

School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work

**Mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy:
Narratives from practitioners
in Bhutan and Australia**

Ian David Percy

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number OTSW-09-2011

Signature:

Date:

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Abstract

Secular descriptions and practices of therapeutic mindfulness in the West have claimed positive physical benefits and improved mental wellbeing. Alongside these developments, the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan is addressing unprecedented social problems through emerging counselling and psychotherapeutic services. Approaches seek to align with Bhutanese values, ethics and cultural mores, integrating mindful awareness training from the country's Buddhist heritage.

The present research project took a critical approach to deconstruct the place of mindfulness in the personal lives and professional practices of counsellors and psychotherapists in Australia and Bhutan. An interpretive and collaborative narrative research methodology was adopted to encourage reflexive, relational and dialogical understandings of participants' views on mindfulness. The design comprised three sites of enquiry. First, as it is widely accepted that Buddhist traditions offer precise concepts and skills for mindfulness and given that Bhutan is founded upon the Kagyu and Nyingma schools of Buddhism, individual interviews were held with senior monastic and lay Buddha Dharma teachers from both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions to provide an historical context. Second, senior organisational managers who have promoted mindfulness, directly or indirectly, in their social service organisations were consulted individually. Third, in keeping with the principal aims of this project, six counsellors and psychotherapists in Perth, Western Australia and five counsellors in Bhutan were interviewed deploying a four-part cooperative group inquiry. To enhance reflexivity, these primary research partners were witnesses to each other's interviews in their own countries, bringing forth their values, beliefs, and commitments in their professional and personal lives with regard to mindfulness. They were interviewed twice with impressions of the interviews being shared between the two countries to produce a conversational reciprocity. Throughout I situated myself as an active interpreter and co-author of the emerging discourses and practices while making transparent my research intentions.

Storying noteworthy events and turning points in the lives of the counsellors and psychotherapists and revealing the significance of relationships with secular and

spiritual teachers highlighted how meanings about mindfulness were shaped by diverse cultural conditions and personal circumstances. Everyday embodied storied lives and the broader discourses of cultural meaning-making generated similarities, uniqueness and novelty. The recognition of relational and contextual influences provided a foundation for reconsidering the descriptions, purposes and applications of mindfulness in personal life and professional settings.

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Part One

Sources and Pathways:

Life, Literature, Methodology, Guiding Interviews

1

Tracing Moments and Movements

*Abandon your destinations.
Only prepare continuously to appear and disappear
in the unsurpassable moment of a breath.
Know you are led by longing,
the tantalising fragrance of desire,
to memories you haven't had yet.*

I drifted slowly along Elizabeth Street at the end of a work day, towards the bus stands at North Quay. The summer clamminess still hung about in the waning light. I must have seen it before but a curious impulse that day held my attention on the sharp shadows etching the contours of a bookshop on the ground floor of the Prudential Building. I made a line for it. Perhaps I was pressed on by the restlessness that filled much of my early life, an unease that could quite often suffuse me with dissatisfaction and a longing for a different and unimaginable direction. I didn't know before I did it but the seemingly random choice to step inside that bookshop would set this path in motion.

I circled the shelves, only lightly aware of the streaming people close-by on the other side of the glass as they rushed forward to the day's end. Sheltered and quiet in the coolness, I tried to keep an elusive faith in not having to know what I was looking for. Glancing here and there, moving slowly, I found myself at one corner of the shop twirling a reluctant metal stand. I cannot say even now why I was drawn to *Yoga Made Easy* (Dunne, 1971). Certainly it wasn't the promise of it being easy as when I skimmed the detailed pictures of *asanas* and *pranayama*, the yogic postures and breathing exercises, it appeared remote and demanding, its images and words far removed from my ordinary life in steamy Brisbane. Putting it back on the wobbly

stand, I headed for the door. But after taking a few steps I turned around and, inexplicably, picked up this strangely appealing book again. Catching the later bus home, I remember peeking occasionally into its snug white-orange paper bag, being oddly excited about its strangeness. And so began, at 17, my explorations in mind training, meditation practices and philosophies originating from India.

Over the next few years I collected spiritually oriented books but having been well-skilled in doubt and fear I did not immediately tell others about their mounting number by my side. This gave my venture a strange secluded specialness as I roamed imagined exotic worlds and, at the same time, felt more alienated from the life routines I inhabited. My attraction to ancient societies felt liberating and expansive, and contracting and isolating. Fortunately, some like-minded people turned up including a man I had known slightly in secondary school. We were enrolled in the same business degree and enjoyed listening to elegant imported music on his splendid sound system. In 1975, as we sat in his small room one night listening with serious delight to his latest purchase, I couldn't miss a large framed photograph of a turbaned Sikh draped in a pastel brown shawl. Curiously, the eyes of this unusual stranger in the picture seemed to attract mine. I still vividly remember turning away from his image and then gazing back and feeling an inexplicable familiarity and comfort. Telling me he was a spiritual master in the Punjab, my friend gave me a book on the path he taught, *Surat Shabd Yoga* (J. S. White, 1975). Even though I was quite attracted to its compassion and meditation, the devotional obligations were a stretch too far. So for the next two years I practiced the more accessible, less taxing and well-known Transcendental Meditation (Yogi, 2001). Promoted as a stress reduction technique, persistent in the background was its origins in Indian philosophy and ethics. This prompted me to read more on these subjects in earnest and I eventually returned to *Surat Shabd Yoga*, partly because it seemed to be without commercial intent. Ashram pilgrimages to northern India followed, taking me far beyond well-worn cultural pathways and remaking my life through exhilarations and illnesses.

During one of these trips I made it to the Piccadilly Book Stall in New Delhi. There is no slow exposure to this cavernous city. It presses equally intense on all the senses and demands to be noticed and answered. As I walked warily along Janpath Road

towards the suggestively named Connaught Circus, it seemed people's endless activities around me were intended to prepare us for the unexpected. Sweet incense wafting from I don't know where tried, hopelessly, to repel the thick pungent air pollution which smothered all creatures in a warmish blanket of promised disease. Tucked into this frenzied swirl, suddenly plonked vividly before me at 64 Shanker Market, sat the Piccadilly Book Stall.

By removing a few wooden panels and pushing aside metal security lattices the entrance opened almost the entire width of its street front. I paused before it disoriented, convincing myself it existed by gazing at the roughly stacked ledges of books growing upwards to the high ceilings. They jutted out everywhere in all directions, the walls and floors made solid by them, their cryptic titles and motley covers offering vague promises of secret terrors and wisdoms. I was enticed but put off by the bleaching of the harsh fluorescent lights overhead and the considerable difficulty just to find a space to walk. As I looked up, I saw a wrinkly kindly face watching me. He stood still, commanding the scene. Encouraged by him with a wave, I moved gingerly into his generous strangeness. As the traffic blared in the background, I stumbled over the scattered books. *A Gradual Awakening* (Levine, 1979) with its misty greyish cover appealed to my yearning and cautiousness. Inside awaited my first encounter with Buddhist mindfulness. Even now as I write, holding this book close and flipping its pages, its smell and sight and touch evoke the enduring traces of 30 years ago. Not long afterwards I commenced a serious exploration of *Theravada* Buddhist teachings and practices. Weekend and nine day retreats were demanding and enlivening. The Dalai Lama's visit to Australia in 1992 encouraged me to read texts and make efforts to understand *Mahayana* perspectives. Trying to comprehend these various spiritual pathways was not straightforward as often they seemed to somewhat conflict in teachings and philosophies, and their requirements could be different when it came to dress, diet and meditation skills. Still, I was committed to their possibilities, making alliances if it seemed apt and allowing for differences when it didn't.

Moving on to 2005, I happened to be sitting at my desk one day at Curtin University in Perth when the phone rang. A cheery voice told me his name was Tshering, he was calling from Thimphu in Bhutan, and he wanted to enrol two teachers into the

postgraduate counselling course I coordinated. Taken by surprise, I repeated, in a quizzical tone, what he had just told me. He restated his request, the line as clear as if he was in the room next to me. Some months later the first Bhutanese counselling students arrived and so began my close association with that country and its peoples. In 2007 my partner and I lived and worked in Thimphu, the capital, as volunteer consultants at the invitation of the Bhutanese Ministry of Education. We returned for curriculum development and teaching assignments with School Guidance Counsellors from 2010 to 2012.

These glimpses of a few crucial episodes in journeying from Brisbane to Bhutan, chosen from numerous alternatives, had me dreaming and living in mixed worlds of meanings which consequently shaped and reshaped my inclinations and commitments with regard to storied lives and mindfulness. This led me to the central question of this cross-cultural research project: What are the convergences and divergences between professional practitioners' understandings and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia? Related to this primary question, the research objectives included articulating the principles and practices of Buddhist and therapeutic mindfulness; critiquing the relevance, application and effectiveness of contemporary therapeutic mindfulness; and describing personal and professional beliefs, values and attitudes, and their implications for counselling and psychotherapy.

I recognise that with an almost 40 year history of studying and practicing meditations from yogic and Buddhist traditions, I cannot unknow what I know. Subjectivities are not an after-the-fact option. Hence, I sought to expose, question, and reassess the choices I have made in my life, to note past loyalties and their waxing or waning, to locate the effects of holding particular worldviews, and to reconsider their value, if any, as ways of understanding the present assignment. I tried to be aware of my personal history so as not to impose it and to make sense of what I was experiencing by frequent experiments in inclusions, deletions and revisions. Partly, this involved posing counterfactual life trajectories, that is, imagining ways I could understand my experiences not only by what happened but in contrast to what might have happened but didn't. Uncertainty, my steady companion, brought a peculiar joy.

Growing more intimate with this project through the years, I was watchful of how and why my relationship to it shifted over time. Emerging understandings and expectations made possible a rereading of past happenings which led me to rework the existing text and, in turn, this propelled future writings. Experientially no hard line can be drawn demarcating these temporal dimensions. As I composed the thesis it composed my sense of its possibilities and my knowing of myself as its author in a continuous interplay of contexts, forms and contents.

2

Making Sense of Texts

You found the endlessness of words contagious.

You approached their merciful shelter.

And, after all that, misplacing your heart,

you found it waiting once again.

Why didn't you take the shortcut?

Over recent decades, prominent Buddhist traditions with their similar and varied philosophical and cosmological interpretations of the *Dharma*, the teachings of the Buddha, have become more visible in the West. Their methods of practice and modes of transmission have ethnic and cultural foundations (Batchelor, 1994; Coleman, 2001; Croucher, 1989; Fields, 1992; McMahan, 2008; Prebish & Baumann, 2002; Seager, 1999; Storhoff & Whalen-Bridge, 2010; Surya Das, 1997). I acknowledge that the terms 'West' and 'East' are situated within contested geopolitical and ideological discourses. For my purposes, the term West is shorthand for Australia, the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom. They have comparable cultural and social outlooks, share the English language and are countries where mindfulness has become most noticeable in counselling and psychotherapy. East refers to India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. They also have historical, political and social resemblances. Pertinently, they are connected through their ancient Buddhist religious commitments and their use of the English language links them to the Western countries mentioned.

Psychology and psychotherapy have not been immune from these trends as evidenced by professional curiosity about the ideas and practices of different Eastern religions and spiritualities for more than a century. In recent times this has culminated in a vigorous interest in Buddhist perspectives on the human mind and meditation practices (Aronson, 2004; D. Brown, 2009; Claxton, 1986; Dass, 1971;

Epstein, 1995, 2007; Evans-Wentz, 1927/1960; Fromm, Suzuki, & De Martino, 1974; Jung, 1927/1960; Kornfield, 1993; Kurtz, 2007; Kwee, 2010; Lax, 1996; Maitreya, 2006; Rubin, 1996; Unno, 2006; Watson, 2001; Watson, Batchelor, & Claxton, 1999; Welwood, 2000). Buddhist understandings of human predicaments and the nature of suffering and compassion along with sophisticated theories of mind have also attracted psychoanalysts (Epstein, 1995; Safran, 2003; Young-Eisendrath, 2008).

To establish the breadth of potential literature for this project, I initially searched databases across many categories of the helping professions before focusing closely on my specific concerns and restricting texts to peer-reviewed journals and scholarly books within social work, psychology, counselling, psychotherapy, family therapy and Buddhism. Even so, I sourced material from other disciplines, including psychiatry, nursing and teaching, if the text seemed germane. Major keywords for searches within the literature comprised various combinations of the terms “mindfulness”, “mindful”, “Buddhism”, and “Buddhist”. Readings would often elicit potentially alternative searches, such as “present moment awareness”, “acceptance”, “attention” and “memory”, in a cascading effect that was at once enlivening, complexifying, and daunting. Steering a course to contain and focus this study, I mostly surveyed quantitative and qualitative literature from the last decade although I also critically probed earlier seminal publications, assigning degrees of significance to them with regard to my research interests. These common strategies highlight the wanderings and deliberate choices at work in all studies. No research document is dispassionately acquired.

I do not think there would be any contention in stating that various discourses on mindfulness have become decidedly noticeable in recent times. Journals have devoted Special Issues to theories and procedures (Davidson, 2010; DeSole, 2010; Dunkley & Loewenthal, 2013; Lau & Yu, 2009; Marcus & Zgierska, 2009; Ponton, 2012; Shapiro, 2009; Still, 2005, 2006; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Zgierska & Marcus, 2010). Mindfulness Research Monthly gives a total of 2761 citations since its inception in January 2010 to March 2016, an average of 51 per issue (Mindfulness Research Monthly). Psychology, especially the cognitive behavioural school, has been the key catalyst for many vigorous developments in therapeutic

mindfulness principles and skills with mental health colleagues drawing on these innovations (Didonna, 2009; Gardner, Moore, & Marks, 2014; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990; Linehan, 1993b; Malinowski, 2008; McWilliams, 2012; Roemer & Orsillo, 2009; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Teasdale et al., 2000; Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn, 2007). Meta-analytic reviews have concluded that mindfulness-based interventions appear to be effective in addressing a broad array of physical and mental health problems (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009; Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011; D. M. Davis & Hayes, 2011; Powers, Zum Vörde Sive Vörding, & Emmelkamp, 2009) including chronic pain (Beaulac & Bailly, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Morone, S, Greco, Tindle, & Weiner, 2008) and relapse prevention for substance abuse and major depression (Beckerman & Corbett, 2010; Chawla et al., 2010; Chiesa & Serretti, 2014; Ma & Teasdale, 2004; Marlatt & Gordon, 1985; Parks, Anderson, & Marlatt, 2001; Segal et al., 2002; Teasdale et al., 2000).

Mindfulness approaches have also been recommended for the effects of traumatic events (Briere, 2012; Chopko & Schwartz, 2009; Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006; Goodman & Calderon, 2012) and problem eating (Baer, Fischer, & Huss, 2005; Godfrey, Gallo, & Afari, 2015; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Mantzios & Wilson, 2015; Prowse, Bore, & Dyer, 2013).

As well, positive outcomes have been noted in oncology (Mackenzie, Carlson, Munoz, & Specca, 2007) and for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (Zylowska et al., 2008), early intervention for psychosis (Ashcroft, Barrow, Lee, & MacKinnon, 2012), stress reduction (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; King, 2006), and anxiety or depression (Evans et al., 2008; Kenny & Williams, 2007; Orsillo & Roemer, 2005; Strauss, Cavanagh, Oliver, & Pettman, 2014; Thompson & Waltz, 2010; Van Dam, Sheppard, Forsyth, & Earleywine, 2011; Vøllestad, Nielsen, & Nielsen, 2012). Mindfulness for adolescents has been endorsed cautiously (Lam, Lau, Lo, & Woo, 2014; Zack, Saekow, Kelly, & Radke, 2014).

The psychiatric profession has turned towards mindfulness-centred interventions to address, for instance, the experience of schizophrenia, depression and anxiety (L. F. Brown, Davis, LaRocco, & Strasburger, 2010; Finucane & Mercer, 2006). One

overview study expresses confidence with regard to many psychological and physical health issues (N. B. Allen, Blashki, & Gullone, 2006) and a meta-analysis tentatively states that people diagnosed with major depression and bipolar disorder may gain benefit (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). Neuroscience has also taken a robust stance towards studying the positive effects of meditation and mindfulness, topics once marginalised through the modernist pejorative term, non-scientific (Chiesa, Calati, & Serretti, 2011; Chiesa & Serretti, 2010; Davidson, 2010; Davidson et al., 2003; Dorjee, Lally, Darrall-Rew, & Thierry, 2015; Dorji, 2006; Hölzel et al., 2011; Ives-Deliperi, Solms, & Meintjes, 2011; Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008; Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015).

Mindfulness in a variety of forms has been adopted by social workers to address various common problems and promote approaches that combine the physical, mental, and spiritual life of clients and professionals (Birnbaum & Birnbaum, 2008; Brandon, 1979; Connors, 2010; Dewane, 2008; Gockel, Cain, Malove, & James, 2013; Hick, 2009; Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Keefe, 1975; Lee, Ng, Leung, Chan, & Leung, 2009; Leung, Chan, Ng, & Lee, 2009; K. Turner, 2009). Efforts have focused on distress in children and adolescents (Birnbaum, 2005b; Burke, 2010; Coholic, 2006), depression relapse prevention (Beckerman & Corbett, 2010), bereavement (Cacciatore, Thieleman, Osborn, & Orłowski, 2013), social justice and economic disadvantage (Hick & Furlotte, 2009), discipline-specific pedagogy (Gockel, 2010; Mishna & Bogo, 2007; Wong, 2004), professional self-concept and reducing burnout in students (Birnbaum, 2005a; Botta, Cadet, & Maramaldi, 2015), the therapeutic relationship (Hick & Bien, 2008) and the wellbeing of social workers (Brinkborg, Michanek, Hesser, & Berglund, 2011; Shier & Graham, 2011). The interdisciplinary fields of couple and family therapy, including Narrative Therapy, have articulated mindfulness practices and their implications for clinical work (Beaudoin & Zimmerman, 2011; Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007; Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2007; Chadwick, Kaur, Swelam, Ross, & Ellett, 2011; Gambrel & Keeling, 2010; Gehart, 2012; Gehart & McCollum, 2007; Gehart & Paré, 2008; Percy, 2008).

Texts explicitly identified with educational settings (Felver, Celis-de Hoyos, Tezanos, & Singh, 2015) and general mental health counselling have become

noticeable in asserting that mindfulness has a positive role to play in professionals' self-care (Christopher & Maris, 2010; de Zoysa, Ruths, Walsh, & Hutton, 2014; Hassed et al., 2006; Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010), spirituality (Malinen, 2010) and therapist and client attunement (Bruce, Manber, Shapiro, & Constantino, 2010). It has also been found to be helpful in addressing addictions (Bien & Bien, 2002; S. Khanna & Greeson, 2013; Reid, Di Tirro, & Fong, 2014), obesity (Caldwell, Baime, & Wolever, 2012), depression (McCarney, Schulz, & Grey, 2012), bipolar disorder (Chadwick et al., 2011), physical illness and pain (Dobos et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick, Simpson, & Smith, 2010; Malpass et al., 2012; McIndoe, 2006), and schizophrenia (Pérez-Álvarez, García-Montes, Vallina-Fernández, Perona-Garcelán, & Cuevas-Yust, 2011).

Practitioners from different philosophical positions refer to mindfulness as a core orientation or a common factor found in all therapeutic activity (M. Barker, 2013a; Bien, 2006; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Childs, 2011; D. M. Davis & Hayes, 2011; Gehart & Paré, 2008; Germer, Siegal, & Fulton, 2005; Greeson & Welfare, 2013; Hassed et al., 2006; Hoshmand, 1994; Johanson, 2006; Mace, 2008; Martin, 1997; McCorquodale, 2015; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008; Wallin, 2007).

Difficult though it was to locate negative or even equivocal outcomes, the generally upbeat unanimity on the adoption of mindfulness for mental health has been critiqued somewhat from within evidence-based science. In some studies there are unclear outcomes for anxiety and depression (Toneatto & Nguyen, 2007), indications that mindfulness was at least not inferior to standard treatments for depression, anxiety, stress and adjustment disorders (Sundquist et al., 2014), grounds for cautious optimism in working with people who have physical medical conditions (Carlson, 2012) and only partially encouraging signs for adolescent populations (Tharaldsen, Bru, & Wilhelmsen, 2011). Likewise in a major systematic review and meta-analysis of 47 trials that studied the effects of meditation on wellbeing, mindfulness approaches provided only “small improvements in anxiety, depression, and pain...[and] the mental health component of health-related quality of life” (Goyal et al., 2014, p. 364).

Within professional disciplines and more broadly, the rapid expansion of mindfulness into the Western secular therapeutic arena has been criticised for its individualism, its commodification and marketing as a skills-based program and its narrow emphasis on techniques compared with its ethical, philosophical, and practice foundations in Asian Buddhist teachings (M. Barker, 2013b; Bazzano, 2013; Bishop, 2002; Bodhi, 2011; C. Brazier, 2013; D. Brazier, 2013; Davidson, 2010; Dawson & Turnbull, 2006; Grossman, 2015; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Hickey, 2010a; Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008; Milton, 2011a, 2011b; Rosch, 2007; Samuel, 2015; Sharf, 2015; Stanley, 2013a; Wallace, 2006, 2011; Wilson, 2014). There have also been public criticisms of the corporate appropriations of mindfulness for politico-economic neoliberal agendas that seek to expand consumer capitalism and adjust people to unjust workplaces (Purser & Loy, 2013; Purser & Ng, 2015; Safran, 2014).

The extensive literature on mindfulness and marked differences and likenesses with regard to the intentions and languages of professional disciplines posed significant problems as to how I might scrutinise them. In response, I considered the broad epistemological assumptions that may underpin these claims to knowledge, my hope being that this could guide me as to where the literature might settle most fittingly.

Modernity's intense dedication to rationality and objectivity is emblematic of a notion of progressive humankind in Western nations. The differentiation of science, religion and art has resulted in certain dignifying human accomplishments such as the astonishing advancements in technology and medicine, the yearnings for political freedoms espoused in liberal democratic discourses, and the aspirations and actions for human rights and social justice. Professional disciplines in counselling and psychotherapy such as psychology, psychiatry and social work have been noticeably affected by modernity's assertion that subjective reports of experience are simply surface manifestations of core internal structures.

Through repeated third-person experiments, it is avowed that all appearances can be objectively observed and steadily reduced to underlying factual mechanisms, components, units, elements, or dynamics. It is assumed that a hypothetico-deductive approach will disclose their active ingredients, reveal measurable and replicable patterns, establish invariant rules that make predictability possible, and lead to

standardised definitions and manualised techniques to operationalise interventions. There is alleged to be a relatively constant, contained, and singular self which is frequently characterised as a hidden authentic essence to be revealed, or a transcendent self which exists behind, above, or beyond personality and the social and cultural roles of the human world. These reductionist, monist and generally materialistic theories declare that “natural, quantifiable, regular laws govern the course of events in the universe uniformly throughout all space and time” (Wallace, 2000, p. 23). For an ever-increasing repository of advanced knowledges, primacy is given to the scientific method irrespective of subject matter.

Whilst there have been outstanding scientific and social advances in modernity, the ascension of rationalist and objectivist schools of thought has led to totalising and assertions of value-free claims to knowledges. Destabilising and contesting these inclinations has been the increasing recognition of the ways in which interpretive acts shape the creation of knowledges and the constitution of lives and relationships. Fleck’s thought collectives (1935/1979), Kuhn’s prominent critique of the process of scientific discoveries (1962), the emergence of social constructionist perspectives in various disciplines (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1999, 2009; Shotter, 2008; Witkin, 2012), the interpretive turn in anthropology (Geertz, 1973), and postmodern and poststructuralist views have subverted modernity’s reifying inclinations (W. T. Anderson, 1996; Lyotard, 1984). A deconstructive attitude recognises that shared acts of cultural knowledge-making occur within relations of power (Colebrook, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1976, 1978; Foucault, 1980a, 1980b, 1990). Of central significance is the historicising of self which has acted to restrain any final claims on its existence and purpose (Gergen, 2001; Giddens, 1991; Guignon, 2004; Hodgkiss, 2001; Morris, 1996; Rose, 1990, 1996; Sampson, 2003; Simpson, 2002; C. Taylor, 1989, 1991).

