this case. Ouch. Feeling like a giant yogic failure today.*

*Dec 13 – Back to YP yoga studio, Gabe's Yin class stretches my body, but more so my mind. My dissertation was inspired by Gabe about 12 years ago. He planted the seed with what he says during class – he says things like, "It's not what you are doing, it is how you are doing it" and "You are doing your practice for those around you as well as your self."*

*Dec 14 – Mom and I venture to the clinic at 2:20PM for mom's blood tests. I spent the morning at coffee shops grading papers. Thank gawd for a grading gig – to keep my mind on something other than mom's pain and the slowness of the medical system.*

*Dec 15 – I went to Gabe's Kung Fu class in the morning at YP yoga studio, for the first time. Kung Fu – I figure I can work out some anger if needed. Upon arrival, I feel supported by everyone who introduces himself or herself to me. A group of eight of us, lying on our backs,*

*doing thousands of leg lifts. I am surprised by the volume of voices (louder than yoga classes) and friendly chit-chat and camaraderie amongst the members while we do thousands of leg lifts. Next, we do floaty flowing movements as we glide across the floor practicing our monkey paws, knife hands, and snap kicks. It helps me get into my body and out of my head and emotions. I don't cry like I do during yoga classes. I feel stronger after Kung Fu. After I get home, mom says she wants to try going to Safeway, for an outing with her new heavy-duty walker, so we went. She rolled down an aisle and a half at Safeway, picked out some groceries. She said the trip made her feel better, to get out. I'm so glad about this. On the mend.*

*Dec 16 - Mom's bone scan in two parts went okay. I watched for the first part as she is injected with dye. Then we go home for a calm lunch, and I go to the coffee shop for 1 hour of marking before the second appointment. I watched a scanner scan mom's entire body skeleton. "What's the dark spot?" I ask. "That's a problem area - I can't say anything more," says the neutral nurse, blond ponytail, in her late 20s. Friendly, but too neutral I think.*

*Dec 17 – In the morning, mom was stiff having had no pain meds during the night. She slept through the night, which was good – a solid rest. She verbalized her pain and I tell her to take her pain meds from Dr. R.. She did okay waiting for the morning meds to kick in, and we had a calm soup/salad lunch. After lunch, I left, without administering her meds. I thought she would take her next dose on her own when needed. I came home after another grading session and a Restorative yoga class, picked up some Chinese food on the way at mom's request. The first thing she said was that she was battling the pain. She hadn't taken any meds and said she couldn't tell on our paper schedule when she last took a dose. I said I wasn't going to keep track or administer the meds anymore. I'm pissed that she allowed herself to get into big pain. I'm feeling partly responsible that I didn't hand her the meds, and partly pissed she didn't take*

*responsibility to take them herself. The Chinese dinner is not great. I do laundry after dinner and a blitz of writing in order not to seethe. Feel like a non-meditative, yogic failure, again.*

*Dec 18 – seems like a repeat of previous days – some pain, a calm lunch, errands, more pain management lessons with mom.*

*Dec 19 – Trip to the medical supply store to get a tub seat, install seat. Mom is so happy to wash her body in the tub instead of trying to stand at the sink, sponge bathing.*

*Dec 20 – Went to morning Kung Fu before mom woke up. Mom sent a text “HEY!! Where. Are. You without a coat?????” The first thing she says when I get in the door is, “Let me check something” and she goes slowly over to the closet to check coats. I wore a new coat that she didn’t know about. I feel like she is snoop. I’m almost 50 years old and I am irritated. She suggests taking a taxi to the doctor appointment and I am internally upset, and wonder out loud, “Why do we have a Jeep car rental?” Mom begins to cry and says “Every time I open my mouth, you harp at me.” Buttons are being pushed and my part is my reaction to her idiosyncrasies. She will not change. She is caring for me, checking I have a coat on in cold weather. Maybe she wants to take a taxi instead of having me drive her in the snowy weather. I feel crummy, like a bad daughter. People are calling me a “good daughter” because I’m taking “good care” of mom. The “good” label sets me up for falling from grace into feeling the opposite, bad. I think of Gabe’s teaching in yoga class, “It’s not what you are doing, it is how you are doing it.” Bad, I think. I’m doing it badly! I don’t feel graceful under the pressure. It is a learning for me. ‘How’ to be in these moment-by-moment situations? Sometimes I am being calm or upset. I’m mindful or not mindful. A bit of a mess.*

*In the evening, I didn’t have the compulsion to go to Yin yoga, or escape in any way. I ate dinner with mom, watched TV with mom, shut off TV when mom fell asleep, and had a sound*

*sleep. Two weeks here, so far, and a few meltdowns. My awareness to my irritations are in full uncomfortable throttle.*

*Dec 21 – Mom told me to wear her black gloves, I said, “I’m 50 years old and like to choose my gloves.” I’m irritated that she can’t remember what the laxative meds and Metamucil are for. We have a productive convo about removing some obstacles in the hall near the door including some shoes and a small bench. I put things in the closet for now, to make room and a clear passage.*

*Dec 22 – Results are in – mom has fractured the T-12 vertebrae in her spine as well as a bone in her foot, and her hand. She says the foot and hand feel okay. The vertebrae will take up to a year to fully heal. It’ll be a slow process, but at least we know now. Slowly, mindfully, on the mend, taking one day at a time.*

**Shanghai re-visited.** After five weeks with mom, I didn’t go back to China for research. I went to India instead in spring 2018 after receiving Jyoti’s invitation to her yatra. I received the invitation while I was taking care of mom. I asked my two scholarly mentors about switching my research from China to India. I got the green light and my final research site was set. I completed the dissertation research in India.

After my research for my dissertation was complete, in September 2018, I flew back to Shanghai. I returned to gong with my 84-year old Gong teacher. One of the women I had originally interviewed during my week in Shanghai, Jade, was hosting a 10-day Gong Training with my Gong teacher. Interestingly, it was Jade’s interview data that I accidentally deleted when I was in Shanghai in December 2017. I thought I could get her data again, in September. Then, I thought to myself, “No, my research is complete. Stop the research for the dissertation – enjoy a couple weeks in Shanghai with my Gong teacher, Don.” I soon realized I was drawn back to

Shanghai for a different research purpose – being at the 10-day Gong Master Training course solidified my plan for a post-doctoral study titled: *Improvised Soundscapes for Social Transformation: An Ethnography of Gong Masters and Their Social Spaces*.

At first it seemed that my research in Shanghai was interrupted by my mother's fall. That re-routing back to Calgary to take care of mom, however, became an opportunity to be keenly aware of my own mindfulness-based practices as socially situated. Bump in the scholar road or serendipitous? I did not know in December 2017 that meeting Jade for a brief week would prove generative for my post-doctoral plan. Going back to Jade's studio in Shanghai to be with my Gong teacher, Don, subsequently propelled my post-doctoral work. These events can be considered bumps in the scholarly road or going with the Universal flow and synchronicity of *what is*. Alternatively, these events can be considered as simply experiences – “When experience is intrinsically rewarding, life is justified in the present . . .” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 69).