I still agree with Heller that the term postmodernism refers to the “self-reflective consciousness of modernity itself” (Heller, 1999, p. 4) and that a critical postmodernism cannot be called an “ism” without a contradiction (Percy, 2003). In a similar fashion, I turned away from describing epistemologies and their attributes as “isms”, as totalising representations of human experiences. Hence, I do not refer to rationalism, objectivism, essentialism, postmodernism, social constructionism,

constitutionalism, constructivism, Buddhism and so on except where I am mentioning a philosophical position or referring to a written text or a speaker who has used the term. Otherwise I write of perspectives, understandings, realisations, ideas and viewpoints as a linguistic tactic to remind me of my stance and convey this to readers. Thus, the present research takes contemporary epistemologies as heuristics, as aids in constructing the complexity of human encounters and appreciating the limits of any language to express it. A series of questions based on earlier research and my extensive use of deconstructive therapeutic inquiries (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Percy, 2003; M. White & Epston, 1990) assisted me to explore how much a document displayed:

- Tendencies towards a modernist and structuralist episteme that valorises the scientific rationalist and objectivist position pursued by an independent, unified and masterful self?
- A privileging of the voices and hierarchies of professional expertness as valid knowledge?
- Tendencies towards a social constructionist, postmodernist or poststructuralist episteme that valorises the politics of subjectivity produced through relational, dialogical, contextual, and reflexive acts of meaning?
- A privileging of diverse ways of knowing including the local and cultural?
- Tendencies towards blurring modernist and postmodernist positions?

As I foresaw, texts were resistant to straightforward groupings, showing considerable variations in response to the thorny predicaments raised by the topic of mindfulness and its place in counselling and psychotherapy. Nevertheless, I commence with exemplars of scientific psychological literature, commonly referred to as mindfulness-based interventions (MBI), acceptance-based behavioural therapies (ABBT) or mindfulness-informed therapies (MIT). Quantitative and qualitative research will provide a general picture of the textual terrain. Personal, social and relational dimensions of therapeutic mindfulness will then be considered before I turn to critiques on the professional literature's engagement with Buddhist understandings of mindfulness. Finally, I offer an account of the emerging counselling profession in Bhutan.

Pursuing Scientific Definitions

For authors swayed by the idea of evidence-based practice it is necessary at the outset to assign a definition of the subject to be studied and, by implication, its associated function. Definitional language, “described in clear psychological terms” (Baer, 2011, p. 255), forms a frame of reference and a foundation from which all further therapeutic activity should proceed coherently. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a short-term and group-based manualised program originally developed for the management of chronic pain, pioneered a version of mindfulness and associated skills in medicine and psychology (Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990). Adopting an experiential method, there is a strong emphasis on turning towards perceived painful or unpleasant bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts with a nonreactive and non-judgemental attention. Kabat-Zinn’s characterisations of secular mindfulness moves from a “moment-to-moment awareness” of experience (1990, p. 2), to “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p. 4) and more lengthily:

Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as nonjudgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible.

(2005, p. 108)

This shift to include emotional openness and compassion as a part of mindfulness appears in other texts (Bien, 2006; Brach, 2003; Briere, 2012; Germer, 2009). McCown et al. (2010) note the “key elements of the definition - intentionality, present-centeredness, absence of judgment” tend to “shape the thinking, practice, and experience” of MBIs in scientific research and teaching (p. 64). For example, Shapiro et al. (2006) extrapolate three “axioms” or behavioural truths from Kabat-Zinn’s work, defining intention, attention, and attitude or IAA as a “single cyclic process” (pp. 374-375) involved in the application of mindful acuity. Intention relates to a personal quest or motivation for undertaking the practice; attention refers to the different abilities necessary to maintain focus on passing experience; attitude

reinterprets the notion of non-judgemental awareness to mean acceptance with a kind-hearted curiosity towards experiences. Mindfulness then becomes synonymous with acceptance of physical, mental and emotional experiences as they occur. The accent on accepting experiences with a close and sustained dispassionate attention pervades the literature (Bishop et al., 2004; Chiesa & Serretti, 2011; Germer et al., 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Linehan, 1993a; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999; Segal et al., 2002).

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), a manualised cognitive-behavioural approach to managing high-risk behaviours and working with people who have made multiple attempts at suicide, has six components (Linehan, 1993a, 1993b; Linehan, Armstrong, Suarez, Allmon, & Heard, 1991; McKay, Wood, & Brantley, 2007). Three are called the “what” skills of observation, description and participation. The other three are called the “how” skills of being non-judgemental, being one-minded or focused, and being effective in doing what works to achieve practical goals. Mindfulness is coupled with other challenging therapeutic activities to develop self-acceptance, interpersonal abilities and the capacity to regulate disturbing emotions. Linehan adds that the attitude of acceptance or being non-judgemental “should not be taken to mean that it is one of approval” of the external situation or mind states (Linehan, 1993a, p. 147). Individual therapy and groupwork is offered to enhance psychosocial skills and, following the reduction of dangerous behaviours, strategies to enhance everyday psychological functioning are implemented. DBT teaches non-meditation exercises to promote mindfulness of different and changing somatic sensations, feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. Curiously, though non-judgemental mindfulness is regarded as an essential feature to develop these abilities, both the seminal text and its accompanying workbook give substantially more space to traditional psychological principles and cognitive-behavioural skills-building (Linehan, 1993a, 1993b).

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (Segal et al., 2002; Teasdale et al., 2002; Teasdale et al., 2000), a manualised group-based psychosocial program combining familiar cognitive therapy skills with MBSR was developed to address recurrent depression. For its proponents, mindfulness is a set of learned skills that “note distressing thoughts and feelings [and] hold such experiences in awareness”

with “acceptance and self-compassion” (Kuyken et al., 2010, p. 1106). Its purported “nature” is present when

the focus of a person’s attention is opened to admit whatever enters experience, while at the same time, a stance of kindly curiosity allows the person to investigate whatever appears, without falling prey to automatic judgments or reactivity. (Segal et al., 2002, pp. 322-323)

A meta-cognitive state is supposed to see all thoughts as just thoughts rather than believing the content of thinking to be unquestioned facts. Qualities such as empathy, equanimity and patience are linked with mindfulness. Both internally focused practices, such as carefully sequenced and regulated attention to the whole body and the breath, and external attention given to mindful activities, are central to this program.

Langer adopts mindfulness to enhance a range of interactive social skills designed to disrupt constricted thinking and develop cognitively complex responses (1989). An emphasis on mental flexibility, a capacity to move focus and notice overlooked events, is designed to create multiple perspectives on issues. For Langer and her colleague Moldoveanu, mindfulness is “best understood as the process of drawing novel distinctions” regardless of whether the experiences are “important or trivial” (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 1). Engaging in this ongoing discernment is not a detached cognition but gives the “subjective “feel” of ...a heightened state of involvement and wakefulness or being in the present” (pp. 1-2). This work stands in contrast to descriptions of mindfulness as non-evaluative responses to changing sensory, affective, and mental phenomena, though as Langer states prudently:

Even with the best definitions, the finest research designs, and the most careful answers to each question, mindfulness...cannot be captured, cannot be analyzed once and for all. (1989, p. 202)

Another major approach in the field is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes, 2004; Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006; Hayes et al., 1999). It relies on Relational Frame Theory (RFT) which contextualises personal experiences

within social activities, emphasising the influences of language and cognition (Gross & Fox, 2009). As socio-verbal communities reinforce certain human responses in given situations, it is speculated in RFT that “*arbitrarily applicable derived relational responding*” is “*non-arbitrarily applied*” (Blackledge, 2003, p. 428, emphasis in original). That is, the language community endorses ways of giving meaning to events through contextual cues. The “disease” of literal language is characterised as dominant, evaluative and restrictive, leading inevitably to detrimental attitudes (Hayes & Wilson, 2003, p. 163). In ACT this literality is intended to be destabilised through cognitive defusion. Observing moment-to-moment experiences, including the ever-varying linguistic and cognitive formations, this approach claims a self-in-context can be revealed which has direct access to a transcendent spiritual dimension. As this self is separate from, or beyond, what is being observed a person can “be aware of one’s own flow of experiences without attachment to them or an investment in which particular experiences occur” (Hayes et al., 2006, p. 9).

Because ACT exponents believe psychological suffering is caused by experiential avoidance of negatively evaluated physical sensations, feelings, and thoughts, it makes sense to develop mindfulness skills that encourage people to stay in present time and, as much as possible, safely re-experience disturbing memories or imagined frightening futures without a defensive evasiveness, as they describe it. Like other methods, this observational mode of mindfulness is defined as contacting each moment with an accepting, nonreactive, and non-judgemental openness. Therapy may consist of wide-ranging life reviews thus potentially expanding the range of responses to pressing concerns. This distinguishes ACT from those psychological approaches that aim to eradicate defined problems. Although its principles and activities might suggest an alignment with interpretative social constructionist and postmodernist perspectives, RFT is driven by functional contextualism with progress being gauged as moving “beyond gross metaphorical analyses of language” to “more precise technical accounts” (Blackledge, 2003, p. 432). It aims for prognostic veracities and general applicability, adopting a utilitarian posture to reach defined goals. Therapeutic processes assert a scientific, rational and behavioural base. To clarify, functional contextualism in ACT can be differentiated from descriptive contextualism, the latter being characterised as a method that allows rich

understandings of personal events occurring at particular times and places such as happens in the telling of narratives. Without diminishing approaches that attend primarily to diffusing the effects of traumatic or distressing events, it seems to me they are often reductively described in the professional literature as synonymous with supposed negative and harmful states such as shame, regret and anxiety. However, a person who experiences an intense distress or shame after committing an act of violence towards another person may be demonstrating how seriously they have transgressed their personal principles of respect. A person who internalises anxiety due to workplace harassment may be making a statement about their desire to be treated fairly and decently in human relationships. This alters the meaning of the sensations, emotions and thoughts. They are no longer internal afflictive personal problems to be diffused but can be read as an ethical response associated with justice. Such meaning-making occurs via the storying of relational ethics which highlights the importance of language and discourse in the deconstruction of distress.

In comparing the methods of the four major approaches in the West, that is MBSR, MBCT, DBT, and ACT, Brown et al. (2007) note that the first two therapies promote the “centrality of mindfulness in the treatment plan” and rely on formal meditation. DBT and ACT include mindfulness as part of a wider range of cognitive skills (p. 219). All four use a variety of skills to develop mindfulness but there is more emphasis placed on stillness meditations and movement such as yoga in MBSR and MBCT. These are intended to “enhance attentional stability or continuity, sensory awareness, metacognitive skills (impartial, nonreactive observation of one’s thoughts and feelings), and awareness of one’s behavior in daily life” (2007, p. 219). Buchheld et al. (2001) believe that mindfulness “can only dwell in the present, immediate moment; one can be neither mindful of the past, which resides in memory, nor the future, which is not yet in the realm of actual experience” (p. 6). They go on to state “this observation is carried out with curiosity and without bias or expectation” (p. 6) seemingly unaware that the choice to adopt these intentions already predisposes and limits observations to particular ways of construing experiences.

Troubled by a lack of consistent and systematic descriptions of mindfulness, Bishop and colleagues (2004) sought a “more precise” consensual and operational definition

that would explain the “mechanisms of action of mindfulness” (p. 231), eventually offering,

we see mindfulness as a process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of nonelaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance. We further see mindfulness as a process of gaining insight into the nature of one’s mind and the adoption of a de-centered perspective...on thoughts and feelings so that they can be experienced in terms of their subjectivity (versus their necessary validity) and transient nature (versus their permanence). (p. 234)

Unlike common definitions in the field, Bishop et al. (2004) separate typical correlates that might be the outcomes of an acceptance-based mindfulness, such as patience and compassion, from what they consider to be its defining features, hoping that this might be theoretically and pragmatically clarifying when measuring effectiveness. In response, Brown and Ryan (2004) question whether the correlates and the features proposed are contradictory, as one involves non-interpretive and non-evaluative continuous attention and the other an active curiosity, so reinforcing my concern about Buchheld et al. (2001). Mindfulness is a single factor for Brown and Ryan, a “constantly shifting intrapersonal and interpersonal attribute” (2003, p. 824), a kind of free association and unbroken observation that leads to an enhanced awareness of momentary experiences.

In another paper co-authored by Brown, mindfulness is neither cognitively reflective nor productive of knowledge about various psychological states but is “rooted in the fundamental activities of consciousness: attention and awareness” (K. W. Brown et al., 2007, p. 212). Broadly conceptualised, awareness is the “conscious registration of stimuli, including the five physical senses, the kinesthetic senses, and the activities of the mind” and receptivity is the ability to observe phenomena within awareness non-reactively (p. 212). Skills building focuses on emotional regulation, becoming sensitised to variations in somatic states, noticing intrapersonal psychological shifts and perceiving changes in external situations. If developed, continuity and fluidity of mindfulness make it possible for practitioners to direct

their gaze back-and-forth from narrowed foci to wider landscapes without losing mental poise. Brown et al. claim this prolonged nonconceptual stance towards the arising of internal and external experiences assists practitioners to remain in the moment and know “reality as it is rather than to react to it or habitually process it through conceptual filters”. There is a “bare registering of the facts observed” that does not calculate, classify, introspect or reflect on events happening in present time or from past memories (p. 212). They reinforce the view that mindfulness is a “quality of consciousness manifest in, but not isomorphic with, the activities through which this quality is enhanced” (p. 215), distinguishing between “mindfulness itself”, the “processes explaining its effects”, the methods used to improve it, and the outcomes from practicing it (p. 231). Over time, the mindful person ostensibly grows mental agility, moving easily from a clear awareness of wider perspectives to an improved noticing of everyday mental and emotional activities. To the authors this process is “unbiased by conceptual thought” and “simply reflects what passes before it” which they claim contributes to an “insight into reality” (p. 213), seeming to assume there is a true single reality to be known and that it can be accessed. According to them, this is all achieved dependent on predispositions or situations which implies, to me at least, that choice and partiality are at work despite their view of mindfulness’s “bare attentional, nondiscriminatory” features (p. 222). Again accentuating their reliance on rationality and objectivity they assert that thoughts will be “less likely to be colored by beliefs, prejudices and other biases” (p. 213) which presumably applies even to their thoughts about mindfulness, though how any of this might be accomplished is left unanswered.

As with other professional colleagues, Brown et al. (2007) support consulting the extensive Buddhist literature to guide the work of differentiating between fundamental and nonessential features of mindfulness. Germer takes this tack too, translating the Pali language word *sati* as “*awareness, attention, and remembering*” (Germer et al., 2005, p. 5, emphasis in original). While the latter meaning is very often missing in the professional literature, for Germer this special kind of remembering brings attention into the present moment with a non-judgemental acceptance, aligning his views with existing interpretations of mindfulness in psychology. To develop what he maintains is a psychological and socially coherent wholeness, Daniel Siegel blends descriptions of mindfulness encompassing Langer’s

educational definition and Kabat-Zinn's meditative approach. Coining the term *mindsight*, he links "mindful awareness and being mindful" with technical progress in the neurosciences, asserting that both these "mechanisms" are "beneath what being mindful *truly* means" (Siegel, 2010, pp. xxv-xxvi, emphasis added). The imperative is to capture the "totality of who we are [and] gain the objectivity we need" (p. 109).

These textual claims and counterclaims for a stable, verifiable, and authorised mindfulness are shored up by a constant belief that precise definitions are not only possible but indispensable (Milton & Ma, 2011). It is claimed this can be achieved through the continued application of the scientific method which will eventually collapse unruly distinctions into a settled neatness. However, an integrative study by Chambers et al. (2009) notes that mindfulness is referred to as "a theoretical construct, a mode of awareness, a range of meditation and attention training practices, and a number of related psychological processes" (p. 561), raising difficult issues as to what practitioners claim to be offering, what is being defined, and what is quantified. On this subject, in an extensive comparative study of ancient Buddhist mindfulness meditations (MM) and contemporary MBIs, Chiesa and Malinowski note definitional variations. Framing these as inconsistencies, deficiencies and confusions, Chiesa and Malinowski (2011) admit that it "may be impossible to adequately capture the full spectrum of meanings with one simple definition" (p. 407). They question the "usefulness of using mindfulness as an umbrella term" (2011, p. 420). To them, Buddhist methods avoid precision and so do not easily translate into the kind of operational definitions coveted by modernist psychologies. Mindfulness as contemplation is particularly confusing, they state, as the former "emphasizes the nonengagement with specific content" (p. 407) compared to contemplation which is a discursive inquiry into that content. Then again, Blanton (2007) uses the term contemplation as the ability to "let go of language" so that "the rest will begin to happen on its own" (p. 214), suggesting a free-flowing certainty towards positive futures. Like Brown and Ryan (2004) and Rapgay and Bystrisky (2009), at the end of their review Chiesa and Malinowski conclude a Buddhist description could give precise conceptual language without seeming to be familiar with the definitional variations associated with different Buddhist traditions.

Measurement and Assessment: The Quest for Calculation and Quantification

From the perspective of modernist science, definitions are operationalised through standardised methods or techniques and the results collected, recorded, calculated and assessed through the use of reliable and validated scales and inventories. This version of empirical validity asserts the study object and its effects can be established with verifiable, reliable, and generalisable data. Baer and her associates' comments from 2006 are still germane: scales are designed to “capture its essence”, to discover its “nature” (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006, p. 28). The hope is that these steps will yield the sought-after mechanisms and construct credibility which will then inform and guide treatment protocols (Baer, 2007; Baer et al., 2008; D. B. Brown, Bravo, Roos, & Pearson, 2014; Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003). In the main, measurement devices are designed for adults though it is worth noting that a child and adolescent mindfulness scale (CAMM) has been trialled and extended upon (de Bruin, Zijlstra, & Bögels, 2014; Greco, Baer, & Smith, 2011).

Developed for people who are already mindfulness meditators, the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) is a 30-item unidimensional instrument which seeks to gauge a number of factors including non-evaluative present-moment attention and willingness to stay with negative mental states (Buchheld et al., 2001). The inventors claim it is the “first and validated” attempt (p. 16) to operationalise being in the present moment. A 14-item version for general settings where knowledge of Buddhist practices would be unlikely was developed later, the authors declaring to have “demonstrated that it is possible to measure mindfulness in a semantically rich and yet *unequivocal* way with our instrument” (Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmuller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006, p. 1552, emphasis added).

Brown and Ryan (2003) describe the testing for scientific reliability and validity of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), an instrument which is limited to attentiveness and awareness of momentary experience in everyday life. Merging their personal experiences and understandings of mindfulness with the professional literature, the resultant scale purports to measure subjective experiences of

mindfulness in “general terms as well as in specific day-to-day circumstances”, avoiding unusual or symbolic language (p. 825). They do not admit items that refer to attitudes, intentions, and consequences such as increased acceptance, empathy, or gratitude, choosing instead to focus on perceived present-centred attentional control. Following factor analysis which reduced an initial 184 items to a manageable 15 statements on a 6-point Likert scale, the authors undertook a number of studies with a variety of populations, investigating convergent and discriminant correlations with existing attributes of wellbeing, and whether mindfulness is associated with a greater awareness of implicit emotional health. Results indicate a significant positive correlation between mindfulness and openness to experience, emotional intelligence, and wellbeing. Through comparing the MAAS to an array of instruments they conclude that mindfulness, as they define it, “is a reliably and validly measured characteristic that has a significant role to play in a variety of aspects of mental health” (p. 844). They also surmise that “mindfulness may have influence on behaviors with societal and cultural implications including those related to drug use” (p. 844) and wonder about social surroundings that might support or deter both trait and momentary mindfulness, a passing remark sympathetic to the influence of broader contexts. The MAAS has been criticised for choosing the single factor of present moment awareness and for not including other features of mindfulness such as acceptance and insight (Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007; Walach et al., 2006).

Other self-report questionnaires include the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Scale (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004) and a revised Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (Feldman et al., 2007) with 39 and 12 items respectively. They focus on the areas of observing, describing, awareness or acting with awareness, present-focus, and acceptance/non-judgement. The Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) is a 13-item unidimensional psychometric tool designed to assess the effects of mindfulness meditation as a state-like experience. It focuses on two factors: curiosity and decentering, the latter being a “shift from identifying personally with thoughts and feelings to relating to one’s experience in a wider field of awareness” (Lau et al., 2006, pp. 1460-1461). The authors acknowledge that a test at “a single point in time...may not reflect a respondent’s *true* or *average* capacity to evoke a state of mindfulness” and suggest that “multiple testing periods should yield an

indication” (p. 1462, emphasis added), highlighting confidence in mindfulness being placed along a normative continuum. A trait version of the TMS was later developed (K. M. Davis, Lau, & Cairns, 2009).

After appraising the available self-report scales and efforts towards the quantification of mindfulness, Baer et al. (2006) developed a Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire which challenges the usefulness of single factor/single score or one-dimensional measurements proposed by colleagues (Buchheld et al., 2001; Feldman et al., 2007). Instead they set forth a series of analyses suggesting that five features are indispensable to a mindfulness construct: the abilities to observe and describe experiences, to act with awareness of an action, to be non-judgemental and to be nonreactive. They claim that the “most useful measures of mindfulness will be those that measure *all* relevant facets *separately* and reliably” (p. 33, emphasis added). This demonstrates the tendency in the literature to believe that a totality of experiences is not only possible to collect but essential. Paradoxically, this can be achieved by placing experience into fractioned parts. Following their study of MBCT, Kuyken and his colleagues (2010) seem to concur that it is vital to understand the elemental parts of mindfulness. They propose self-reports be triangulated with behavioural measurements and neuroscience scales, attempting to blend first-person and third-person research paradigms.

In their review comparing classical and modern variants of mindfulness, Rapgay & Bystrisky (2009) are concerned with the lack of a satisfactory operational definition, the dearth of evidence for the “mechanisms of mindfulness” and the indistinct usage of the terms attention and awareness in theory and use (p. 148). Similarly, Chiesa and Malinowski (2011) are critical of inconsistent operationalisation, the considerable perseverance required by service recipients to complete programs, and problems with methodologies such as a lack of follow-up, the dependence on self-reports, and the absence of standardised protocols. They seem to imply that continuing assessments, multiple instruments and uniform procedures will yield the actual essence of mindfulness eventually (2011). In another extensive evaluation of instruments, and relying on their personal understandings of Buddhist mind training, Grossman and Van Dam (2011) note unresolved difficulties with regard to bias, the diversity of definitions, and interpretations of experiences between meditators and

people without considerable meditation experience. They argue self-report scales become problematic when using reverse-scored items and the authors suspect the inability of respondents to notice and remember when they have been inattentive. The iterative process of refining and reappraising self-report measures also suggests to them that “scales may take on a life of their own to define and reify mindfulness in the psychological literature” (p. 227). Bergomi and her colleagues (2013) seem to inadvertently highlight this issue with the invention of a Comprehensive Inventory of Mindfulness Experiences beta (CHIME-β), the title promising an all-inclusive end to these quandaries. But in concluding, mindfulness is reduced to the familiar language of a four-factor structure comprising “*present awareness*”, “*accepting, nonreactive, and insightful orientation*”, “*open, non-avoidant orientation*” and the “*describing of experiences*” (pp. 28-29, emphasis in original).

As a display of the modernist episteme, these research texts are saturated with a tenacious search for the “mechanisms of action underlying mindfulness” and the “various active ingredients in mindfulness-based interventions” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 374). This phrasing implies inherent elements are covered up or hidden, waiting to be discovered through the positing of correct theory, the operationalisation of true methods, and the measurement of mindfulness through valid quantitative scales. Chiesa and Malinowski (2011) give numerous instances of this quest in their critique including hopes for the “possible underlying mechanisms” of mindfulness to be discovered (p. 405), connections between “neurobiology and psychological mechanisms” (p. 405), research into the “psychological mechanisms underlying MM and MBI” (p. 416), wonderings about MBCT results and the “mechanisms underlying such changes” (p. 417), the need to “clarify psychological mechanisms underlying ACT” (p. 417), the “attempts to investigate the psychological mechanisms underlying [different] mindfulness-based approaches” (p. 418), the “unlikely [probability] that mindfulness by itself can change the underlying mechanisms of psychopathology” (p. 419), and the links between “different neurobiological correlates and underlying psychological mechanisms” (p. 420). There is consternation as to whether variations in outcomes reflect “*real differences*” or “*simply reflect the interest of researchers*” (p. 419, emphasis added), as if personal research choices are not continuously being made through an intricate web of interactions and are having effects on the matter studied. A systematic review of

MBCT for recurrent major depressive disorder concludes that understanding “specific mechanisms...is still in its early stages” and “more rigorous designs” will identify causality (van der Velden et al., 2015, p. 37), a characteristic conclusion for authors favouring systematic reductionism.

Brown et al. (2007) at least acknowledge the influence of various viewpoints when they state “different clinical approaches can spawn different definitions and operationalizations of the construct that *accord with their particular treatment perspectives* and with the *outcomes they seek to foster*” (p. 215, emphasis added). Likewise, Sauer et al. (2013) assert that choosing a scale is related to the research questions created and the intentions of the researcher, concluding that the “very essence of mindfulness will always be associated with subjective phenomenal states that cannot be reduced to their neuronal, psychological, and physiological correlates” (p. 13), the choice of the word “essence” giving away the authors’ metaphysical premise.

Overall the literature is replete with these methodological postures which, when applied to mental and physical phenomena for the purposes of measurement-making by third-person observers, aim to give a reassuringly independent, lucid, and precise view of mindfulness. The greater the consistency of responses and the more convincing the rationale of the evidence collected, the more forceful will be the truth-claims. A strong posture from this place asserts that investigators and their measurement activities have a minor effect, or no effect at all, on the phenomena being assessed and all people involved are impervious to social context and culture. Taking a moderate stance, researchers aim to be “as free as possible of bias and prejudice in their collection and interpretation of empirical data” (Wallace, 2000, p. 22). Either way, though not always explicit, there is a conviction that a veiled genuine mindfulness can be calculated precisely, it is just that science has yet to discover accurate definitions and proper instruments of measurement.

From a social constructionist view, respondents in any research project step into a priori histories that ground and sway the knowledges eventually claimed. This view questions whether a hypothetical natural essence can be impartially known via respondents’ language especially when they are required to complete predetermined

expert-generated quantitative behavioural inventories and segmented qualitative scales. The reporting conditions oblige people to filter and reduce comments from their already selectively remembered subjective experiences to fit purportedly normative developments of mindfulness. These preset linguistic conditions with assertions of objectivity and truthfulness are seemingly designed to eliminate any uncertainties of what might be, or might not be, considered genuine mindfulness and to gauge its extent. However, such definitions and their operational procedures may become “self-referential, reductionist, and dismissive of other communities of interest” with “the potential ultimately to limit and direct the language and pedagogical practice of professionals teaching mindfulness” (McCown et al., 2010, p. 64). As they are conversational correlations, it is debatable whether any authorised accurate inventory with named facets or components will produce a definite objective structure that underlies mindfulness’s appearances and reveals its psychological realities. Every report is relative to the means of observation and the observer’s viewpoint. From this place, language cannot be a transparent mediator of internal mental conditions but a communicative sign that shapes what is being described in the telling.

Expanding and Restricting the Voices of Research Participants

I now turn from the governing principles of quantitative research to interpretative, recursive approaches which seek to make sense of participants’ understandings of their experiences. Looking at the texts, most methods demonstrate a reliance on structuralist notions of knowledge-making. Consequently, I restrict my scope in this section to studies that arrive at slightly different outcomes, give a new focus, or appear to have some shared intentions with my project.

Adolescents are the focus of a number of studies (Coholic, 2011; Dellbridge & Lubbe, 2009; Himelstein, Hastings, Shapiro, & Heery, 2012; Monshat et al., 2013). Young people were referred by child protection and mental health services to a group program combining mindfulness with arts-based interventions (Coholic, 2011). Whilst encouraging, they found difficulties in using traditional meditation methods that require participants to close their eyes, sit still and pay attention to their

breathing. These issues are interpreted as the effects of trauma, as evidence of individual pathologies, though wider contextual readings of these responses may suggest other possibilities such as the limited range of mindfulness skills adopted by the program and the children's cultural training in action and noisemaking.

An Australian study states it was the earliest qualitative study with young people who did not come from backgrounds of socioeconomic exclusion or disadvantage and did not have a diagnosed clinical problem. The authors note a great similarity of results between their distinctive population and other research conducted with adolescents and younger people who had come to mental health services (Monshat et al., 2013).

Twenty clients participated in semi-structured interviews to understand the features of a MBCT relapse prevention program for depression (M. Allen, Bromley, Kuyken, & Sonnenberg, 2009). While an "increased sense of *control* over depression", "an *acceptance* of depression-related thoughts and feelings" and "*struggles* with MBCT" are common in the literature, the theme of valuing oneself and "expressing and meeting personal needs in *relationships*" is unusual according to the researchers (p. 423, emphasis in original). An inductive methodology, Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowed the language of participants' experiences to be somewhat visible through listening to recorded interviews. Analysing transcripts identified "themes that were internally homogeneous, externally heterogeneous and had explanatory power" as well as standing the test of "credibility and coherence" (p. 417), those common facets that privilege precision and consistency in research outcomes. Mindfulness appeared to reduce self-devaluative thinking and increase the likelihood of skilful responses to problems. The authors claim their study is the first to suggest that MBCT might enhance both "self-compassion and interpersonal functioning" (p. 426). Yet, even though they attended to participants' verbatim remarks, in the end the researchers translated their words into the common language of mechanistic psychopathology. Likewise, Canadian women living with arthritis and fibromyalgia rejected the descriptor "acceptance", speaking of their journey as "a process of realizations and acknowledgements" (LaChapelle, Lavoie, & Boudreau, 2008, p. 201). Despite their strong refusal of the term acceptance and the

adoption of very particular language to portray their experiences, their words were eventually disallowed by the authors who reiterated that mindfulness is acceptance.

Aggs & Bambling (2010), Christopher et al. (2011), Cigolla & Brown (2011), McCollum & Gehart (2010), Rothaupt & Morgan (2007) and Shier & Graham (2011) are especially relevant to the present assignment as they invited their professional colleagues to reflect on the various effects of mindfulness in work settings and other dimensions of their lives. Christopher and his colleagues (2011) take up a story metaphor, using content analysis to make sense of various themes. Long-term mindfulness training is associated with counsellors' enhanced personal care patterns and private relationships. Professional domains are affected positively with regard to their experience of themselves, the therapeutic relationship, and the evolution of their clinical work. Similar findings are made by Keane (2014).

Christopher et al. (2011) challenge quantitative designs that reduce interviewees' rich narratives into already established lists of variables, an "*imposed etic*" approach where all descriptions of experience from study participants are compelled to fit neatly into the researchers' worldview (322; emphasis in original). As could be predicted from my critique of scientific modernist tendencies in research, I share these concerns. Yet I diverge from their humanistic assertion that this reductionist method leads to a misrepresentation or absence of comments that participants otherwise "would spontaneously generate and employ on their own" (p. 322). Rothaupt & Morgan (2007), like other researchers, use semistructured interviews to identify themes including a heightened experience of valuing connection to others, to a higher power, and to nature. They conclude that mindfulness is not simply a technique but "a whole approach to living...a way of being" (p. 52).

Taking an ethnographic approach with social workers, Shier & Graham (2011) adopt semistructured open-ended interviews to explore aspects of self-care and supervision for practitioners. Establishing a link between mindful awareness and positive subjective wellbeing, they identify an increased ability to reflect on "pivotal moments in one's life, and maintaining a balance between work and personal life" (p. 33). Although the voices of participants are present, the authors' desire for reliability and evenness in findings lead them to create various hypotheses and

explanations for “*all* instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences” (p. 32, emphasis added). In the next chapter I will critique this tendency in research to need smooth and coherent stories, offering an alternative approach that recognises and appreciates the importance of ambiguity and inconsistency in the making of credible and multifaceted life narratives.

Stelter (2009) interviews participants at the commencement, the middle and the conclusion of four mindfulness meditation sessions. He analyses the stories of three participants to understand how this training contributed to their increased wellbeing in spite of them suffering from stress, sleeplessness, depression or agoraphobia. Following the work of Gergen and Gergen (1983), he categorises their achievements as “*progressive narratives*” (p. 155, emphasis in original). Somewhat resembling the method to be presented in this thesis, Stelter emphasises participants’ words through extensive use of their language, seeing these as acts to claim their unique knowledges. Wolsko’s (2012) narrative work with undergraduate students also seeks subjective experiences taking into account their local social circumstances. Students’ purposes and realisations are then appraised through humanistic and transpersonal lenses, the therapist playing a central part in releasing them from what is called their “often pathological world of egoistic functioning” (p. 321) and guiding them on an instinctive quest for self-actualisation.

The idea of dialogical mindfulness is introduced through an exploratory pilot-study of Mindfulness-based Role-play supervision (Andersson, King, & Lalande, 2010). The approach requires participants to be aware of the dialogical, sensory, emotional and cognitive features of their supervision meetings. Generally, there was an increase in constructive responses including empathy. On a related note with regard to supervision and training, social constructionists McCollum & Gehart (2010) report that mindfulness meditation improves the skill of being present with the distress of clients. It also balances the “being and doing modes” of therapeutic work and enhances acceptance and compassion for all involved (p. 347).

Often research focuses on measuring self-esteem and self-awareness, two ubiquitous individualistic notions embedded in psychological discourses of personal growth. Humanistic assumptions are also found in variants of grounded theory, a method

used to understand diverse mindfulness skills within scientifically credible designs (Ashcroft et al., 2012; Coholic, 2011; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Mason & Hargreaves, 2001; Monshat et al., 2013). For instance, Ashcroft et al. (2012) implement a grounded theory approach with a “realist perspective” (p. 329), employing an independent researcher who had no familiarity with mindfulness. They seem to suggest that even if participants experience multiple realities about an event, the event has a singular truth which will be unaffected by, and uncovered by, an unbiased interviewer. Likewise, Childs (2011) states that mindfulness makes researchers “unprejudiced” (p. 295), an assertion that repeats the objectivist tendencies in quantitative research projects.

Internal Mind States, Relational Care and Social Justice

Noticeable in the textual record lately are discursive renderings of mindfulness that draw on social constructionist ideas where personal intentions and cultural commitments are viewed as embodied, relationally situated and dialogical. This requires a shift from an emphasis on internalised mind states to the interpersonal features of mindfulness and a related move from private issues to wider dimensions of people’s lives. With body sensations, emotions, and mental perceptions seen to be created within a generative flux of interdependent experiences, there is a blurring of the boundaries between evidence-based science and social reflexivity (Andersson et al., 2010; Bakhtin, 1981; Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004; Falb & Pargament, 2012; Gehart, 2012; Gehart & McCollum, 2007; Gehart & Paré, 2008; Gergen, 1999; Kwee, 2012; Lillis & Hayes, 2007; Lord, 2010; McCown, 2013; McCown et al., 2010; Paré, 2013; Shotter, 2008, 2011).

Gehart and McCollum (2007) note the differences between change-focused therapy models and acceptance-based approaches founded on mindfulness and compassion. Part of their purpose is to assist therapists and clients to change their internal relationship to suffering rather than change the perceived external sources of suffering. To them, distress increases in proportion to a person’s attachment to particular storylines so, fittingly, the authors prescribe a “nonattached yet fully engaged witnessing of internal or external phenomena” (p. 217). They align

themselves with a mindfulness process that notes corporeal experience, cognitions and emotions in a non-evaluative manner so that habitual reactivity to distress is interrupted. This challenges forms of family therapy that actively pursue structural shifts in problematic patterns or adopt a discursive re-storying approach. Instead the authors claim that the mindful and compassionate witnessing they advocate leads to clients befriending problems and understanding them better as a prelude to taking actions with others.

Social workers Hick and Furlotte (2009) promote mindfulness and critical social theories to address social relations of power and enact justice. Drawing on Langer (1989), Bishop et al. (2004) and Kabat-Zinn (1990, 2003, 2005), whose health and education settings are shared by social workers, Hick and Furlotte bring together the “awareness-raising and immediate potential of mindfulness training and the political economy learning espoused by structural, critical, or anti-oppressive social work practice that works towards effective social change” (p. 6). They assert mindfulness can be used to develop a critically informed analysis of unsustainable social and economic arrangements as both are “engaged with examining, understanding, and changing something” (p. 19), which seems in line with, and contrary to, psychological descriptions. Hick and Furlotte espouse the expected outcomes of their approach: the opportunity to clearly see social inequities, the gaining of knowledges about the effects of prejudice and patriarchy, an increasing compassion for self and others, an ability to critically question excessive material consumption, and the possibility of routinely taking justice-based social actions (pp. 12-20).

The same authors also research effectiveness with severely economically disadvantaged people (2010). Following consultation with community focus groups regarding which mindfulness-based interventions may be suitable for this client population, a tailored radical mindfulness training (RMT) was created. Whilst acknowledging the resemblance to MBSR, this approach makes the interaction between “personal, interpersonal, and societal issues a core feature” (p. 283), emphasising a sociological lens to understand wider economic and political conditions that contribute to poverty. The common requirement of mindful acceptance is explained as personal self-acceptance. One participant describes this as

“I am OK just as I am” (p. 292). Nine core skills are outlined to assist clients in responding to oppression and distress.

As a social worker, I am keenly drawn to these potentials for mindfulness and yet questions remain as to whether such all-embracing claims are warranted. Through the eyes of Hick & Furlotte, mindfulness responds non-reactively to unpleasant emotions, making it possible to “drop below the story line of “me,” and see the larger picture” (p. 17). This brings “*true learning*” as a “person can watch the inner and outer experience and *clearly see* the dialectical relationship” (p. 15, emphasis added) between personal activities and the wider society. This reminds me of Shapiro et al. (2006) who state that through mindfulness people don’t become “immersed in the drama of our personal narrative or life story” (p. 377) but simply see what is there with “greater clarity, perspective, objectivity” (p. 379). Going further, Hick & Furlotte state that when people realise the Buddhist view of a transient sense of self, they will understand interconnectedness which will then lead to “unobstructed love and respect toward everyone and everything” (p. 18). Although I value their intentions, the authors’ expansive claims seem somewhat like an essentialist philosophy where a real and true self, once gained, will automatically act ethically. What remains unclear for me is how a person who has dropped below a personal storyline, assuming that is even possible, could explain or justify everyday actions they take. I think it can reasonably be asked: Who sees these superior pictures of human life, who changes, and what stories could she or he tell from that supposedly clear and objective place? Does the subjective experience of interconnectedness automatically promote an unconstrained respect?

Lord (2010) situates her work primarily within the not-knowing approach of Harlene Anderson (1997) and conceives of mindfulness as an embodied spiritual dialogue co-created between the therapist and the client. Multiple ways of seeing are encouraged. An intersubjective “fourth space” (p. 270), as she terms it, will reveal shared inner knowledges that can address the issues at hand. Lord also draws on other therapeutic traditions including those promoted by Bion and Winnicott (1970; 1971) and she refers to essentialist notions of “wholeness” (p. 276) and “knowing who we [truly] are and what our lives are about” (p. 277). These imply a certainty that is at odds with her suspension of absoluteness which complicates a neat philosophical location

for her proposals. Somewhat allied, Blanton (2007) claims that contemplative practices can supplement postmodern Narrative Therapy. His aim is to perturb the binaries of language and silence, seeking to dispel a contest between a discursively constituted personhood and an unseen transcendent self. A both/and integration is attempted, yet how these fit together and are taken into clinical work remains uncertain.

McCown (2013; 2010) gives his allegiance to MBIs in general and MBSR primarily. He applauds the groundbreaking contributions of the key protagonists I have mentioned and supports the relevance of attending to pre-linguistic sensations and feelings. And he points to limitations. For example, Kabat-Zinn states mindfulness is not exclusively Buddhist, describing himself and Williams as scientists and clinicians. But McCown notes that MBSR instructors are required to immerse themselves in Buddhist education and methods, especially those from the *Theravada* and *Zen* schools. They must be conversant with the *Abhidhamma* (B Bodhi, 2000; Mahà Thera, 1979), the schematic classifications given to Buddhist phenomenology and soteriology. McCown asserts this limits the creation of “ethical space” with others who may not share the assumptions underpinning these world views (2013, p. 91). Further, in a stark departure from the modernist scientific literature, McCown rejects any one correct experience or true definition of mindfulness, believing mindfulness is a fluid ever-changing process with new co-created descriptions and images coming forth moment-to-moment. To bolster these claims, McCown relies considerably on Gergen’s relational being (2009) and Flanagan’s no-self (2011), the latter a naturalistic and materialist take on the Buddha’s view that there is no innate self-essence. The undesirable effects of individualistic schemas prevalent in MBIs and the entity-reified relationships common in Western psychologies generally, are replaced with non-entity or nondual theories where in each perceived moment the unique features of a situation are constantly surfacing and being dispersed, the experiences produced being neither entirely inside nor outside people.

Living actions are then viewed as co-created with “ideas from the ethical realm [offering] a contrapuntal narrative, leading with relational concerns” (p. 37). McCown also challenges the totalising hierarchies of knowledges and meaning in the *arahant* and *Bodhisattva* ideals, and in the Western medical tradition. In their place,

he proclaims a democratic pedagogical context which is nonhierarchical, an inclusivity and mutuality that blurs the terms teachers and students. For him, all involved are students of mindfulness together. This sweeping reflexive and qualitative approach to mindfulness keeps well clear of manualised programs. I resonate with these democratic sentiments and the legitimising of multiple contexts of non-entity ethics, yet it seems to me it's possible to create other, perhaps unhelpful, epistemological dualistic notions such as entity/non-entity. I question too whether MBIs can be "freely translated from the religious and cultural contexts in which its origins can be found" (p. 64) simply by holding close to the viewpoints he avers. The term "freely" implies a translator can not only achieve this feat but, in line with Western ideals of an autonomous self, has a personal right to do so in whatever way she or he deems correct. This raises a possibly undetected imposition of the doctrine of freedom through self-expression, a conspicuously Western political entitlement.

Buddhist Mind Training and Therapeutic Texts

I commence this section by agreeing with Bodhi (2011) that mindfulness and its associated practices as recorded in seminal and persuasive Buddhist texts have always been generated from within, and influenced by, the personal characteristics of authors and their historical eras. My intention is not to provide a comparative study of the influence of these aspects in shaping *Theravada*, *Zen*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* traditions as I am not a Buddhist scholar and it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, in what follows, I am highly selective in choosing what I think are relevant directions and texts, my modest aim being to give an account of critiques from Buddhist writers with regard to the use of mindfulness in psychotherapy and counselling. To make these choices, I draw on my personal exposure to a wide range of Buddhist texts from different traditions which have been influential in shaping my understandings of the *Dharma* (for instance, Analayo, 2003; Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000; Buddhaghosa, 2010; Dalai Lama, 2001; Goldstein, 1987; Gunaratana, 2002; Gyatso, 2009; Harvey, 2000; Khyentse Rinpoche, 2008; Kuan, 2008; Nyanaponika, 1973, 2001; Pandita, 1993; Santideva, 1997; Silananda, 2002; Thanissaro, 1996; Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987; Traleg Kyabgon, 2001; Wallace, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011).

Versions of mindfulness are present in ancient and contemporary spiritual and religious teachings including those of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1999), Ramana Maharshi (1959) and Eckhart Tolle (1999). Kabat-Zinn claims it is most lucidly and methodically set out in Buddhist teachings (2003, p. 146) though different schools and their practices emphasise it to varying degrees. Generally it is seen as a method to enhance concentrative contemplation on specific objects such as the breath, the purpose being to calm mental activity and encourage tranquility. These are commonly referred to as practices of *samatha* in Pali, *shamatha* in Sanskrit and *shyiné* in Tibetan. Unless otherwise noted, I will mention these languages from time to time in this sequence to acknowledge the crucial importance they have played in linguistically constructing the *Dharma* within Buddhist cultures. The focused concentration practice of *samatha* is a precursor to penetrative insight (*vipassana* / *vipasyana* / *lhak tong*) that realises impermanence (*anicca* / *anitya* / *mi rtag pa*), one of the three characteristics of existence proposed by the Buddha *Shakyamuni*, the other two being the unsatisfactoriness of all phenomena (*dukkha* / *duhkha* / *sdug bsngal*) and nonself (*anatta* / *anatman* | *bdag med*).

The prevalence of terms such as acceptance, nonconceptuality, present moment, kindness, and being non-judgemental have been traced to Buddhist textual roots (Gilpin, 2008; Stanley, 2013a) and, as already mentioned, a number of professional texts encourage a return to the early Buddhist canon for a definition of mindfulness. In MBSR, Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2011) express a strong desire to bring together contemplative Buddhist methods with the procedures of scientific modernity, claiming to recognise they emerge from different epistemologies and cultural locations. Kabat-Zinn clearly articulates a secular mission for MBSR, stating that mindfulness should be “free of the cultural, religious, and ideological factors associated with the Buddhist origins” (2003, p. 149). Huxter agrees, believing MBSR promotes sensitive translations of the traditional Buddhist skills for awakening the potentials of mind in secular settings (2007). This discursive drive, evident in mindfulness allied therapies, has been well received in the helping professions, probably due to its implicit existentialist and humanistic tones and its fit within evidence-based practices (Dryden & Still, 2006).

However Buddhist scholar Rupert Gethin, in commenting on MBSR, notes: “although not exactly a secret, [the program’s *Dharma* sources] are often underplayed or even not mentioned at all” (2011, p. 268). For some authors, the diminishing of mindfulness to a stress reduction technique or for personal worldly happiness is seen as the antithesis of its Buddhist purpose (C. Brazier, 2013; D. Brazier, 2013; Stanley, 2013b; Wallace, 2011). Hickey views Kabat-Zinn’s “rhetorical strategies” with suspicion, her strong critique refusing his redefining of Buddha *Dharma* as “trans-religious, trans-cultural, and trans-historic” (2010a, p. 172). She sees his tactical linguistic glossing as “perennialism...a product of modern, Euro-American colonialism” (2010a, p. 172). Through his discursive positioning, she claims Kabat-Zinn makes the past invisible and presumes his own social, cultural and historical viewpoints are universally true. This raises the question of how MBSR, with its professed foundations in a Buddhist nondualistic embodied awareness, can take into account the varieties of social and cultural expressions that have sustained these knowledges and techniques. Or, as Bodhi puts it, mindfulness

occurs embodied in a particular person with a unique biography and personality, and it occurs embedded in a particular context—historical, social, and cultural—that gives it a specific orientation on which its very identity depends. (2011, p. 30)

Hickey’s negative appraisal of MBSR targets various issues including “the removal of meditation practice from its moral and communal frameworks, a tendency toward individualism and commodification, and questions about research methodologies” (2010a, p. 178). She also challenges Kabat-Zinn’s notion that meditation has been widespread for thousands of years in Asian Buddhist societies, stating that until recent times it was limited to the *sangha*, that is, to ordained nuns and monks (p. 172). This fits with my personal experience in Bhutan where meditation teachings specifically for laypeople have become more accessible outside of monasteries only since about 2007 (Deer Park Thimphu, 2014). Williams and Kabat-Zinn defend their task as recontextualising mindfulness into other cultures while retaining its fundamental characteristics. Referring to Varela and Shear (1999), they claim mindfulness is at the contemporary interface between subjective or first-person experiences and the science of third-person observations. It is “not merely bare

attention [nor] merely conceptual, cognitive, or thought-based” but “in essence, it is awareness itself” (2011, p. 15). It seems to me this assertion only makes another problem. To conflate mindfulness with awareness may, like some understandings of religious meditations, be used to assert there is a naturally pure intrinsic self or soul which stands apart from and above the contestations of culturally-infused religious, spiritual, and secular philosophies. Offering a canonical perspective, Bodhi states that it is not possible for a person to escape all contributing factors to their life and arrive at a total directness of experience. Mindfulness, he says, must be purposefully connected to the social ethics of skilful speech, action, livelihood and effort, as in traditional Buddhist teachings. Likewise, Amaro finds Kabat-Zinn’s stance that MBSR conveys implicit ethics “a very dubious principle upon which to structure a pedagogical approach” (2015, p. 67).

Other authors, like Brown and colleagues (2007), rely on seminal and popularised *Theravada* and *Mahayana* teachings (Dass, 1971; Gunaratana, 2002; Nyanaponika, 1973; Rahula, 1974; Sogyal, 1992). Shapiro et al. (2006) state their work on intentionality is taken from Buddhist teachings. For her part, Linehan (1993a) is explicit that observational training, mindfulness, and acceptance originated from her personal studies of *Zen* Buddhism and Eastern spirituality, with the DBT systemic worldview based on a Buddhist understanding of interrelatedness. She includes contextual and feminist views of psychopathology in her work and challenges a male dominated Western-centric privileging of “separation, differentiation, individuation, and independence” (p. 31). Further, she takes the *Mahayana* Buddhist term ‘middle path’ to explain dialectical thinking which avoids both universalistic and relativistic extremes, and promotes an ability to see experiences as multidimensional and holding possible contradictions and ambiguities. Langer (1989) acknowledges there may be similarities between her definitions of mindfulness and Eastern religious views though she cautions against a “tidy” link, noting in passing there are “differences in the historical and cultural background from which they are derived” (pp. 77-78). Roemer & Orsillo (2009) acknowledge Buddhist influences too, yet insist an acceptance-based behavioural therapy be separated from these origins as both non-Buddhists and Buddhists may be discomforted with any association. As an alternative, they encourage mindfulness from within the client’s own spiritual or religious tradition or secular life.

Finally, ACT eschews any connection to Buddhist traditions. Not only that, Hayes and Shenk (2004), question unnecessary “attachment to meditation” (p. 249) as a path to mindfulness, insisting that multiple measures and definitions may be less important compared to figuring out the psychological procedures that make a constructive difference. According to them, if mindfulness can be considered a psychological process then all “techniques that are effective in producing that mode or process are mindfulness techniques” (p. 250). Chiesa and Malinowski counter this “extreme” outlook (2011, p. 419), asserting that Buddhist teachings see stability and lucidity fostered through meditation as a precondition to accurate perception of various psychological conditions.

Turning towards Buddhist texts, mindfulness is the English translation of *sati* in Pali, *smṛti* in Sanskrit and *dran pa* in Tibetan. Despite closeness of meaning, I acknowledge that these renderings do not convey their complexity when used within different cultural and language settings. Even so, it appears mindfulness has had a fundamental purpose from the earliest records to the present day: to assist in the alleviation or cessation of inevitable or socially created suffering.

The most explicit descriptions of *sati* are found in the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*, the Larger Scripture on the Foundations of Mindfulness, and the *Anapanasati Sutta* or Scripture on the Mindfulness of Breathing (Anlayo, 2003; Silananda, 2002). These doctrinal texts place skilful or true mindfulness (Pali: *samma-sati* | Sanskrit: *samyak-smṛti*) as the seventh part of the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation from *samsara*, the repetitious cycling through births and deaths within six realms of existence. The other parts of the Eightfold Path are skilful views, intentions, speech, actions, livelihood, effort and concentration (Pandita, 1993; Thanissaro, 1996). Mindfulness is also considered the first of the seven factors of awakening (Pali: *sati-sambojjhanga* | Sanskrit: *sapta-bodhyanga*) alongside investigation, enthusiasm, rapture or joy, poise, *samadhi* or concentration, and equanimity. It is also the third of five strengths with faith, energy, concentration and wisdom making up the rest. Placing mindfulness into these frameworks immediately draws attention to its contextual roots and its location within a multifaceted journey of spiritual liberation. It is required for the attainment of boundless compassion and the realisation of the emptiness of conditioned phenomena (*sunnata* / *sunyata/shunyata* | *stong nyid*).

From this view, all phenomena merely arise as non-substantial appearances, including the experience of an inherent and independent person. This sense of a self is imputed upon an aggregation of interrelated conditions through ever-arising forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness (Buddhadasa, 1994; Collins, 1982; Harvey, 1995; Huntington Jr & Wangchen, 2007; Khema, 1997; Loy, 1988). No eternal or fundamental self exists yet there is nevertheless a unique historical person to whom these events are happening, a person who is “no-thing apart from these relations” (Engler, 2003, p. 75). Further, while phenomena exist and have temporal appearances it is posited that emptiness and everyday appearances are equivalent in the *Mahayana* (Dharmachakra Translation Committee, 2006; Garfield, 1995; Komito & Nagarjuna, 1999; Loy, 1988; Maitreya, 2006; Streng, 1967).

Meanings given to the Pali language word *sati* are contested in the academic Buddhist literature but it is commonly associated with the mental faculty of memory. This includes to bear in mind or recall practices intended to “root out greed, hatred and delusion”, to oppose afflictive emotions (*kilesas* | *klesas* | *nyon mongs*), and “to transform destructive states and tendencies into constructive ones” (Kang & Whittingham, 2010, p. 171). An unmistakably evaluative process encourages non-harm to oneself or other beings in thoughts, words, and body, and ultimately leads to freedom from all suffering. In the earliest teachings of the Buddha mindfulness is the gatekeeper who guards the passing mental states so that unwholesome or harmful thoughts or activities may not come to fruition and that wholesome or skilful thoughts or activities may be created and sustained (Gethin, 2011, p. 272). The *Milindapanha*, a dialogue between the Indo-Greek King Milinda and the Indian Buddhist monk Nagasena in the second century BCE, shows *sati* being used to recall past knowledges through its “explicit recollective abilities” (Dreyfus, 2011, p. 52) and to note projected future happenings.

Mindfulness can be thought of as a progressive phase-like series of acquired skills, the initial phase being to establish bare attention before advancing to introspective awareness (Wallace & Bodhi, 2006). Such understandings are evident in the writings of T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), a British Civil Servant in Sri Lanka, a scholar and founder of the Pali Text Society, and the person credited with translating *sati* into the English term mindfulness. After considering and rejecting various

interpretations he settles on “that activity of mind, constant presence of mind, wakefulness of heart, which is the foe of carelessness, inadvertence, self-forgetfulness” (Rhys Davids, 1890, p. 58).

Regardless of whether Buddhist mindfulness should be acknowledged openly, deliberately ignored, or actively silenced in the therapeutic literature, the current predominant definitions and methods are highly shaped by their key promoters having studied for many years within *Theravada* and *Zen* Buddhist schools (Dryden & Still, 2006). After learning meditation approaches from different spiritual traditions for 40 years, I have the view that gurus, masters or teachers tend to advance methods they were taught by their teachers and have found fruitful in their personal experience (Dalai Lama, 2001; Singh, 1993). According to Gethin (2011, p. 14), the Buddhist teachings that mainly influence contemporary therapeutic meditation and mindfulness have come through the German-born *Theravada* teacher Nyanaponika Thera whose own understandings were formed through his association with the revered Myanmar Buddhist Mahasi Sayadaw (1944; 1973, 2001; 1944). Due to these historical trajectories, much professional literature tends to reduce the practice of mindfulness to bare attention. However, Bhikkhu Bodhi (2011), who was a student of Nyanaponika, clarifies that a nonconceptual and nondiscursive application of mindfulness is only meant to be an initial phase to make it possible for a practitioner to step back from limited selfish interests and appreciate different perspectives on issues. Seeing thoughts as ‘just thoughts’, feelings as ‘just feelings’, and physical sensations as ‘just sensations’ becomes a preliminary method to counter the reification and attachment to thoughts, feelings and sensations and their tendencies to aversion or attraction. Such skills can be developed through a non-reactivity to the ephemera of body, thoughts, and feelings, all of which are “ethically indeterminate” (Bodhi, 2011, p. 28).

Similarly, Gethin (2011) asserts a lucid bare attention is a foundational step but does not “constitute the presence of *real* mindfulness” (p. 274, emphasis added). Connected to this point, Stanley (2013b) critiques the limitations of cognitive mechanistic metaphors and the much emphasised nonconceptuality in psychological definitions, Dreyfus (2011) believes the therapeutic focus on being present-centred and non-judgemental is inadequate, and Bazzano (2013) claims that in aligning

predominately with *Theravada* definitions, programs such MBSR exclude other Buddhist knowledges and methods, leading to abbreviated explanations. To these authors, peculiarly reductionist definitions lose the meaning of mindfulness as associated with the cognitive function of memory with retrospective and prospective features and separate it from its ethical purposes in relational contexts (Bodhi, 2011; Greenberg & Mitra, 2015; Hickey, 2010a; Stanley, 2013b; Wallace, 2011). Acting with skilful mindfulness implies there can be unskilful mindfulness which in its broadest sense could contribute to the suffering of a sentient being. For Stanley (2013a), if all mental content has ethical implications then mindfulness cannot simply be bare attention with acceptance as this description leads to the possibility of expunging the ethical consequences of action. Consequently, he highlights the relational, social and political features of mindfulness which he claims is an outcome of an “*embodied and ethically sensitive practice of present moment recollection*” (p. 65, emphasis in original). This contrasts noticeably with the emphasis in the therapeutic literature on moment-to-moment attention to bodily states or mental activities with a non-judgemental stance.

Canvassing early Buddhist literature, Kuan (2008) suggests four differentiated dimensions of mindfulness. The first is a deliberate nonconceptual attention, the second relates to the protective attitude of the gatekeeper, and a monitoring introspective vigilance is the third facet. The final dimension generates conceptions which involve recalling wholesome notions to motivate future beneficial actions and noticing any harmful phenomena including “impure body parts” (p. 53) so that a practitioner may not become attached to seemingly attractive transient appearances.

Kang & Whittingham (2010) also précis the many-sided Buddhist views of mindfulness as

simple bare awareness of moment to moment experience; “gatekeeping” awareness; remembering and sustaining attention on a familiar object; a process of systematically recollecting a sequence of ideas; conjoined with introspective vigilance that monitors the stability and clarity of awareness; wisely directed attention that probes into the source of experiential content;

and nondual coemergent awareness at the subtlest level of consciousness, free from all conceptual constructs and frames. (pp. 163-164)

Lately, some professional texts have addressed the implications of relocating Asian Buddhist understandings of mindfulness into cultures with different social mores, philosophical traditions and Judeo-Christian religious cosmologies (J. H. Davis, 2015; Grossman, 2015; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Hickey, 2010b; Panāoti, 2015; Purser, 2015). Rosch (2007) persuasively argues that if mindfulness is linked to Buddhist traditions then it cannot be naively dissected from those contexts and conveniently leave behind challenges to “our present [Western] cultural assumptions” (p. 262) about ego structures, time and timelessness, and interdependence. Agreeing, Brazier (2013) states that ancient *Dharma* techniques have been “lifted out of their original context and significance and relocated with new associations and even new meaning” (p. 118), so that mindfulness has been adjusted to fit the pervading technical rationalist modern world. This “here-and-now-ism” (p. 119) eliminates the Buddhist view that mindfulness is necessary for evaluating past experiences. Reflecting on the transitioning of mindfulness into Western contexts, Grossman & Van Dam (2011) recommend “caution and patience...lest we reify and trivialize concepts that may have a richness of which we cannot yet be fully aware” (p. 234). Baer (2011), who promotes science-based assessments, admits some important aspects of Eastern mindfulness may disappear or be reduced during translations into psychological language. Likewise, Lindahl (2015) requests more critical thinking about any presumed connection between psychological and Buddhist responses to adversity and hardship. In their extensive review, Britton et al. (2013) underline these concerns, noting that the Buddhist intention of meditation is associated with spiritual awakening whereas the modern aim is physical and psychological wellbeing, especially meditation as a stress reduction technique.

Some writers criticise current scientific and romanticised discourses on mindfulness for depoliticising unjust socio-economic systems (Hickey, 2010b; McMahan, 2008). Purser (2015) puts it this way:

A major fall-out of this psychologized conception of mindfulness is that it comes to be understood at best—as a path for personal salvation, and at worst, as just another self-help technique—both of which are blind and insensitive to the social, political and economic dimensions of suffering. (p. 42)

Further, the deliberate trend to erase the diversity of culturally-shaped living Buddhist traditions in the West may make invisible any considerations of white privilege in the development of American Buddhist communities (Hickey, 2010b). Proponents of socially engaged Buddhism view activism to address issues of racism, poverty and sexism, for instance, as part of their mindfulness practices (Jones, 2003; Loy, 2015; Moon, 2004).

Not that it is a focus of the present study and without wanting to dichotomise sexual identities, it seems the politics of gender are active in the publications of texts on mindfulness. Many prominent commentators in the field are male (Analayo, 2003; Bodhi, 2011; Brahm, 2006; Buddhadasa, 1997; Goldstein, 2013; Gunaratana, 2002; Hayes et al., 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Siegel, 2007; Wallace, 2011; Williams et al., 2007). Females appear less often (Brach, 2003; Friedman, 2000; Koppedrayar, 2007; Linehan, 1993a; Salzberg, 1995; Tsomo, 1995, 2006). Only a quarter of the contributors to a special issue of *Contemporary Buddhism* devoted to mindfulness were women (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011), and while two females and one male coauthored a critical reflection on traditional and contemporary methods in the journal *Mindfulness* (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015), the 11 respondents to the article were all male.

Counselling and Mindfulness in Bhutan

Alongside discourses and practices of therapeutic mindfulness that have been surfacing in Western countries is the emergence of counselling services in Bhutan, the last Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom. About the size of Switzerland, the country has a population of approximately 700,000 people, the vast majority dependent on an agrarian subsistence economy. Pervasive cosmological and doctrinal *Mahayana*

Tantric schools have led to the maturation of distinctive Bhutanese identities and their expressions. *Drukpa Kagyu* is the official national Buddhist religion with the *Nyingma* school also prominent (Acharya, 1999; Ardussi & Pommaret, 2007; Aris, 1994; Crossette, 1995; S. K. Khanna & Sudarshan, 1998; Pommaret, 2006; Rajput, 2010; Wangchhuk, 2008).

Fiscal and political modernisation has brought positive economic and social improvements to Bhutan. At the same time an increasing exposure to, and mimicking of, certain Western ideas and lifestyles, the adoption of a more capitalist-based market economy, and wide exposure to information technologies, have destabilised traditional living arrangements and contributed to unprecedented social problems including the breakdown of long-established community support systems, youth unemployment, and drug misuse (United Nations Youth Development Fund & Ministry of Education, 2006). To address these challenges and other associated physical and spiritual concerns, the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) has gained credibility. This approach to national governance, sustainable socio-economic growth, cultural values, and environmental protection is intended to measure the nation's wellbeing through a range of indicators which are given equal importance (Drakpa, Sunwar, & Choden, 2013; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012; K Ura & Galay, 2004; Veenhoven, 2004).

Counselling and psychotherapeutic services have been evolving, especially for primary and secondary school age children and out-of-school youth, through the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) (Borgen, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2006, 2007; Percy & Bower, 2007). In addressing social and personal problems, there are many community processes in Bhutan that have been, and still are, beneficial. Some have similarities to Western counselling approaches. They can have quite different features too, depending on the local situation. For many years the training of Bhutanese teacher/counsellors has relied on the importation of counselling approaches that do not necessarily take into account Indigenous values, ethics and cultural mores. There is an ever-present hazard of psychological colonisation through imposing and replicating dominant Western epistemologies and therapeutic approaches (Guth, Lorelle, Hinkle, & Remley, 2015; Lorelle & Guth, 2013). The MoE and the RUB have been keen to foster ways of

working that align with Bhutanese identities and aspirations, especially with regard to the country's Buddhist heritage and GNH. The commencement in 2010 of a Postgraduate Diploma in Guidance and Counselling at Samtse College of Education and the appointment of fulltime school guidance counsellors to selected schools are tangible outcomes of government policies. To support the Postgraduate Diploma, the then Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan established close links with the Buddhist-inspired Naropa University in Colorado, USA which was founded by the Western influenced and, at times, controversial Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. This academic arrangement fits well as the Rinpoche was a lineage holder of both the *Kagyü* and *Nyingma* traditions.

However, with counsellors often working alone, whether in larger centres of population or in remote locations, there are limited face-to-face opportunities to disseminate local knowledges. To address this isolation, counsellors often consult with each other by mobile phone and an annual National Counselling Conference has been held in the capital Thimphu since 2011. The Bhutan Board for Certified Counsellors was founded in 2012 and a journal for the dissemination of counselling approaches that are resonant with cultural beliefs and values is planned. Central to these initiatives has been the training of staff in social service agencies and schools on Western counselling methods and the adaptation of Buddhist mindfulness for secular aims.

Bhutanese researchers have explored psychosocial mental health counselling in response to natural disasters (Dorji, 2006) and the positive potential for mindfulness meditation in schools (Karma Ura, 2009). Namygal (2012) reports on a nine week mindfulness training to improve the self-awareness of tertiary students at Sherubtse College in eastern Bhutan. While cautious about the benefits of meditation due to the brief time allocated, he acknowledges there have been moderate benefits overall especially in the area of students' ability to concentrate on their studies. Possibly due to the newness of these initiatives, limited resources in the country and non-text cultural ways of sharing knowledges, there appear to be no other national or international articles or books specifically on counselling and mindfulness in Bhutan.

Fields of Inquiry

The insertion of mindfulness into professional texts cannot be neatly circumscribed as writers frequently blend conventional psychology, brain-based biological sciences, social sciences and Buddhist mind training. As Stanley (2013b) puts it:

[Authors] hold varying understandings of mindfulness: an art of living or way of being; a type of attention; a meditation practice; an outcome of meditation; an independent variable (experimental condition); a dependent variable; a class of therapeutic intervention; a momentary state of consciousness; an abiding trait existing at an aggregate level across populations; and more. (p. 153)

Writing this thesis implicates me in these kinds of transactions and translations. Recognising this, the conceptual analysis I offer is situated within Western social constructionist epistemologies where bodies of knowledges can be considered versions of events located within discourses that seek to make the object of study intelligible, in this case mindfulness. Definitions, calculations, outcomes, descriptions and stories come into view dependent on the procedures of inquiry, which open up and limit the possibilities for thinking certain thoughts and taking related actions. To me this accords with Buddhist understandings that human perspectives are temporal-bound realities appearing in the moment they are spoken and, if desired, remembered in the next instant to reinstate them.

All modes of knowing are prone to reification and exclusionism when sets of ideas are not seen as time-bound and constitutive of the realities they claim to portray. There can be a tendency, and I am prone to it, to freeze authors' views in the two-dimensional etchings of articles and books, and to make research transcripts and thesis writing too static. Throughout this project I attempt to catch that impulse. Texts speak to me and I speak back as we make efforts to understand each other. Some initially close to me move further away; those at a distance move closer. Texts and writings are once-were views that may, in total or in part, still speak for the author. I assume so but do not know. This is not to suggest a sweeping relativism.

Definitions and practices can't be anything people say they are or be relentlessly modified every moment. Embracing such a thoroughly relativistic stance may produce an endless discursive loop of obstinately blurry concepts with the hazard of being overcomplicated or practically unworkable.

Appraising the aforementioned literature confirmed my initial thoughts about an overriding Western presence, particularly the filtering of concepts and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy through social lenses currently dominant in the United States of America. This is not a surprise as this political exercise of power exists in various forms throughout many fields of learning and practice. While appreciating the positive intentions and practical benefits of Western people's engagement, their views do raise concerns about the decontextualising of mindfulness from Asian religious and social histories and its recontextualising into secular social services. This may have the unintended effect of neglecting certain generative understandings and skills from Asian Buddhist settings. Though it is asserted by some practitioners in the West that secularising mindfulness releases it from unnecessary Eastern cultural constraints there may be a failure, inadvertently perhaps, to critique the beliefs and values of the cultural worlds it is taken into. Western authors tend to make universal assertions, exempting themselves from evaluating their own locations within authoritative academic institutions and professional settings. These sites often require a conforming competitiveness to generate knowledges and understandings, leading to a discursive insularity and circularity of expert knowledges. This brings to the fore certain questions about the dominant positioning of Western peoples to define the trajectories of mindfulness discourses across the world. Relatedly, I was concerned about the almost complete absence of professional literature addressing the ethical implications of a relational and social mindfulness compared to Buddhist mind training which focuses keenly on the ethics of speech, action and livelihood with others.

Given my longstanding association with the emerging counselling services in Bhutan, I wondered how practitioners in that country were negotiating the arrival and relevance of a secular and pragmatic Western approach to mindfulness. I remained unclear as to how these initiatives were being taken into everyday counselling and whether Bhutanese cultural heritages were being given precedence.

This is especially pertinent as the nation embodies, in significant ways, ancient sacred traditions that endorse particular ways of living life that are in contrast to prevailing Western attitudes and values.

This led me to consider how professional and personal practices of mindfulness in Bhutan and Australia might be enriched through a series of conversations between practitioners in these two countries. I surmised such an endeavour might make visible certain social and cultural conditions that influence the constructs and methods of mindfulness. Also that the expression and dissemination of their shared voices on a range of topics might expand our knowledges of each other's worlds and potentially be of benefit to ourselves, our colleagues and the people who seek our succour during times of distress and difficulties in their lives.

3

Becoming Narrative Lenses

*Look, inciting a thousand hesitant questions
with promises of enchanting confusions.
A glimpse, maybe more, perhaps less, of the mystery.
Drifting there, becoming lenses.
What now?*

As promising sketches for this project gradually took shape I revisited numerous research methodologies and, to adopt a visual metaphor, looked through their lenses to see what I might see, and to note what they offered, or didn't, given the matters I wanted to explore. An excess of promising approaches proved both exciting and daunting. I grappled with how to proceed given the expansion of textual sources on mindfulness and the complications they raised for me. I took to forming views about viewpoints, asking questions like

How might a chosen lens shape my thoughts, words, and actions?

How might another lens shape other thoughts, words, and actions?

How might this lens position me relationally?

What were the lenses I wore before the ones I am considering now?

In what ways am I intentionally constituting myself as a knower?

What am I becoming a knower of as I look through this lens?

Without trying to resolve these inquiries in any final sense and realising such questions already indicate certain orientations, and their lenses too, what follows are my responses. In presenting them I seek to make my research methodology and design transparent so that readers may have an understanding of my aims and actions: why I chose what I chose, did what I did. First, I briefly consider narrative aptitude and cultural discourses in the creation of human lives. Second, I connect

these views to the rise of interpretive narrative methodologies especially attending to the negotiation of power relations, the activity of positioning, and the notion of a performative ethical person. Third, I turn to how I enacted a reflexive narrative research approach in this project to explore the primary question: What are the convergences and divergences between professional practitioners' understandings and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia?

The Play of Narrative

As biological entities, humans experience material phenomena through the simultaneous occurrence of consciousness, healthy and receptive physical organs and perceptible objects. Innumerable waves of moments and movements provide exceptionally fluid ecological resources when translating prelinguistic biological phenomena into discourses on human beliefs, values and claims to truth (Maturana & Varela, 1998). Prior to conception, during gestation, and after birth, there are views, convictions, attitudes and values that swirl about and direct the ways in which a baby will be received into the world and primed to respond to given conditions. Prevailing family stories and wider social and cultural discourses concerning the event of human birth and the raising of a child will be activated. We are born into social worlds and they are borne into us.

Over time, through the development of a narrative mode of consciousness, infants turn the shapeless flow of sensory phenomena into decipherable cultural forms and content, the foundations of storytelling becoming more noticeable when children enter into symbolic play (Oatley, 2007). These reflexive proto-narratives exhibit a variety of vocal actions and gestures in an attempt to convey their experiences with others and the natural environment. Verbal and nonverbal response cues from actual or imagined audiences, especially primary caregivers, guide their ongoing ordering of words and other expressions. As they learn, relearn and unlearn various communication prompts, children develop linguistic skills which allow them to connect their sensory experiences with the regular words and phrases of their communities of influence (Bruner & Haste, 1987; Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, &

Mintz, 1990; Nelson, 1989). There is no one-to-one correspondence between the sensations and the words, but patchy or persistent language given by others in the course of daily life. Eventually, these morph into meaning-made discursive worlds suffused with straightforward and complicated plotlines.

According to Jerome Bruner (1986), the narrative and the logico-scientific or paradigmatic modes as ways of conceptualising human experiences are irreducibly complementary, with their own operational principles and criteria for appraisal. The paradigmatic seeks to “convince one of their truth” through regular, observable and certifiable procedures developed from hypotheses. A narrative approach attempts to convey “lifelikeness” (p. 11) or, in my terms, an experiential felt-sense of being a person. Narration is accomplished through zigzagging between two landscapes.

One is the landscape of action, where the constituents are the arguments of action: agent, intention or goal, situation, instrument, something corresponding to a “story grammar.” The other is the landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think, feel, or do not know, think, or feel. (J. Bruner, 1986, p. 14)

Whether we are cognisant of them or not, interpretative skills assist in the creation of personal life histories, those uniquely embodied accounts of people who exist and take actions in distinct places and times. When an important event occurs it “takes on unity and shape” in comparison to “those moments in life when we might say that nothing much seems to be going on” (Mattingly, 2007, p. 409). Counterfactual imaginings, events that might have happened ‘if’, linger silently in the background of the expressed telling, perhaps sharpening its implications. Subsequent retelling may bear a resemblance to the actual event in tone and content, evoke a familiar felt-sense of what happened, and be more or less indistinguishable from a previous rendering. However narration is a context-situated one-off event, a temporal occurrence to claim a point of view (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Hence, in becoming tellers of tales and witnesses to others and our own activities we attempt to produce a coherent storied sense of self (J. Bruner, 1997; Bruner, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Labov, 1982; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Research in neuroscience seems to confirm that when children learn language and the skills to narrate their experiences

to others and themselves they enhance an “autonoetic consciousness” (Siegel, 1999, p. 333), the mental ability to shift a relatively stable agent across the temporal frames of past, present, and future (Freeman, 1993; Linde, 1993). Predictability, steadiness and coherence are valued while irregularity, confusion and disorder may be viewed as undesirable and perhaps an impediment to a normative developmental agenda. Still, Elliot Mishler questions the usefulness of coherence as a marker of an accomplished self and critiques normative notions of logical and connected identity stages to be mastered (Erikson, 1950, 1959). His study of craftartists’ lives found that “discontinuities and disjunctions in career paths were typical rather than unusual” (1999, p. 130). Similarly, historian Hayden White (1987) contests the pursuit of continuity.

Every narrative, however seemingly “full”, is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out; this is as true of imaginative narratives as it is of realistic ones. And this consideration permits us to ask what kind of notion of reality authorizes construction of a narrative account of reality in which continuity rather than discontinuity governs the articulation of the discourse. (p. 10)

Certainly uneven narrations are common in psychotherapy as people attempt to craft meanings about the consequences of distressing events, troubling incidents and unasked-for injustices. Therapeutic conversations may intentionally interrupt well-rehearsed disturbing storylines, prompt novel versions of events to appear, and encourage positive ways to live. What was initially cast as marginal may come to the foreground and take on a constructive authority in the client’s life and relationships. What was compelling and harmful may be consigned to the edges. Storied creations reveal how “ambiguity is the rule rather than the exception, and no utterance is simple” (Spence, 1982, p. 24).

In case the foregoing be read as privileging interiority in the composition of storylines, I side with the view that protagonists make personal knowledge claims shaped by the “context, the audience, and the conventions of the medium” (E. M. Bruner, 1997, p. 270), the sociocultural circumstances of a telling. Though much can be contested as to how the terms culture and society have been invented and are

deployed, for my purposes culture means the characteristic beliefs, knowledges, values and agreements that bind people together to explain their experiences of the world. These may take religious or secular forms. Here, society refers to the broader systematised patterns of relating in a community or nation and may include diverse human expressions (C. Barker, 2004).

When dominant cultural plotlines are influential, they may entice people into pre-existing ways of thinking and acting, thereby setting aside alternative opportunities for living. Personal stories emerge from these cultural and social sources, from “textual structures that afford blueprints for world construction” (Herman, 2008, p. 256), promoting and restraining the kinds of accounts that can be told and lived. Settled ways of thinking coalesce, produce, and sustain habitual distributions of power in relationships. Yet, even though people access and rely considerably on these preformed discursive arrangements, they do not mechanically mimic them as there can be vagueness, contradictions, and dissonances between well-established storylines and the current zeitgeist. No discourse has free rein as there are multiple social processes through which power flows from everywhere to constitute the relational arrangements of the particular. Power in this sense is intimately productive. Every instant it is dispersed through affiliations and forms ideas of personhood, but is not the property of any person (Foucault, 1980a, 1990; May, 2006). The drama metaphor makes it possible to see these embodied human actions as improvised and reflexive self-performances, and to recognise that the kinds of selves depicted, and either aspired to or avoided, have been generated within the minutiae of sociocultural discourses (Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1997; Hodgkiss, 2001; Langellier & Peterson, 2011; Morris, 1996; Newman & Holzman, 2006; Rose, 1996; C. Taylor, 1989). Modern electronic technologies that distribute audiences around the globe and the mobility of the world’s peoples further complicate any tidy boundaries in the production of contemporary selves.

Creating a Reflexive Narrative Research Methodology

The term narrative has its linguistic origins in the Sanskrit *gna* meaning “to know”, the Latin *gnarus* or “knowing” and *narro* or “telling” (H. White, 1987, p. 215). It has

been proposed as a root metaphor for the interpretation of lived experiences (Sarbin 1986) and “the quintessential form of customary knowledge” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 18). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give an account of its significant momentum in recent decades, it is noteworthy that persuasive advocates have appeared in philosophy (Barthes, 1974; Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1990, 2004; C. Taylor, 1989), history (Roberts, 2001; H. White, 1987), anthropology (E. M. Bruner, 1986, 1997; Geertz, 1973, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988) and literary criticism (Eakin, 1999, 2008; Smith & Watson, 2001). The professional disciplines of social work, counselling, psychotherapy and family therapy have endorsed this trend (Efran, Lukens, & Lukens, 1990; Flaskas, McCarthy, & Sheehan, 2007; Hall, 1997; Lieblich, McAdams, & Josselson, 2004; McLeod, 1997; Milner, 2001; Papadopoulos & Byng-Hall, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schafer, 1992; Spence, 1982; M. White, 2007; M. White & Epston, 1990). Psychology and psychiatry have also taken this direction (Berkenkotter, 2008; J. Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Crossley, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 1983; Hamkins, 2013; Lewis, 2011; Mehl-Madrona, 2010; Sarbin, 1986).

My general purpose in this project was to engage in a “polyphony-driven mode of research” with participants being encouraged to reveal their intentions, values, beliefs, and commitments in their professional and personal lives with regard to mindfulness (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 258). I wondered how I might construct a reflexive methodology to call forth unique stories and create a design that could “obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996, pp. 5,6). On the other hand, I wanted to restrain this enterprise from spiralling into interpretive and deconstructive acts without end through a “pragmatic knowledge interest” in the everyday and therapeutic purposes and effects of mindfulness (Kvale, 1996, p. 248). Given these aims, I was drawn to formal research that championed narrative, linguistic, reflexive and relational methodologies (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Angus & McLeod, 2004; Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Elliott, 2005; Etherington, 2004; Gee, 1991, 2012; Labov, 1982; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Mishler, 1986, 1999, 2004; Paechter, 2012; Percy, 2003; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Riessman & Speedy, 2006; Schwandt, 1994).

It is not surprising that Rudrum (2005) notes the “sheer variety of different uses to which narratives are put” (p. 202), confounding what qualifies as a narrative. For Polkinghorne the word “functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units” (1988, p. 11). Edward Bruner believes the “key elements in narrative are story, discourse, and telling” where story is the related sequence of happenings, discourse the contextual setting, and the telling an act of communicating in storied form (1997, p. 269). Riessman (2008) is concerned that precision has been sacrificed with the spread of narrative approaches and she offers a range of candidate descriptions linked to the purpose and design of an enquiry (pp. 3-7). In another place, she and Speedy define narrative crisply as “*sequence and consequence*” (2006, p. 430, emphasis in original). I came to the view that just as we cannot re-present the world in an unambiguous and neutral manner through narrative, neither can we decide on definitions of the term narrative impartially. My concern is that tight definitions could lead to an uncompromising solidification and potentially exclude speech and text that didn’t conform to strict parameters. Consequently, I join with Mishler’s refusal to “police the boundaries” (1999, p. 17) of what counts as narrative, follow Polkinghorne (1988) by not making a distinction between narrative and story and, like Rudrum (2005), prefer to consider what becomes possible, or not possible, through particular concepts of narrative and its enactments in context.

With regard to the ethics of this research, I read the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007) and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2007), noting the special relevance of Chapter 4.8. I reread the Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics to ensure my research processes were consonant with the obligations of my profession including to engage in just, equitable, and accountable practices with culturally diverse communities (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). I believe the project, both in conduct and design, respects the local cultural and social values and traditions of Bhutan. In line with academic convention, all potential participants were made aware of my research intentions, the procedures to be deployed and the specifics of the design. Risks and benefits, possible outcomes, how the results may

be used, and my part as the researcher were explained. A right to withdraw from the project at any time, without prejudice or negative consequences, was given. Confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity were addressed through the use of pseudonyms and the altering of certain identifiable data in the final report. However, given the small number of subjects in this study, consent to contribute was sought on the basis that identification might be possible (Appendices 2 and 9).

Orderly professional codifications and the “*procedural rationality*” of University Human Research Ethics Committees are necessary but they seem meagre when faced with the intricacies of human lives (Bauman, 1994, p. 6, emphasis in original). Common requirements from within Western academia may be experienced differently by populations which don’t share these views strongly, or at all, perhaps especially where they hold alternative cosmological views. This may lead to ethical positions that “are either irrelevant, unrealistic and/or possibly inappropriate and insufficient to address the complexity of such encounters” (Andrews, 2007, p. 498). In Bhutan I was convinced that all participants understood the ethical obligation of research confidentiality and yet, from my observation, privacy as it is usually understood in Australia is highly unlikely. This was underlined for me when one Bhutanese participant asked casually who else was being interviewed for the project. I felt uneasiness and, somewhat reactively, referred to the University’s requirements concerning confidentiality. A pause followed awkwardly, at least for me. I silently chided myself for being a detached academic, a clumsy enforcer of rules to follow, and an impolite cultural interloper. Seeming to notice my mood, in the next breath the interviewee said, with a graceful laugh, that it didn’t matter whether I told him as he would know soon anyway. I think he was direct with me due to our previous association. I certainly appreciated being relieved of my discomfort. Reflecting on this later, I heard in both my stumbling reply and his relaxed expectation a desire to care for each other. And I am left wondering whether in some circumstances the Western idea of research confidentiality may lead to participants being less trusting of the researcher. Perhaps, under certain conditions, using the actual names of participants might be a more culturally ethical stance as then they can be held accountable to others in their community for their comments. This raises many complex issues on privacy, trust and safety, to name a few.

At some phase I became troubled too by my early conclusion that the nature of the topics and the senior professional status of primary participants in this project reduced the likelihood of causing harm. Thinking more carefully, I recalled occasions in therapy where clients who had achieved higher educational qualifications and held executive positions in their area of work became distraught when I asked seemingly ordinary questions about their personal life. My response to their distress was sometimes unhelpful, partly based on mistaken assumptions about shared social values and beliefs. Consequently, I decided to problematise the imagined benevolence of this project, my aim in part being to guard against what I saw as the hazards of naturalising or normalising interactions with people from my culture and of assuming participants and I would obviously act ethically given our similarities in social and professional standing. I sought to lessen the modernist tendencies of rationality, regulation, and scientific certainty in ethics opting instead for a critical “living tradition” approach (Hugman, 2005, p. 163), an ethically embodied researcher-self who could draw on established modes yet remake them in response to local issues and circumstances. As would be clear from my earlier remarks, I believed participants’ assertions of personal knowledges could only be made from socially situated perspectives on life within a continuous enactment of power relations (Foucault, 1988; Rabinow, 1984). Given that extolling individual agency in personal narratives can erase contextual and socio-political dimensions, I sought to produce texts within texts, drawing in part on Foucault’s ethics of concern for self where “a person can be responsible for and responsive to her or his own self and from that to her or his encounters with the world” (Hugman, 2005, p. 109). An ethic of care with others seeks to understand participants’ worlds of experience through listening for agreements, subversions, resistances and reverses with regard to the social discourses they inhabit (Foucault, 1997; Weedon, 2004).

Relatedly, I turned to the explanatory scheme of van Lagenhove and Harré (1999) who propose three modes of discursive positioning that can be taken up or assigned within an emerging plotline. First order positioning refers to the ways in which people morally situate themselves. A second order “occurs when the first order positioning is not taken for granted by one of the persons involved in the discussion” (p. 20), illustrating its reflexive or accountive features as people negotiate meaning through raising questions about the first position and perhaps refusing it.

Conversations that involve the accountive in another time and place are a third order. All positions are vantage points from which to construe events employing specific metaphors, analogies, and images which are formed into storylines. Of import with regard to ethics is that “the rights for self-positioning and other-positioning are unequally distributed and not all situations allow for or call for an intentional positioning of the participants” (p. 23). Attention is given to the moral stances taken up through “the local distribution of rights and duties”, which then “determines the way episodes unfold” (Rom Harré, 2006, p. 228). Although the term “determines” seems unfortunate, implying a strong causality, Harré & Moghaddam (2003) clarify that positions are fluid, with people taking up or contesting, stepping back from or aligning with, the present circumstances. This description of mobility worked well for me as it acknowledges peoples’ predicaments when socially performing their preferences, the consequences being an expansion and contraction of certain lines of action. While the notion of performing a social self is not new (Goffman, 1969; V. W. Turner, 1986), discursive positioning requires researchers to consider how personal claims are made continuously through distributions of power.

As well as the academic works cited, I drew on my heart/mind lived experiences of Australia and Bhutan. When the scholarly and other lived personal histories are knitted together an “ethical pluralism”, to borrow Hugman’s term (2005, p. 161), may be attempted. This comprises academic knowledges, experiences of being a moral person, and the recognition of our collective social responsibilities. Ellis writes of “mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (2007, p. 4) and May theorises a “responsive and reciprocal” covenantal ethic and its requirement for “an exchange of promises” (2006, p. 367). Guided by these philosophical views and research traditions, I chose a reflexive and dialogic narrative research design where the “dividing line between performer and audience blurs, and culture itself becomes a dramatic performance” (Denzin, 2001, p. 26). I will give details of this approach in the design section of this thesis especially with regard to the structuring of conversations with counsellors and psychotherapists as they become audiences to, and commentators on, each other’s interviews.

Even so, an ethic of participatory narrative inquiry with its aspiration for equitable justice-based relationships only serves to emphasise inevitable difficulties (Riessman, 2002). I felt the tension between tendencies to sway participants' answers so they might say what was valuable in my eyes and opening space with them for uncensored remarks and a shared say in the project's outcomes. I can claim we all participated in the spoken and unspoken positionings of each other, with each person making decisions as to utterances and revelations. Still, my collaborative ambitions remained problematic. To put it minimally, I invited participants into processes I structured. I interpreted their accounts through our conversational and somatic expressions, choosing which parts to include from a back-then-and-there historical past into a written here-and-now text for an unpredictable future when-and-there. I gain academic and social prestige if the thesis is passed. In striving for polyphonic texts I recognised, like Adams, that in deciding the final ways interviewees' accounts are interpreted in this document, I 'escape textual debate with the people I textually implicate' (2008, p. 180). Keeping this in mind, I was on guard against the possibility of harm from the researcher-me who I believed had good intentions but who may, in the end, misunderstand. Josselson's comments are apropos.

The greater the degree of rapport and trust, the greater the degree of self-revealing and, with this, the greater degree of trust that the researcher will treat the material thus obtained with respect and compassion. (2007, p. 539)

I placed participants' voices alongside mine as researcher, not giving voice to them or empowering them to speak, but rather aspiring to a co-created context that made possible the bringing forth of multiple voices where language is always mutable and constitutive. For this to succeed I made continuous efforts to take seriously the predicaments of who could speak and under what conditions, what accounts were tellable or silenced, whose knowledges were brought to light and for what purpose, who was included and who was excluded, and what expressions were allowed or avoided. Contradictory perspectives were predictable and encouraged. These kinds of collaborative ethics demanded a critical reflexivity, a continuous willingness to contend with power/knowledge and knowledge/action through destabilising hierarchy and making way for "partnerships of relational truths where all parties co-

create knowledges that further the aims of the conversation” (Percy, 2006, p. 97), words that are easy to write and far removed from the predicaments of achieving such an engagement during an actual conversation.

Given this co-learning ambition, my preference is to refer to interviewees as conversational partners though I do use the terms participants and interviewees as well. On a similar note, “client” was the word most used by partners in professional settings and “people” was given by interviewees who had other identity markers such as teacher or student. Consequently, I mostly use the term client people for the recipients of counselling or psychotherapeutic services rather than client. One exception is referring to people in a hospital setting as patients. At different times, I more or less personified and claimed the identities of researcher, family therapist, mindfulness practitioner, university lecturer, and Euro-Australian male as well as colleague, acquaintance, and friend. I am conscious that all of us moved between various identity states, the shifts often marked by more or less formality of language, tone of speaking, and gesture. As Josselson puts it, we must be “conversant with the ultimate complexity of moral choice when confronted with the situational particularities” (2007, p. 559). We are relentlessly invited to take up positions in response to the momentary uniqueness of happenings, never able to stand nowhere.

Enacting Reflexive Narrative Research

The design comprised three sites of enquiry. First, as it is widely accepted that all Buddhist traditions offer concepts and skills for mindfulness and given that Bhutan was founded upon *Kagyū* and *Nyingma* religious histories, I sought views from senior monastic and lay Buddha *Dharma* teachers from both the *Mahayana* and *Theravada* traditions of Buddhism to provide a contextual heritage to the research. I realise these broad categories conflate different schools within these traditions but for my purposes this is not significant. Second, it was apparent from scanning contemporary Australian and overseas conference programs, attending professional development trainings, and having informal discussions with colleagues, that various social service organisations in Perth and Bhutan have included, or were thinking of including, mindfulness approaches in their programs. To gain an understanding of

these trends, I consulted with senior government and private sector managers in both countries. Third, in keeping with this project's overall aims, interviews with counsellors and psychotherapists in Australia and Bhutan were given primacy. These three sites could not be explored consecutively but when interviewees were available. Opportunities arose initially with a Buddhist monk and a government service provider in Perth. The last interviews were with Bhutanese colleagues, followed by an unexpected chance to interview an internationally esteemed *Mahayana* Buddhist nun in Perth.

I now explain my general approach before laying out the details of the steps I instituted for the group interviews with counsellors and psychotherapists. Initially I phoned or emailed potential participants in both countries outlining the purposes and practicalities of the project, offering to answer any queries and seeking to ascertain whether they found the research topic meaningful and were willing to participate. If they had a desire to contribute, I requested them to confirm they fulfilled the eligibility criteria. I also asked whether they knew of other colleagues who might be possible candidates for inclusion. Sometimes people wondered if they had anything to offer. I took this apprehension, and perhaps humility, as a sign to clarify my purposes further regarding my preferred role as a co-researcher.

Following my assessment of their suitability, an official Letter of Invitation detailing the study's aims, my research intentions and the design was sent to each person along with a Consent Form and Interview Questions (Appendices 1-10). The latter were created to explore topics emerging from the literature that I considered could be important given my research interests. They fall into five broad classes: professional practices, personal approaches, notions of self and ethics, Buddhist and secular views, and similarities and differences between Australia and Bhutan. Though they were intended to shape responses relevant to this study, they were not designed to be restrictive and I made it clear that partners could introduce additional subjects.

All were informed the project had approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number OTSW-09-2011) and they were provided with information should they want to make a complaint about the research process at any time. I reassured them that interview material would be treated with

respect and conveyed my genuine gratitude for their possible participation. Dependability, trustworthiness and credibility were central. My well-regarded professional status in Perth and the fact that I knew about half of the participants in both Bhutan and Australia, to varying degrees, created a provisional foundation for trustworthiness.

I conceived of the conversations as dialogical matrices where I could ask potentially generative questions especially drawing upon my experience of landscape of action and landscape of identity enquiries with client people in therapy (M. White, 1995a; M. White & Epston, 1990). Maintaining this stance, we made efforts to story pertinent events and make them available for further reflections and, if significant, plot them into an historical trajectory of mindfulness. In some ways this fitted well with the notion of a decentred and influential posture favoured by Narrative Therapists where the knowledges and understandings of client people are sought and, at the same time, the therapist is prominent in eliciting these experiences so that preferred storylines and associated identity conclusions become more likely. This helped to create and sustain a co-learning milieu with regard to noteworthy events.

I recognised my insider-knowledges on the topics we discussed, as well as a desire to deliberately bracket my knowing and stay confidently tentative, be open to unpredictable conversational arcs, and be willing to not know the direction of dialogues or the conclusions we might or might not reach. I did not disguise my personal histories of mindfulness and gave brief responses on occasions when partners interviewed me about my practices. Sometimes the Australians asked me questions about Bhutan and the Bhutanese partners enquired about the Australian context. I did not want to impose my views or suggest subjects they should explore. And I did not want to feign neutrality or pretend not to have thought about their questions, a difficult feat to achieve given my professional relationships with some people. I hoped that my intention to ride the fluid borders of knowing and unknowing, of insider and outsider, would encourage the partners to do likewise and enter polysemous conversations which might in turn offer opportunities for us all to explore particular cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Transcripts of the interviews are the principal documents for this intercultural narrative study, the words of the partners serving to focus on pertinent issues. Temporal-bound stretches of conversation were turned into moveable texts with consequent losses in precision and immediacy especially with regard to somatic experience, affective tones and nonverbal expressions. In making transcripts I take the view that they are not “copies or representations of some original reality; they are interpretive constructions that are useful tools for given purposes” and are subject to ongoing deciphering (Kvale, 1996, p. 165). To mitigate these losses and do justice to the interviews I read each transcript and listened to its digital recording simultaneously, the usage of certain words rousing my curiosity and the hearing of partners’ voices reminding me of the emotional textures in the actual interview. An opportunity to receive and reconsider transcripts of their particular meeting, with an invitation to clarify any remarks, was given to all partners. No requests were received. Based on their brief verbal replies, I speculate that each person was satisfied with their interview, though I don’t know more details as I didn’t enquire further.

In all these ways I tried to make my expectations and motivations clear so that people might treat informed consent not as a signed finality but as an ongoing revisable agreement. I desired to be held ethically accountable for my words and actions not only before and during the interviews but afterwards with regard to this thesis, published texts or verbal presentations.

Monastic and Lay Buddha Dharma Teachers

The criteria for the selection of monastic and lay *Dharma* teachers were the holding of senior positions within a Buddhist tradition and having actively promoted mindfulness. To locate potential candidates in Australia for a one hour semi-structured interview, I composed a list of people whose teachings or retreats I had attended during 25 years of exploring *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Buddhism. Two monks and one unordained male teacher from the *Theravada* tradition and two nuns and one monk from the *Mahayana* were interviewed. Three people are based in Perth, one lives in another Australian state, and two are internationally respected figures who had travelled to Perth to offer teachings. Regarding the latter, one is

Australian-born and the other is from Myanmar. I relied on local colleagues in Bhutan to locate potential partners there. Some candidates I knew of were unavailable during my visits and it was quite unclear when others might be able to meet. In due course, I interviewed one European born monk who has lived for many years in different Asian countries including Bhutan. My only other interviewee was a highly regarded male lay Buddhist practitioner who is Bhutanese. He is considered a virtual monk due to his genuine and sustained dedication to the Buddha *Dharma* and has taught in a number of Asian and European countries. During my second visit to Bhutan in March 2013 I had to leave the country sooner than expected due to a change in the visa laws and so was unable to pursue leads I had been given. Unfortunately, I was unable to speak with *Mahayana* nuns in Bhutan as there are relatively few ordained due to a lack of opportunity historically, though numbers are increasing. I believe there were no *Theravada* monks or nuns in Bhutan at the times I visited. As would be evident, with six males and two females interviewed overall, a gender balance was not achieved.

Although I attempted to schedule conversations with *Dharma* instructors in Australia and Bhutan weeks or months ahead, I had to be flexible and adjust to changing situations, completing interviews when participants were available. The shortest time between a request for an interview and a meeting was a few days, the longest period was almost three months. To an extent these events highlight the uncertainty of research endeavours generally and perhaps more so in cultures that have a relaxed attitude to the passing of time and the, perhaps related, intricate protocols necessary to expedite decisions in organisations. Despite these conditions, I believe the interviews achieved the aim of articulating various understandings of mindfulness from within the *Theravada* and *Mahayana* traditions. Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, no teachers were concerned about their actual names being published and they consented to my preference for pseudonyms only to satisfy the University requirements. I refer to two males by their respectful Buddhist title, that is, *Ajahn* from the *Theravada* Thai tradition and *Sayadaw* for the *Theravada* teacher from Myanmar. Otherwise partners are given Tibetan or English names.

Government and Private Sector Managers

Interviews were sought with people who held senior government or private sector management positions and who were directly responsible for prioritising therapeutic mindfulness approaches in their areas of influence. One semi-structured questionnaire guided an hour-long interview during which I sought their personal understandings of mindfulness along with their broad organisational visions for the inclusion of secular or Buddhist-informed methods. Through my long-established family therapy work and my lecturing at Curtin University and the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle, I have met colleagues from different disciplines and social service agencies with an interest in mindfulness. I composed a list of potential candidates from the government and private sector who I thought could possibly fit the criteria, eventually interviewing one female and one male. Familiarity with counselling services in Bhutan led me to speak with three male government officials. It was my plan to interview one prominent female administrator but due to the visa problem already mentioned this did not eventuate. As four males and one female were interviewed overall, I did not get close to achieving equal participation of genders.

Counsellors and Psychotherapists

A preference for promoting dialogical exchanges with these key participants in both countries led me to reconsider a cooperative and collaborative group inquiry method I had applied to a project over a decade ago (Dodds, 1995; Heron, 1996; Percy, 2006). Noting the different foci of the present research, I was obligated to not simply attempt a replication of methodology or design but to review and reassess the features, relevance, and implementation of these past activities. It was especially important to appreciate the social and cultural contexts within which I would be moving. For this purpose, I desired to construct an interpretative design that would enact and enhance the reflexive potentials of narrative research. In looking for an answer I returned to my familiarity with Michael White's adaptation of the reflecting team approach used in family therapy (1995b, 1997, 2000), my professional experiences with this innovation, and my reworking of this process in the previous project (Percy, 2006). After consideration, I decided to interview and reinterview

participants in each other's presence through a four-part progression, a social and communal process I surmised would potentiate reflexive telling and retelling, thereby generating multiple perspectives and richly nuanced accounts. This co-research approach, which I explain in detail shortly, acts as an antidote to a single authoritative version of events by an interviewee or researcher and restrains any tendencies towards extremely relativistic or solipsistic interpretations.

Even though I saw sense in these steps, when I reread my research intentions and methodological preferences, I wanted to enhance dialogical exchanges between Bhutan and Australia, partly in order to understand how much personal responses might implicate sociocultural histories. I considered asking partners to read and respond to the transcripts of interviews but, sensitive to the fact that they were already committing themselves to a considerable number of hours, decided this request was unreasonable, and perhaps unfeasible, even though they may have been willing. I settled upon a two tiered process whereby I would interview the Australian and Bhutanese partners twice over a 19 month period with a précis of each meeting being sent to both groups. I will explain this step further when describing the details of the design.

In blending collaborative and cooperative inquiry methods, I conceptualised each group of interviewees as belonging to a living empirical or experience-based knowledge community which may achieve unique understandings in relation to the topics under discussion (Denzin, 2001). This has some resonance with William James' "radical empiricism" (1912/1977, p. 195). Declining reductive theories, he states

the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system. (p. 195, italics in original)

Criteria for the selection of partners were the holding of senior professional positions, the provision of supervision to colleagues, significant standing in the field, and declaring a professional and personal interest in, and practice of, secular and/or Buddhist mindfulness. Again, I drew on my professional connections to put together

an initial list of potential candidates from social work, counselling, psychotherapy, psychology, occupational therapy, and other related helping professions who would most likely fit the criteria for inclusion in this project. With regard to Bhutan, I had known a number of colleagues since 2007, initially as one of their university lecturers and then as a volunteer consultant based in Thimphu. I thought they would probably fulfil the criteria and I knew they were fluent in English though the latter was not a prerequisite for inclusion.

In my initial contact, I informed people there would be a series of group meetings of approximately 2 hours duration each. A gap of about one year would occur between a first and second round of interviews. My intention was to be clear about the substantial time and the degree of cooperation that would be needed if they chose to participate in the study. Snowball sampling via a series of emails eventually produced six committed participants in each country, initially four females and two males in Perth and the reverse in Bhutan.

I reacquainted myself with the guiding principles of this cooperative and collaborative approach (Dodds, 1995, pp. 37-38). Below I have italicised those principles, followed by my reasoning as to participants' suitability for the present inquiry.

The method involves considerable commitment on the part of all participants

After weighing up their obligations and the time involved in the research meetings, respondents were willing to be included, expressing their appreciation for the opportunity to explore issues that were of great importance to them.

Group members must have direct experience of the study subject

Privileging insider or emic knowledges would be a necessary pathway for extensive explorations of distinctive attitudes and actions. Group members were practitioners of personal and professional approaches in mindfulness and were involved in different ways in counselling and psychotherapy. I believed my dual insider and outsider knowledges could add to the richness of this study.

Participants must feel assured that what they say will not be used against them

Given my explicit ethical stance and transparency, and the related design of this study, I believe people were able to determine my care for them and the stories they might gift to me.

It is important that there is no great disparity in power or status among group members, including the initiating researcher(s) organisational or social position, as this could inhibit the democratic process integral to the method

I hope it is clear from the preceding sections in this chapter that democratising the research was a steady intention of mine. Participants consented to be interviewed knowing my professional background as a University academic and a family therapist. They are all tertiary educated and in senior roles in their home countries. I already had an acquaintance with some Australian colleagues and, as mentioned, the Bhutanese people were students and colleagues of mine to varying degrees. Researchers have noted advantages and cautions with regard to these kinds of prior relationships, leading me to consider if they would be unfavourable or contrary to the aims of this project (Acker, 2000; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Humphrey, 2007; Paechter, 2012; J. Taylor, 2011). Might it compel people to participate and, if they did so, would this inhibit or change their contributions? Bearing in mind the arguments made in the literature, I did not think there would be any concerns in enrolling the Australians, given our occasional professional contacts and the seniority we all held. With regard to the Bhutanese, I decided to canvass this issue with them in a straightforward manner. I was reassured they did not feel obligated and they could not foresee any reticence to speak. Rather, what became clear is that through our previous connections they had the opportunity to observe me closely and note my interpersonal and professional approaches with them, other students and my University colleagues, so providing evidence to guide their decision-making about involvement. In more collectivist cultures like Bhutan the foundations of dependable and open relationships are built slowly over time especially with foreigners who share no ancestral or geographical heritage. Still, even with my Bhutanese colleagues' encouragement, I kept in mind their social inclination to deference towards senior educators and decided that if I thought this might be constraining a conversation I would raise my observations openly and tactfully.

In addition, the reflexive narrative method I proposed emphasised reciprocal trustworthiness and credibility, qualities that may be realised whether a researcher has past links with participants or not. And though it might sound as if I chose them, I think it is also reasonable to assume that the participants chose me too. Mutuality and not passivity was at work in our email exchanges. To put it succinctly, I am claiming a benevolent environment was created because I did already know some Bhutanese and Australians in various prior circumstances and this resulted in frank and wide-ranging conversations.

The initiating researcher(s) must perceive themselves as “co-learners” rather than “experts”

All social knowledges are coproduced but certain ethical conditions are required to educe just relational arrangements. Along with the actions I have mentioned already, shortly I will clarify design features that I believe contributed to co-learning opportunities in the groups.

It is a method of research particularly suited to practitioners who have been trained in groupwork skills

For over 20 years I have facilitated groups across a range of contexts including professional development training, supervision, and organisational evaluations of social service teams. In addition, I have taught group process in an undergraduate Social Work course at Curtin University, and presented workshops at state, national and international conferences.

Before the initial meeting I reminded participants of the dates and times, provided a brief agenda, and gave more details of the four-part group process, requesting they contact me with any questions. All partners reaffirmed their keen interest in the project and, as I read their emails, I sensed the emerging shape of a welcoming community. The first time we met I expressed my appreciation for the partners' presence. I then gave a brief overview of the reason for the research project, explaining why I thought it was significant, mentioning my hope that being involved would be fruitful for us all, and stating how I saw them playing a part and in what ways results from the project might be disseminated. As well, I offered them a copy

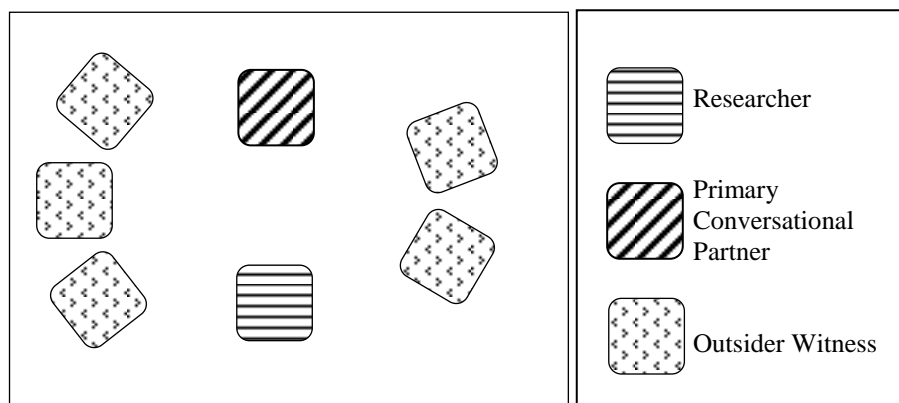
of my candidacy proposal and said I would provide a copy of the completed thesis to them.

Each person agreed they fully understood the Consent Form and chose to be involved. They introduced themselves, spoke briefly on their work context and, if they wished, said why they had decided to participate. After I mentioned the aims and practicalities of the group process, we randomly chose the interviewing order of primary conversational partners, the person whose life would be featured during each meeting. During the first part, I interviewed them while other members were encouraged to listen as a silent audience or “outsider witnesses” (M. White, 1997, pp. 93-114) to the telling and create “a respectful, spacious receiving context for the story being told by the interviewee, whose narrative [remains] at the forefront” (Percy, 2006, p. 99).

To emphasise this aim, I sat opposite the primary conversational partner with the witnesses gathered around us as shown in Figure 3.1. Witnesses did not have conversation with each other, the primary interviewee or the researcher and were not in the direct line of sight of the researcher/interviewee dyad but placed to the side so that there was less likelihood of communicating via eye contact.

Figures 3.1 to 3.4 show the sequence of seating arrangements in Perth during the group interviews. Similar chair spacing and orientation occurred in Bhutan.

Figure 3.1 Seating for the First Part



Witnesses were encouraged to attend to verbal or nonverbal expressions of the interviewee and become aware of the resonance or otherwise of the account, any images that appeared to them, and whether they were moved by the stories told. People in this place were not passive receivers of knowledges but rather interpreters who would later respond to what was offered and, in doing so, influence the direction, content and legitimacy of the narratives. They were invited to become part of the action of telling as versions of events folded back on each other in reflexive formations of meanings. The privilege of being in the audience requires a willingness to take up responsibilities with regard to the ethics of listening and responding from this reflexive viewpoint. Unlike Narrative Therapy where outsider witnesses are requested to give greater attention to actual or potentially preferred changes, audience members in research projects may widen their scope to cover both the unwanted and the preferred as well as introduce other topics. They can take brief notes and hold the following questions in mind:

The expressions

- What aspects of this conversation am I most drawn to for further exploration?
- What am I most curious about or interested in?

The images

- What images are evoked for me by this conversation?
- What impressions do I receive when listening to these stories?

The resonances

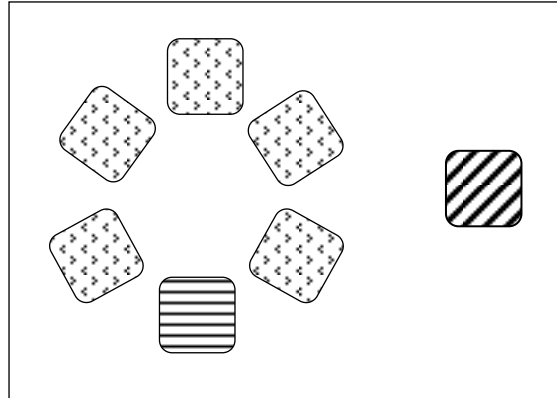
- Why am I most drawn to these images, ideas, suggestions and so on?

The sense of being moved or transported

- Where have I been taken in my thinking?
- How have I been moved by this conversation?
- What am I now experiencing differently?
- What might this say about me as a person and a professional that is important to me?

During the second part, the primary conversational partner and the witnesses physically changed places, the latter forming a circle which I joined.

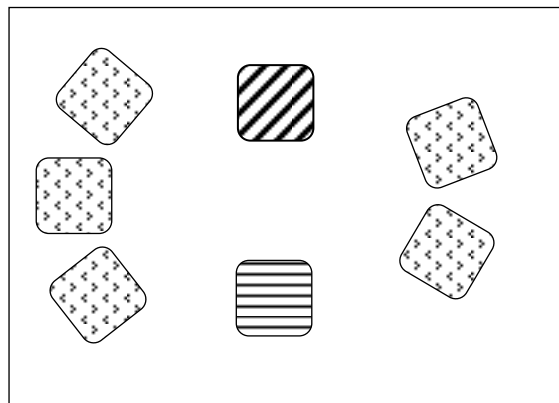
Figure 3.2 Seating for the Second Part



The primary partner then listened silently to the witnesses and me reflect on our understandings of the just completed conversation, the aim being to “expand the range of voices being heard and enlarge possible responses, keeping in mind the themes identified by the [primary] interviewee” (Percy, 2006, p. 100). I made it clear that it was not necessary for each witness to respond to all the given questions, only to those that seemed most pertinent. They were encouraged to actively interview each other about their responses. To begin with I prompted these discussions though over time group members took a leading role. Given their newness to each other and to the purposes of this group interviewing process, I interposed if partners drifted from the agreed-upon tentative and exploratory mode of inquiry towards a more prescriptive or declarative tone. This usually took the form of me inviting witnesses to embody their remarks in personal events, imaginations, and intentions. The effect of this deconstruction was that knowledge claims were rendered propositional and more readily available for appraisal. Guided by a readiness to enter mystery, curiosity, and wondering, partners frequently resonated with the stories being told, revealing personal episodes as they offered comments and sought clarifications from each other. This invariably led to a parallel curiosity by the primary conversational partner towards their own experiences, consequently bringing forth additional “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 310). Responding in this style seemed powerfully capturing of everyone’s attention and created various narrative trajectories.

In the third part, all participants returned to their earlier places and the primary partner was reinterviewed by me. They were invited to reflect on the outsider witnesses' and my responses that were resonant, as well as those that were less so. They could augment, clarify, or dispute our interpretations and provide other general or specific thoughts. I often picked up on some of their comments and, through a range of exploratory questions, encouraged them to elaborate. I also mentioned what I noticed, wondering aloud about various issues, their significance or otherwise, and the possible meanings of what was said. When this was happening the rest of the group remained in their original audience place as engaged silent listeners.

Figure 3.3 Seating for the Third Part

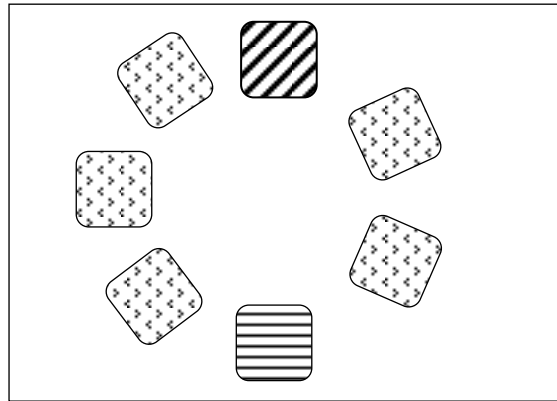


To clarify, the first part of the four-part progression can be considered a telling by one group member, the second part a retelling and response by other group members and me, with the reflections by the primary partner in the third part viewed as a retelling of the retelling. This arrangement allowed the person who was at the centre of our meeting to make the closing remarks, the intention being to maintain their primary authorship of the interview. Frequently, links were made across the three segments by partners, identifying themes and giving a sense of unity and constancy to the overall conversations as people expanded upon topics or moved into related areas.

During the fourth and final segment, we formed a circle and research partners were invited to deconstruct the previous three parts including, if they wished, to inquire of me as researcher “why I asked certain questions, my responses to particular themes that emerged and what directions I saw taken or not taken during the interview”

(Percy, 2006, p. 100). They were also encouraged to interview me about my research aims and aspects of personal experiences that might have influenced decisions to pursue certain lines of enquiry so as to make my contribution transparent.

Figure 3.4 Seating for the Fourth Part



Being able to speak to each other directly in this part, they usually took the opportunity to broaden and give depth to specific themes that had been identified, sometimes introducing other areas that were taken up in later interviews. Such conversational turn-taking circulated and recirculated accounts in a spiral of meaning-making and, as a result, contributed to a further generative polyvocality. When the group interacted in this format I took care to reduce the likelihood that the primary conversational partner was placed at the centre again and be, in effect, reinterviewed as I believed this would have lessened opportunities for all people present to share their thoughts. Given the wide-ranging conversations I anticipated, the first part was allocated 40 to 50 minutes and the remaining parts 10 to 20 minutes each.

In our early meetings I invited comments from the group on this four-part process and opened space for discussions about alternative ways of proceeding. Partners said they were energised as it definitely brought forth their perspectives through detailed descriptions of their lives, attitudes, and beliefs. Though no one spoke of unhelpful features, I made it clear they could raise concerns at any time. These evaluations, admittedly brief, supported my view that the design was appropriate to the project at hand. Towards the end of our time together, partners offered further appraisals which I present in Chapter 10.

I believe this adapted outsider witness and definitional ceremonies process (Myerhoff, 1982, 1986; Speedy & Thompson, 2004) intensified a democratic co-research context and created knowledge communities as people told their stories through shared themes and commitments. Certain questions asked by me resembled Myerhoff's re-membering concept which can be described as a "special type of recollection...calling attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story, one's own prior selves, as well as significant others who are part of the story" (1982, p. 111). Implicating others through telling, retelling and re-telling produced diverse knowledges thereby undermining any efforts to produce an utterly true or final account.

Drawing on Lieblich, et al. (1998), I wrote a global impression of each primary partner's interview though I preferred to name it a *Biographic Impression* as this seemed closer to what we achieved. My aim was to capture in an overall and concise sense the content of the interview through picking up on feelings, thoughts, and actions, and noting any patterns including contradictions or ambiguities. I converted the guiding statements suggested by Lieblich and her colleagues (p. 47) into questions which I believed would lead to a more dynamic style of discursive enquiry and create lenses through which to view pertinent topics. This also appealed to me as it was congruent, in some respects, with the question-asking format I provided to the outsider witnesses.

I listened many times to the digital recordings with the transcript before me, attending to the following questions

As I listen to each recording and read the transcript what connected patterns or themes seem to emerge?

What are my initial and global impressions of the interview?

What exceptions or contradictions to the main patterns or themes of the story am I hearing?

When does a pattern or theme appear and disappear and what are the transition points from one to another?

What might be the importance of each pattern or theme?

Which patterns or themes am I drawn to explore further?

I was also interested in the “identity, perceptions and values of the storyteller” associated with these themes (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 88). As before, I changed the authors’ statements into purposeful questions, the idea being to promote a stronger exploratory mode of language

How might I understand the overall development of the plot, rather than the content in which this development takes place?

What specific forms of evocative speech are used and what is the effect of these languages on plot development and evaluating the narrative?

As I listen to the teller historicising events, where do I pick up emotional expansiveness and intensity, or otherwise?

Where do I notice plot congruence or incongruence?

Who is included in this story and for what purpose?

Who might be excluded in this story and for what purpose?

How is the teller positioning herself or himself in the story?

What effect does this have on the story?

How am I positioned as listener?

What effect does this have on the story?

What has this story left me wondering more about?

I did not require myself to answer each question in detail but rather pursued this process as a discursive strategy to enable a concentrated engagement with the texts. Upon completion I sent the *Biographic Impression* to the primary partner for her or his comments with the following invitation: “What I’d like to do is to leave this with you to read and if there’s anything that you have concerns about, or that you’d like to add, or that you think in some way what I’ve described doesn’t really capture your intentions, then you can bring it back to me and we can have a look at that”. This was an attempt to indicate that the interview was potentially revisable, though not substitutable, and that we could arrive at a version that mixed our understandings without any requirement to arrive at a peerless final account.

A *Biographic Impression* may create an overarching narrative smoothness which can obscure any unsureness of direction and messiness of meaning, both in the interview and in the life it attempts to convey. Addressing this issue, I decided to fragment the interviews into prominent discursive themes as suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998). To make these themes more comprehensible my approach followed Mishler, seeing advantages in dividing transcript excerpts into “larger units of meaning... words into clauses, clauses into sentences and stanzas, stanzas into narrative episodes” (1999, p. xvi). Although I do not claim a sociolinguistic analysis, I agree with Mishler that reconstructing the interviews using this organising principle requires meticulous attention to digital recordings and the close reading of accurate transcripts. Following this approach, I often present transcript excerpts, the dialogic details, in verse form as I found this emphasised discursive motifs and rendered a cadence to the conversations, a ‘feel’ that can be lost when converting animated interviews into the black on white of script. To me at least, this gave the words a poetic appearance and conveyed an experience-near rhythm of the actual speech (Gee, 1991, 2012). I have usually omitted nonlinguistic features like gestures and pauses in the excerpts unless they are especially germane to the meaning the partner wanted to convey.

I assumed this approach would provide resemblances and variations across partners’ descriptions of events, though combining highly selective extracts in this manner increases the hazards of detemporalisation and decontextualisation with perhaps unintended consequences from the interviewee’s point of view. I tried to stay alert to this possibility and any temptation to emphasise words that served my pre-existing

views (Sikes, 2010). Ultimately, I gave weight to both the overall sense of each interview through the creation of the *Biographic Impressions* as well as the themes identified across the partners' conversations. I believe they accompany each other, making possible a richer understanding of the convergences and divergences in participants' accounts of professional and personal mindfulness. Apart from these choices, at the beginning of each chapter I have evocatively rendered the research dialogues I was privileged to be a part of in sensory and contemplative languages. They are an invitation to readers to engage with non-narrative forms of consciousness as a complement to the predominantly analytical and critical modes of expression found in this thesis.

The first entry into a conversation may shape considerably what is to follow. There could only be one first country, a first question I asked and a first reply from a partner. The closing country and the final person's comments may likewise have swaying power. As the literature on mindfulness in the helping professions has been published substantially in Western countries, I chose to start the interviews with the Australian partners, becoming conversant with the issues from inside a familiar cultural location. That is, I moved from my personal and professional understandings into the unknown but culturally familiar experiences of Australians and then to the unknown and less culturally familiar experiences of Bhutanese colleagues. I saw this as a structure for sequentially knowing more about what I didn't know. On a practical note, when I sought interview dates, a Buddhist monk, a senior provider of mental health services and the Australian group in Perth, indicated their availability soon. From experience I knew a visit to Bhutan would take some months to organise as various protocols must be completed. Therefore, I commenced the Australian interviews alongside planning my journey to Bhutan. The first person to speak in each group was chosen through people writing their names on pieces of paper, me mixing them together in a hat and selecting one at a time with my eyes closed. Mostly my opening question to each primary conversational partner in the groups was the same as asked to partners interviewed individually: What comes to mind when hearing the word 'mindfulness'? That is, I was asking them to consider opening their interview with an ending, their conclusions about what mindfulness "is" or "might be" or what the term evokes for them. It was intended to signal from the beginning, in my words and tone, a willingness to go with them to their favoured

descriptions. In the groups, it was meant to cue all of us present to focus on a retrospective exploration of the historical conditions that led to these conclusions.

First Tier

Using the four-part group inquiry, the six Australians in Perth were initially interviewed in November and December 2011. They chose the names Frances, Arabella, John, Jeff, Elise and Ann. Three worked in private practice and three for government organisations. A total of 2 hours was set aside for each First Tier interview meeting. Once all the *Australian Biographic Impressions* were completed they were shared with the local group members and emailed to the six Bhutanese colleagues.

Soon after I arrived in Thimphu in February 2012 one female colleague withdrew due to illness. As a result, I met with five people who decided to call themselves Yeshey, Tashi, Dendup, Pema and Wangji. They all worked for government organisations as counsellors. Three people were interviewed in Thimphu using the group inquiry method described. I hoped to speak with the other two Bhutanese colleagues in the southern city of Samtse, where they reside. Travelling there is only possible by exiting Bhutan at the border town of Phuntsholing, driving west through an extremely impoverished part of northern India, and entering Bhutan again a few hours later. It turned out the required visa from the Indian Embassy in Thimphu would have taken an uncertain number of weeks to issue, in part due to their insistence that I should have a security clearance from the Australian Government. The two Bhutanese colleagues travelled to Phuntsholing instead which, fortunately, is not an unusual journey for them. Though I maintained a focus on the semi-structured questionnaire in all First Tier interviews in Thimphu and Phuntsholing, I also requested the research partners select and respond to topics that stood out, if any, when reading the *Australian Biographic Impressions*. Five *Bhutanese Biographic Impressions* were subsequently sent to the partners in Australia so they could comment on them during the next set of interviews.

A few people in both countries made small yet significant amendments and clarifications to their First Tier *Impressions*. One Australian gave an especially

detailed reply extending his interview considerably. I was keen to assure him that his views would form part of the research project but as these newly introduced topics were not covered in his interview I suggested not including them in his *Biographic Impression*, to which he agreed. Instead, we decided that I would send his emailed additions to other members of his group without any expectation that they would respond or begin an ongoing correspondence. There were no email follow-ups perhaps due to the fact that members knew we would have opportunities to talk again face-to-face. I welcomed all of these responses as they signified to me an active engagement with the project and supported my faith in the design.

Second Tier

The Second Tier of interviews in Perth took place during two meetings in August 2012. One person was unable to attend due to illness. Because colleagues had already given substantial time to this project, my preference was to delimit the range of possible responses in the Second Tier, moving from an expansive mode of inquiry to special subjects pertinent for them. To achieve this I proposed that partners respond only to a few comments, topics, or themes from the *Bhutanese Biographic Impressions*. To assist in their choice, I suggested they might be ones that stirred an active interest or perhaps brought unanticipated realisations or “aha” moments. I indicated I was also open to hear partners’ remarks on their personal and professional ideas and practices about mindfulness that had developed since we last spoke. In line with this shift, I suggested we alter the timing and format of the interview procedure allocating 15 to 20 minutes for the first part with the primary conversational partner and 5 to 10 minutes each for the second and third parts. In this way three people could cycle through these three parts, one after the other, in just under 2 hours. The previously described fourth part, when participants could speak to each other directly and interview me as researcher, would be given 10 minutes following completion of the three interviews. I advised the partners beforehand of this shorter version. One person expressed some unease about the reduced time allocated to each primary partner which led me to reassure the group I was open to reconsidering. In the end, the format was adopted by the Australians and gave a purposeful focus.

Afterwards I composed a document I came to call the *Australian Responses to Biographic Impressions from Bhutan*. Subsequent to the partners' consent, this was forwarded to the Bhutanese colleagues with an identical request to focus their comments on standout issues or themes. Our follow-up meetings took place in April 2013, the earliest I could return there. The Phuntsholing interviews occurred as planned. However, I had to interview the three Thimphu partners separately due to changed circumstances. I considered the feasibility of internet interviewing with all of them online simultaneously but the technical infrastructure was not reliable in Bhutan. The first interview was in Bumthang, a judicial and administrative district far from Thimphu, while a second was held in the capital. The third partner had begun postgraduate studies in Australia, fortunately for me in Perth, and so was consulted on my return. Because colleagues were not physically together, I opened each interview by reminding them of our earlier conversations and their familiarity with each other. I played the digital recording of the first interview to the second person for his views, and then the recordings from both the first and second interviews to the last partner for her comments. This took place over a period of four weeks. In these ways I sought to stay close to my reflexive intentions through creating this alternative form of outsider witnessing. Another option occurred to me later: to imagine the others' presence by setting some empty chairs where the absent partners could have sat. Maybe this might have elicited different remarks? I also wondered whether they were freer to express opinions and assertions when not witnessed by colleagues. Unfortunately I did not ask them, which in retrospect would have been worthwhile. Still, based on my experience, my tentative conclusion is that meeting together, as we did in the First Tier, enhanced a generative reflexivity. After approving my write-up of their comments, I circulated the document *Bhutanese Responses to Further Impressions from Australia* to all group partners, so concluding the dialogues that had begun 19 months earlier. Appendix 11 shows the sequence of the interviews.

4

Buddha Dharma Teachers and Organisational Managers: Voices from Traditional and Contemporary Settings

unfathomable

immeasurable

Phenomena rolls on.

Brushing teeth, blinking, mouse clicking.

Just like that.

Given Buddhist teachings form a significant backdrop to the topics of enquiry in this project, I sought the views of well-regarded monastic and lay Buddhist teachers from both *Mahayana* and *Theravada* traditions to further understand the ways in which mindfulness has been historically conceptualised and practiced. As well, I considered the opinions of senior organisational managers who have promoted mindfulness, directly or indirectly, in their social service organisations as pertinent to my research aims. I believed these conversations would augment the literature and guide me as to the directions I might take in the project overall and specifically in the interviews with the counsellors and psychotherapists.

Mostly, I followed the questions given to these research partners before the interviews but as each conversation evolved and took a unique shape I was more interested in knowing their assumptions, beliefs and skills of mindfulness rather than requiring them to fit into my prearranged structure. If they chose to linger on certain aspects, I followed their lead. As it turned out, *Dharma* instructors spoke more about the nuanced meanings of mindfulness from their various traditions and less about significant personal episodes in their lives. This makes sense, as for them the interviews were about faithfully conveying the Buddha's teachings to me, not an opportunity for memoir. Organisational managers varied in their responses. All

spoke about their personal routines and some spent substantial time on program initiatives. Hence, the research partners do not comment equally on all matters and my account is a reordering of their responses to achieve conciseness and clarity. To support this aim, I have clustered the consultations with *Mahayana* teachers in both Australia and Bhutan, followed by those who are committed to a *Theravada* path.

Senior Monastic and Lay Buddha Dharma Teachers

Although not planned, it is apt that the inaugural interview for this project was with Namgyal, an Australian-born man who has been a Tibetan monk for almost four decades. He embodies in many ways the intersections of Western thought and a resolute commitment to a religious tradition very similar to the *Kagyū* school in Bhutan. Responding to my initial request for words to describe mindfulness, Namgyal stated it is “a clear awareness of what is going on in your mind”, a vital aspect “being able to recognise whether your mind is in a virtuous or negative state”. Continuing along these lines, he said introspection “should always go with mindfulness” as it can calm “disturbing thoughts” as well as be used to keep “the mind in virtue”. Namgyal linked mindfulness with the cognitive function of memory: “it’s remembering something you already know”. This emphasis on actively choosing to keep certain past events to the fore, a “continuous [cognitive] recall” so as to act wisely, departs from the pronounced emphasis on nondiscursive present moment awareness given in the professional literature. On this issue, Namgyal added firmly that it has been his “good fortune to receive teachings from many great *lamas*” and he can’t recall “ever, ever” any of them talking about “staying in the present moment”. Neither has he read this instruction in “any of the traditional texts”. While admitting being in the present is “very important”, he was perplexed by “this whole emphasis” which “seems to miss a significant point”, that is, the ethical dimension. He stated drolly that there’s “nothing virtuous as such about walking slowly or experiencing the blue as blue, very intensively”. This may be “nice” but it won’t take a person to “enlightenment”. He also challenged the consistent idea of acceptance being an inherent part of mindfulness, stating strongly “there has to be a value judgement”. Mindfulness from this view becomes “a state that one has to cultivate. It’s not something passive”.

Though reluctant to speak about his personal life, Namgyal told me that an initial negative experience of Buddhism, which he declined to elaborate on, did not dissuade him from pursuing the teachings and attending retreats. On one of these occasions, during a lunchtime conversation with a nun, he realised his consuming mental struggles were not “the totality of my mind”. He saw “it is not the only one [mind state] to be in”. This sudden insight was an “incredibly liberating experience, it changed my life” and “connected me [strongly] to the Buddha *Dharma*”. Before we spoke about this event, he had “never labelled it an experience of mindfulness”, a naming that he now thought made sense. In this very brief interchange, just a few words, we added a new meaning to this profound experience, linking his earliest confusing encounters with Buddhist teachings to our interview, a temporal stretch that increased his appreciation of mindfulness. And at the end of our time together, he told me our conversation will affect his teachings with students as he will include, and put more emphasis on, its importance. As will become evident, these acts of shared meaning-making with Namgyal fit with my larger explorations in this thesis concerning the interpretation and narration of unexpected relational encounters during the social construction of mindfulness and its applications in therapeutic contexts.

Two Australian-born nuns from the Tibetan *Mahayana* tradition, the Venerable Aine and Gen, also underlined the connection between mindfulness and memory. For the Venerable Aine, who has been ordained for about four decades as well, mindfulness is just “one mental element” and “can be translated as short-term memory”. It is the skill of “tracking myself from moment to moment” so there is no “forgetting” her spiritual path. Venerable Aine saw it as a “vital component” for improving concentration which then can lead to the “actual job of changing your mind and developing wisdom”. But the “problem with mindfulness”, she said, is that it has become “sort of mystified”, as if it is a “special holy practice”. She insisted it isn’t, saying to me a few times during our interview that “thieves need mindfulness”. From the Buddhist view it is a “neutral” factor, “neither good nor bad but a necessary tool to be good or, indeed, to be bad”. In attempting to understand her views more, I gave the common definitional language from the therapeutic literature to which she quickly retorted: “I just can’t talk like that. I just find it rabbiting on”. The factors given in the professional literature - being non-judgemental, having acceptance, and

staying in the present moment - are “completely overelaborating the meaning”. I decided to persevere asking her to comment on the prominence given to “being in the present moment”. Without pause she stated emphatically, “I don’t ever use those words ever, ever, ever”, the choice and repetition of “ever” echoing Namgyal. When teaching she doesn’t “put this emphasis that the West puts onto it” as it’s “a great big extrapolation”. Similarly, Gen said mindfulness means “to hold the mind on an object without forgetting”, adding that this can only be achieved “through a meditation practice” or “remembering that intention throughout the day”. Her understanding, like the Venerable’s, is that mindfulness “is neither good nor bad”. This being so, the questions for her are: “Mindful of what?” and for what ethical purpose? Becoming calm is worthwhile but, she said laughing, “you need to do more than just chew things slowly” if there are to be beneficial changes in cognitions. For Gen, it can’t be “a technique that you pick out of the spiritual tradition” as the purpose to “protect me and others from suffering” is lost. She understood and appreciated the therapeutic intent of “sitting and [adopting] a bare awareness type thing” but preferred to “work with the mind more dynamically” and “change the way the mind is functioning”.

The idea of placing and keeping the mind on selected phenomena was a key feature for Lama Yeshe when I interviewed him in Thimphu. Like the other partners mentioned so far, he was born and raised in a Western society and gradually became drawn to mind trainings that were “not so faith-based” but “more wisdom-based”. For him, “mindfulness is kind of coming back” into “the now” which is achieved by releasing “anxieties for the future [and] regrets of the past”. Of special relevance, given the focus of this project, he remarked that Buddhism in Bhutan doesn’t place much emphasis on mindfulness but people “would not object if you say this is a Buddhist thing”. I thought the opposite has happened in the West, his passing comment reinforcing my commitment to understand how social and cultural conditions may influence the appearance and use of therapeutic mindfulness.

I also spoke with Sangay when I visited Thimphu. He is a Bhutanese man who began meditation over 25 years ago, has completed traditional silent retreats in remote locations and taught in other countries. Again I was struck by the ethical imperatives connected to mindfulness. It can be used to harm people, he said. This was due to the

absence of “what is called a [right] view”, of “what is good and what is bad”. Or, to frame it another way, what is beneficial and what is destructive in relationships. Mindfulness, for him, was the ability to cultivate a “state of mind that is discerning” through the skill of “watching one’s own thoughts”. Sangay went to the familiar Buddhist analogy of someone who guards a door, “seeing who goes out, who goes in”, meaning the observation of thoughts and feelings to decide if they are constructive or not. Saying thus, he connected mindfulness with “vigilance” (Tibetan: *she zhin*) and “carefulness” (Tibetan: *bag yoe*) to make it “complete”. He spoke of “two different levels” of mindfulness linked to memory: one level remembers “ordinary...daily life when we are talking, doing what we want”. The second level actively chooses “what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected” so as not to cause harm to oneself or another.

I now turn to the *Theravada* practitioners commencing with an English-born *Ajahn* who has been a Buddhist monk in the Thai tradition for over forty years. Going back to the early 1970s, he told me how mindfulness assisted him to be “physically relaxed” and “mentally empowered” during lengthy and challenging examinations at university. In the subsequent years “mindfulness gave me the choice to be afraid or to have fun, to hate or to love, to reject or to accept”, implying it was not simply a skill of non-evaluation. Memory is at the forefront of this discernment and is “implicit in the way people use mindfulness” though, he agreed, it is not necessarily highlighted in current teachings. Absent too is “the intensity or the strength” of mindfulness that can be developed through *samatha* or “stillness meditations”. This form of mind training leads to noticing “more detail”, the *Ajahn* stated. It is “the difference between looking at a silhouette and a full-colour photograph”. Later in our interview, he mentioned that mindfulness must be “directed through compassion, through kindness” as then it “has huge beneficial effects”. And while he agreed it can be used to harm others, he claimed that “if you have negative thoughts you lose your power” as the “mindfulness gets weak”. This, he asserted, is a “natural effect”. When I repeated the familiar definitions of mindfulness given in Buddhist and therapeutic literature, the *Ajahn* said promptly and with conviction, “there’s no such thing as bare awareness”. There is always “an element of judgement as to what you are mindful of”. Even stepping back from the liking or disliking of experiences involves “judgements going on because you give value to some things above others”.

It may be “mindfulness with minimal judgements” but there is “never absolutely bare [attention], never non-judgemental”, the intensifier “never” seeming to end any uncertainty about his view. But then he asserted, until a person is “totally enlightened”, an essentialist tag implying such a state is possible after all.

The *Sayadaw* gave descriptions similar to other conversational partners. Like Sangay and the *Ajahn*, he told me “it’s possible also to have wrong view and be mindful”. This is because “we often mistake the paying of attention for mindfulness”. Although expressed differently it seems the *Sayadaw* may be saying something similar to his *Mahayana* sisters and brothers when he stated mindfulness is about accepting the presence of a thought but that “doesn’t mean that the thought is acceptable”. And it is “not only having awareness but knowing that you’re aware” in the present. Otherwise it is not a “complete practice”, reminding me of Sangay’s remarks about watchfulness and carefulness being indispensable to skilful mindfulness. I pause here to note that as the *Sayadaw* was speaking in Burmese, it was his female interpreter who conveyed his views, though he did very occasionally speak to me directly in English. I do not intend to canvas the predicaments of translating conversations from one language to another, mainly because in this instance I know the *Sayadaw* has a reasonable grasp of English and his interpreter constantly travels with him to foreign countries. They are therefore familiar with the difficulties of interpreting cross-culturally. I was further reassured that what he was saying was faithfully expressed by her as they frequently had ongoing animated discussions before she responded to my questions. He also interrupted her sometimes to qualify a statement or change her emphasis. Their enduring relationship and their tête-à-tête throughout the interview produced a shared response. The answers were not those of the *Sayadaw* alone. However, I take the perspective that their conversational blend makes explicit what is occurring throughout this research project: continual cultural translations of meaning drawn from relational sources. I suggest this process occurs not only in more noticeable situations, such as with the *Sayadaw*, his interpreter and me, or when partners translate Tibetan or Pali languages into English words, but in all encounters during this project, an assertion I will return to and amplify throughout the thesis.

Finally, Joseph is a former monk and lay *Dharma* teacher. He spoke candidly about how his interest in mindfulness was prompted by extreme “existential suffering”. After reading *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera (1973) he abandoned his university studies, travelled to Myanmar and entered a monastery. In part, he made sense of this exceptional decision for an Australian man growing up in the 1960s by referring to his family’s Catholic beliefs. Their staunchness led him to be “attracted to religion in general” and such was his enthrallment with Catholicism in his early life that he began training as a Marist Brother. But this didn’t last. After two years he had what he described as a complete “psychological breakdown”. During this period, Joseph recalled an intense experience of “no identity”, powerfully realising “thoughts were just thoughts”. These states of consciousness were at once astonishing and liberating. Looking back through Buddhist eyes, he believes it was “*nibbana* itself”, a term that has sophisticated meanings but can be parsed as the elimination of greed, hatred and ignorance through experiencing transcendental and unconditioned consciousness. Taking the conversation closer to professional texts, Joseph stated the Kabat-Zinn definition of mindfulness is a “whole series of attitudes - non-judgemental et cetera - attached to present moment awareness”, a “kind of umbrella term” for the purposes “of looking at one’s experience in a particular way in a particular context”, that is, for the purposes of stress reduction within a secular hospital program in the United States. For Joseph, neither present moment awareness nor “the various qualifiers” are mindfulness. He is “yet to come across an instance in which [the Buddha] refers to the present as being a moment”. Rather, there is the concept of an “experienced present” which may feel like a moment with “very clear borders” or it can be experienced as seamless flows between the past, present and future. The key aspect is that a person knows these movements of the mind are occurring.

Following on, Joseph was highly critical of the current notion of acceptance and being non-judgemental as part of mindfulness. “That’s a good one, non-judgemental!” he stated emphatically. As with all the other *Dharma* instructors, he asserted that one of mindfulness’s “basic roles” is to “guard or protect the mind and that involves making judgements”. He recalled offering workshops to therapists “who are shocked and horrified” by this statement as they have been told and are “convinced” that mindfulness is simply witnessing and accepting without judgement.

To associate mindfulness with “discernment, discrimination, judgement” leaves some of them “staggered”. The Buddha, he claimed, is “light years ahead in the sophistication of his understanding” of the “nature of human experiences”. In comparison, he believes “western discourses” of psychology are in “the Stone Age”, “incredibly primitive”. Near the end of our time Joseph said he doesn’t know of any person who has succeeded in creating “some kind of discourse in which [the Buddha] can be brought into the conversation unapologetically”.

All partners from the *Mahayana* tradition, which places great importance on lineage, mentioned and paid homage to their treasured *lamas* and *Rinpoches* many times when responding to my questions, letting me know about their central place in living the *Dharma*. Gen made it clear, as did Venerable Aine, Namgyal and Sangay, that their views on mindfulness can be traced directly to their teachers. Though we didn’t pursue this line of enquiry much, I know from observing friends and acquaintances that becoming a devotee of a *Mahayana* spiritual mentor who is taken to be the embodiment of the path to liberation from *samsara* is an intricate and, at times, taxing undertaking to say the least. On this quest, Gen cautioned it is necessary to “check the person out” and ensure “they possess an authentic lineage”, a shorthand term I will hear many times in Bhutan to claim historical authority across many centuries. While this spiritual arrangement is intended to assuage doubt, devotion may not come easily. For instance, Lama Yeshe knows the “teacher [and lineage] should be the path” as “the great masters...have this great devotion”. But, he said, “I don’t know if it is”. He still thinks “Oh, I’ll do it myself” instead of being “very dependent”. Talking about the topic with me, he decided it was “not the fault of the system”, he just “hasn’t quite sunk into it yet”, a comment I take to mean he was not persuaded of its necessity. The value placed on this relationship in the interviews just mentioned, diverges from the *Theravada* practitioners passing remarks about their mentors and teachers.

Partners commented briefly on the notion of a self. Recalling his “life changing” lunchtime conversation, Namgyal said the realisation that his transient thoughts and feelings were not evidence of an accurate intrinsic self led him to see that “this “I” that [can be] so upset is an illusion”. Relatedly, Lama Yeshe said the notion of interdependence would be useful to promote in therapy as much suffering is “coming

from the idea of an independent self” which, according to Buddhist teachings, is “not a solid thing” or entity. More forcefully, the Venerable Aine declared it is crucial to assist people in counselling to not “identify with that horrible miserable ugly old self”. She believes that view has “got to come”, it is a “must”. Reflecting back on her life, she told me it was “a good 10 to 15 years after I became a Buddhist when I started to realise that anger wasn’t my middle name”, seeing her progress as a “gradual evolution of really trying to apply these teachings”.

Linking this to ethics, Sangay claimed that if “one perfects [right] mindfulness for 24 hours...the sense of duality dissolves and there’s only going to be a knowing quality” in which life-enhancing ethics would “spontaneously burst forth”. Venerable Aine put it this way: “I’ve got to have awareness, got to have mindfulness to see my mind, body and speech [so I will] stop harming others... [which is] the practice of ethics”. This in turn “will help me” to progress on the path to liberation. She saw this mutuality as a “fundamental law”, mindfulness and ethics being “utterly connected” so a person realises the “virtues [at] the core of our being”. The *Sayadaw* agreed that ethical actions will happen “spontaneously when there is wisdom because wisdom knows the appropriate response” in every situation. Likewise, Lama Yeshe claimed “we are fundamentally pure” or have “basic goodness” as our “natural state”. In his teachings however he tries to “avoid [the term] ethics really” as it can sound like a prescriptive “don’t do this” list and “become very rigid”. Instead, he prefers people to figure out whether their actions are for “others [wellbeing] or [just] myself”. Joseph sees the Buddha’s approach being “basically consequentialist”. If an action leads to “happiness over the long term it is ethical”, if it leads to “distress over the long term is unethical”.

In these conversations with *Dharma* teachers the responses to my questions were assertions from within various Buddhist traditions, a positioning move which embeds their statements in the momentum of centuries-old discourses of authority, hierarchy and power. Their detailed and robust utterances suggest they do not necessarily seek new descriptions or practices of mindfulness but instead desire to stabilise and champion the prevailing teachings, seeing themselves as defenders of the Buddha *Dharma* and the traditional explanations. They mark out particular interpretive zones on their terms, repeating common Buddhist phrasings and

referring directly to the sanctioned instructions of the historical Buddha *Shakyamuni*. Some wore identifiably religious clothing and shaved their heads. These forms of expression and appearance are intended to inscribe authenticity. Given these conditions, there was an understandable consistency in their assertions that mindfulness is related to the mental faculty of memory and its purpose is to recall and enact the ethics of their traditions. Mindfulness, as an impartial mental factor, is combined with introspection and cognitive evaluation to achieve these aims. This endorses the Buddhist literature cited in Chapter 2. Some partners were highly critical of therapeutic mindfulness being seen as present moment awareness with acceptance. This led me to think more about the privileging and dispersal of this definition and the relative invisibility of other ways of interpreting these skills. I was also struck by the readiness of some Western born *Dharma* specialists who have not studied professional counselling or psychotherapy to critique the extensive multifaceted approaches in these fields and take up an authoritative tone when commenting on them.

At my request, partners gave some consideration to notions of self and ethics, a few emphasising that skilful mindfulness, along with other processes, eventually results in contacting an inherently pure consciousness which in turn guarantees a spontaneous expression of virtuous ethics. This assertion and their general understandings on mindfulness can be traced to past and current relationships with various teachers, an interpersonal grounding for asserting definitions, choosing practices and naturalising ethics after accomplishing a Buddhist enlightenment. As already mentioned, typically professional therapeutic texts discursively erase these relational features of mindfulness giving preference to a questionable scientific objectivity.

Senior Organisational Managers

David's long career as an Australian psychologist in the field of mental health along with his expertise as a Buddhist teacher offers an appropriate segue into this site of enquiry. He told me he "was hooked" when a friend introduced him to a "very western" *Zen* in 1985 as it addressed "existential questions" that were troubling him,

perhaps like Joseph. While its origins were Japanese, “one of the attractive things was that [the lay teachers] were Westerners”. I understood this to mean that the teachings and skills were accessible within his personal history and culture. For David, mindfulness is about remembering to be “present and connected”. It is an intentional “way of relating to life really”, an “aliveness in your life”, that is developed through meditation. While it’s “popularised” and seen as a “technique” in the West, it is just “one strand pulled out of the rich tapestry of Buddhism”. In the interview, he said he was “sceptical” of its description as present moment awareness with acceptance, telling me much of what is called mindfulness in therapy is “concentration”, with “insights” being “relatively few and far between”. And it “intuitively feels sensible [that therapists] need to practice” mindfulness in a committed manner if they are instructing people.

This point quickly became clear to Catherine who holds a management job in a counselling service that is part of a large educational institution in Perth. She heard about mindfulness after emigrating from Europe to Australia and initially thought she could just help client people to use it “as a technique”. She soon realised however she couldn’t “talk about something I don’t know” and decided to take it up and experience “exactly how difficult it is, the struggle”. This had “a huge impact” personally as she became “more capable of handling stressful situations”. To illustrate, Catherine told a poignant story of visiting her dying father and using mindfulness to “embrace the experience rather than fighting it” and to “think about what’s important to me”. Such clarities would “never” have happened, she said, without her regular mindfulness exercises. Catherine also told me she associates mindfulness with a “present moment awareness with acceptance” and “being very compassionate”, “very respectful”. This view is understandable as she has been trained in MBSR which, in her words, skills people to observe experiences with “curiosity...from a distance” and to “step out of what is a difficult struggle” or “disconnect” from problems. She has found the “non-judgemental part” most helpful as it allows people to “attend and accept” all that is happening in their life, contrasting this stance to society’s focus on relentless achievement.

Staying with the education sector, I spoke with Wangchen in Bhutan who was one of the country’s most senior administrators in this field. He responded to my opening

question with a story about Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth King of Bhutan. He spoke the King's words to me in *Dzongkha*, the national language, translating them as the "priority task of any teacher" is to instruct pupils in "taking care" of the mind, the purpose of this being to "bring greater wellbeing and happiness to others...which will in turn make you happy". Wangchen's early training in mindfulness included a "vigorous ten-day meditation program" in Kolkata in 2001. Since then he has regularly undertaken retreats and trainings, the effect being he can "choose between what is important and keep pressures off from what is urgent". Wangchen told a compelling tale demonstrating this ability. Some years back, without warning, he was asked to step down from an executive work position, a job that had him in the public gaze regularly. Despite this being a "big change in life" and one that was known throughout the country, he and his family were "surprised" when he "had no emotional flares". Asking how he was able to achieve this, he said, modestly I thought, through "observing [myself]" and learning that "change is inevitable", a reference to the prominence given to impermanence in Buddhist teachings. I was struck by how Wangchen's responses straightaway placed mindfulness within relational and national contexts. Personal practices were seamlessly connected to the King's instructions on the imperative to ensure the happiness of others as well as oneself and, in living those directives, to an incident with implications for his family members.

Similarly for Uygen, mindfulness is part of a "whole process of training". He thought back more than 25 years ago when he attended a meditation retreat and discovered a "kind of hidden ego" that distanced him from other people. Becoming aware of this tendency, he "started looking at myself" to overcome it. As soon as he notices "negative feelings coming in" now he tries to "keep the mind clear", seeing "worries" as "dots in [the] mind". He didn't want to "attach this [kind of mindfulness] to Buddhist practice", saying he has no "particular teacher or guru". Smiling, he told me he was "freelance". Mindfulness can be taken up in an "ordinary sense" that involves "short periods of [practice] many times" every day or it can be developed to a "high level" through spiritual disciplines. Through his committed routines he has learned to "appreciate the preciousness of life" and to understand its transience, folding mindfulness so much into his life that "I don't really see it as something special, something different". Uygen thought his immersion in these skills

permeated his leadership in the drug and alcohol field, telling me he doesn't "try to create that situation" but experiences it as a "natural outflow" of frequent practice. No specifically mindfulness-focused programs have been introduced into the service agencies under his control but he does see the positive calming effects of his effort on his management style and the encouraging results achieved by staff colleagues who have been mentored by him in mindfulness.

Sangay, who is also in the education field, briefly named the process of mindfulness as an awareness of "thinking", "emotions" and "what you are doing". Revealing that "people don't like me very much" because of being "very strict", he told me mindfulness was a way to help him not to be "dictated [to] by [his] reactivity" and so "become a better person". Improving relationships in the "family...workplace and society at large", connects his personal efforts to social wellness, like Wangchen. Sangay said he knows this will only come about with "consistency [and] commitment". It "doesn't work" doing it for one week, having a "gap" and then starting again. And though it is "very simple" to understand, what is required is "so tough". Thinking about the beginnings of his interest in mindfulness, Sangay went back to very difficult personal situations. Like Catherine, he talked about the death of his father, a time when his "phobias" became so intense he thought he was "going insane". He didn't seek out the "religious body" but the reassurance of a "good friend and his younger brother". Eventually, he began to "look at life differently" and noticed "something deeper" and satisfying. Meeting "quite often" with his brother maintained his optimistic attitudes on life's inevitable sorrows. As we were speaking Sangay's mobile phone rang. A short while later he retrieved it from the pouch of his *gho*, a Bhutanese man's traditional clothing, and glanced at the screen. He smiled, then looked at me, saying "it is my brother". We both chuckled at this coincidence.

Like Uygen, other partners took their personal mindfulness methods into their workplaces though they varied as to how much they overtly promoted professional programs informed by social and psychological research. David's "vision is to get as many people as possible to practice mindfulness". He described an encouraging response by colleagues to his offers of teaching. However, after realising that this was "something they're going to have to learn...to focus their attention, it's all too

difficult [for them]” and their enthusiasm waned. On a number of other occasions, under different circumstances, he received “very positive feedback” but again participants did “not follow through”. He said he “doesn’t bring the Buddha’s name” into his client work as there is a “danger of a backlash”, recalling the “[Rajneesh] sannyasins...not so long ago influencing their clients” which was “totally unethical”, “intrusive” and “not needed in therapy”. It is scientific research and Western psychology, not Buddhism, which is “justifying” the various applications of mindfulness in mental health. On the other hand, he was quick to chip in that he hoped countries like Bhutan would “stop swallowing the Western psychological view of the truth” as it isn’t “the only way of viewing things”. People come from “different origins culturally” and this requires “respectful” engagement, not living as “pseudo-Tibetans or pseudo-Japanese”.

In her workplace Catherine has been involved in organising and facilitating mindfulness-informed individual therapy and group work for client people. For her, there are two parts to mindfulness. The formal consists of meditation, the informal “is bringing it into your everyday life”. She agreed this “comes out of” the Buddhist tradition but said she was just talking about mindfulness as a “tool we use” and not connected to the religion of Buddhism. In introducing these approaches to counselling colleagues and other staff in the institution, she was pleased that “the openness is available here”. Going forward, Catherine is keen to explore mindful leadership for management and administration.

Wangchen was convinced that Bhutanese students of all ages “should have opportunities...to engage in mindfulness practice”. His work gives him a “tremendous opportunity” to “influence so many people [and] convince them” of its benefits. He believes mindfulness is “something that is there already in Bhutan [in the Buddhist teachings]”. Such a “cultural affinity” would assist in addressing social challenges, Wangchen going so far as to assert “all of the GNH [Gross National Happiness] will be taken care of by the simple act of mindfulness training”. However, it must remain secular he told me, as this is “more important when dealing with challenges” in the schools. But he does not “forbid referencing” those Buddhist traditions from which these approaches have developed. For this reason, the Postgraduate Diploma in Guidance and Counselling, which he instigated, has

emphasised secular counselling techniques from the West alongside mindfulness training, including a one week retreat.

Uygen has been persuaded likewise that counsellors should engage in a “number of hours of meditation” and have an understanding of the “Buddhist five [ethical] precepts” as these will be an “anchor” during their stressful work. Mindfulness can be part of an inclusive “addiction education” program. And Sangay informed me that GNH education in schools includes some aspects of meditation already, though he said “people [teachers] are mixing being mindful sometimes with Buddhism” which is “not right” as it was complicated and the “children are not able to understand”. He did consider having a *Rinpoche* teach students but his experience was that “they come from their own perspective” and this was not helpful either. Students just need to start with mindfulness as a technique, “not mixed with Buddhism”.

As with the *Dharma* teachers, the managers from social service organisations spoke for a short time about self and ethics, more or less joining with Buddhist outlooks. Speaking more from that place, David stated “utilitarian” versions of mindfulness have “actually reified the idea of self” so people “can feel better about themselves” which is “not the point of [mindfulness] at all”. Clarifying, he made a distinction between the “intention [of wellbeing] within psychology” and the goal of “liberation” from *samsara* through *Zen* ethics and methods. This led him to state that “there is nothing that touches on the ethical thing” in professional texts on mindfulness. Though he appreciated that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy puts emphasis on the “importance of values” he noted these are “not exactly the same” as living the ethics found in the *Dharma*. In her response to my interest in this topic, Catherine simply posed the question: “Is there a self?”, her tone suggesting she may align with the Buddhist view, though I didn’t ask. Going on, she believes “how we relate to each other”, her ethical sphere of action, may be enhanced through mindful attention. Both Sangay and Wangchen thought there would be advantages if counsellors in Bhutan were to understand the Buddha’s philosophy on personhood, the latter stating he had come to see that “there is no line [that] can be drawn [between] self and nonself”, a reference to the teachings on interdependence. Taking this outlook forms the foundation for claiming a thoroughly relational ethics and the ability to discern “selfishness [from] altruism” in counselling, according to

Wangchen. As a Buddhist, he has confidence “there is this goodness” that is “inherent in our nature” and these “universal values [are] naturally true, definitely true”. With mindfulness, he asserted, “this [certainty] is something that grows in you”. Sangay too believed mindfulness “definitely [creates] wisdom because you are already analysing things”. And likewise, Uygen suggested ethics are “not a set of rules” but will “develop naturally” with mindfulness.

Managers situated themselves within multiple discourses already at play in this thesis. In the broad scheme, references to the Buddhist traditions were intended to draw on historical authority whilst speaking from the secular scientific view attained credibility due to its elevated standing in contemporary life. The Bhutanese partners were disposed to occupy the former, Catherine the latter and David a mixture of both. What this suggests is that their interpretations of what mindfulness might be, its place in their lives, and their expressions about it to me, arise from their personal experiences, professional trainings and cultural contexts. Regardless of these varied sources they, like the *Dharma* instructors, appeared united in their naturalising of an inherently beneficent consciousness which will be revealed and enacted following a certain level of meditative accomplishment.

In conclusion, the focused dialogues portrayed in this chapter are intended to supplement the professional texts and permit further consideration of the wider environments and discourses within which therapeutic mindfulness has developed. They arose from invitations to a limited number of *Dharma* teachers and managers in social service organisations in Bhutan and Australia. From my perspective, we engaged in an ongoing dialogical coordination of meanings, influencing each other’s choices regarding the direction and the content of the interviews in a back-and-forth play of senses and words. I am not suggesting that we have done justice to the topics covered, and I am sure nor would the people interviewed, but I do propose that our conversations offered glimpses, and sometimes more, of certain ideas and skills that could be fruitfully pursued in this project. These include the constitutive social aspects of mindfulness, the differences between Buddhist descriptions of mindfulness and the dominant definitions in professional texts, the lack of attention given to ethics in those texts, the implications of naturalising ethical actions, and the emerging views on the intersections of a secular and pragmatic Westernised

mindfulness and a spiritual practice that has been central to Buddhist teachings for millennia.

Part Two

Crafting Storylines

with

Counsellors and Psychotherapists

5

Biographic Impressions

The knowledge-makers are telling stories once more,
their word-life streams flowing to the stars.
Rumi's here too, making memories in the neighbourhood,
returned from a long sojourn of wandering.
Thanks for coming back.

My approach to studying the ways in which counsellors and psychotherapists in Bhutan and Australia have constructed notions and skills of mindfulness, and its relevance and implications for their personal life and workplaces, is exemplified in the details of the methods I applied to the interviews. In following this design, I encouraged the research partners to dwell longer on matters of interest to them and to glide over subjects less compelling. Although I covered all the topics mentioned in my invitation to participate, commencing with the given questions, as the meetings unfolded there was no set order followed on every occasion. This fluidity produced an unpredictable *mélange* of memories during which I sustained a close watch for emerging storylines. I looked for recurring themes that spanned our cultural locations, seeking to balance my preconceived hopes to cover certain subjects with the emerging topics. Appreciating the generative spirit of this interactive process as it happened, I found it advantageous later to hear and rehear our voices on the digital recordings a number of times while I shifted my attention across the completed transcripts. This process brought a looser merging and demerging of textual material allowing me to dwell here-and-there on excerpts that seemed especially pertinent.

In this chapter I introduce the counsellors and psychotherapists through selective and brief *Biographic Impressions* which have been reconfigured serially, giving a flow to their interviews which wasn't there during the actual meetings. Alongside my understandings of crucial events and their thoughts on the place of mindfulness in

their lives, I insert reflective commentaries, keeping in mind my intention to produce an overall sense of each interview with conciseness and credibility. Partners appear in the order of their interviews.

First Tier

Australian Biographic Impressions

Frances

"I've reinvented myself a number of times in life."

Frances took up my invitation to speak with carefully considered responses drawing on her long-standing explorations of mindfulness practices. While she accepted that some people may give attention to “what’s happening on the outside”, for her “mainly it's turning inwards”, of “noticing the flow of consciousness and whatever’s happening within that” with an attitude of curiosity and kindness. It is an “intentional state” to develop an observing awareness, assisted at times through naming or “clumping” experience, so as not to get too immersed in the unhelpful stories created around life events.

Frances introduced an historical foundation to these understandings of mindfulness referring to her extensive Hakomi psychotherapy training. She easily linked mindfulness to other professional training mentioning Jungian active imagination techniques and psychodrama’s attention to shifts in clients’ facial expressions and gestures. Noticing and putting words to their present somatic experience, clients may arrive at “another place from which to notice themselves”. Helpful insights may occur and make possible new responses to the person’s dilemmas. Frances saw this as a “co-creative process... in the moment” where people can be encouraged to become interested in themselves, in part through her interest in their lives.

Mindfulness as enlivening was the prevailing motif of the conversation till now. Then without prompting, Frances put a qualification, a pause, into this generative account saying “it doesn’t work for everybody”. She posed a question for herself as

to who it might not be suitable for, and then instantly responded, perhaps more to herself than to me, that this was something she had “not really thought about”. Going on, she decided “naturally” and “instinctively” she would not offer mindfulness to certain people. With clients’ life transitions she might stay with “what is actually happening in their lives” outwardly instead of going inward. Decisions like these are made in the moment, she said, as psychotherapy is “highly experimental”.

Early memories were smoothly folded into her professional account. From “the beginning I was a little more inward as a child”. This tendency was cultivated further through her education within a semi-enclosed Catholic order that “valued silence”. Frances spoke movingly of times when she felt a “distinct sense of holiness” and of “awe and wonder about God’s presence”. Then Frances interrupted the easy comfort of this scene as she revealed growing up with a father who was a committed atheist and a mother who was a “devout Catholic”. While he showed a “terrific curiosity” and was “interested in science”, her mother was “obedient” to Catholicism and doing “what you were told”. While I did not hear details as to how she plotted a life course through these conflicting ways of living, she touchingly remarked “that’s what I’ve been working with all my life”. I am left puzzling over this pithy conclusion, a loose narrative thread connecting the young Frances’s life to the present.

After “shedding” Catholicism and also Christianity “at that point”, Frances travelled many spiritual journeys, constantly “looking for a sense of aliveness” and seeking “a vast presence” in people. She added, “in fact I’ve almost forgotten all the memories that belonged to that one who was then” as she “reinvented” herself over time which was both “disturbing” and “expansive”. Mindfulness became part of her “spiritual journey” as it “is the inner spirit or the essence”. Frances spoke passionately of an “essential self” which is “core to every human being, universal, across cultures”, where “everything is interconnected”.

In the telling of her chosen histories, I saw a quiet and insistent quest for knowing life beyond the given familiarity of her early years of life. Spiritual and secular teachers, her clients, and her colleagues, were significant inclusions in her account making clear the relational and situated events swirling about the practice of inward mindfulness. Frances’s language movingly evoked a journey of an intense “spirit”

which strengthened the persuasive coherence of her story. Yet, there was also a willingness to counter too even a telling by disrupting the arc of the conversation and repositioning the sense of self in response to the contingencies of the time.

Arabella

"It is about being home, coming home...you go away but you come back".

Arabella's descriptions of her life events and mindfulness practices seemed to be familiar and hard-won understandings with a paradox at the centre: her intense desire for the solitary inwardness of the meditative life made it more possible for her to move outwards and enter into the relational worlds of others.

She opened her responses to my initial queries with a call to complexity when she said mindfulness is "a big word with lots of layers" and depends on the "context" as to what it might mean. Speaking of the importance of "intentional openness" and a "commitment to being aware", Arabella emphasised the choice to focus on a "particular thing" or be "expansive". Lest I misunderstood this focusing to be a cognitive technique, she added "what's really a crucial element for me is kindness", foreshadowing an attitude that constantly interlaced the interview. Accenting her concerns about a "prescription of mindfulness" that ignores kindness and "morality", Arabella summed up with the pointed statement, "it bothers me", before wondering whether "something got lost in the translation from the Pali [language]". Staying with this theme, she said that positive changes had happened for her through "enormous kindness" rather than "clever interpretation", hence linking her professional practice to personal history. Although I invited Arabella to extend on this conversational direction and consider when mindfulness was working well in therapy she surprised me by returning to her uneasiness about people "who have no practice", using mindfulness "willy-nilly" in a "prescriptive way". For her, this would be "a distortion of it". In giving this critique it seemed to me that Arabella was implicitly telling us about her practice by what it wasn't, so I turned towards it.

Her starting place with people who have suffered trauma is purposefully "grounding myself in mindfulness" and then seeking to "anchor someone first in a more external practice before an internal practice...the more manualised approaches don't do this".

She invited her clients to become more familiar with their ordinary sensory worlds, so that having a cup of tea or drinking a glass of water become opportunities for “moments of mindfulness”. As people’s attention skills and emotional balance develop externally, she invited them “to the internal world, to internal experience”, summing up her approach to mindfulness as “I try to grow it up rather than impose it down”. This stance honours the relational care she aspires to in her therapeutic encounters and reveals her choice not to turn mindfulness into a simplistic technique.

At my request to join our conversation so far to earlier life experiences, she at once revealed a vivid life-turning memory of a television interview with Carl Jung. From four decades ago, Arabella recalled “the chair I was sitting in” when a program was broadcast “just before Songs of Praise”. Growing up a Catholic she had thought about being a nun or, for reasons I did not get to know, a veterinarian. But then “Carl Jung turned up” with a “twinkle in the eyes” and “the chuckle that’s about to come through”. This compelling, perhaps mesmerising, experience had her younger self thinking “Whatever he was, I was going to find one of him”, so leading to her decision to pursue psychology. Disappointment soon followed and Arabella “wandered around in the wilderness for a while”, a compact expression that seemed to me to fit with her curiosity and wonder about life, despite its possible negative inference. Eventually this searching took her to a “sense of being home” through the practice of meditation and, oddly, her dedicated search for inward realities had taken her more into the “marketplace” of people’s lives. With a wry smile she remarked, “now I go in, in order to be able to be out...that’s not what I expected”.

Listening in real-time, and later when I transcribed this interview, Arabella’s conversational trajectory brought to mind a journey metaphor, a seeking beyond what is known, as she travelled towards the meditative and relational connectedness she called “home”. This ability to be alone with others, to rest in the relational, appeared to be transformative for her and finds its most vigorous expression in the mingling of her Buddhist mindfulness practices and her mostly secular therapeutic encounters.

John

"I decided to take a year off work, watch the chooks, do the veggies and get more into the kind of Buddhist practice, more meditation. So the last six months I was revisiting my roots."

John commenced his responses to my questions from the vantage point of his private world rather than the professional domain, a decision I didn't take to be unintended. Following his lead, so reversing the given order of the interview questions, made way for an extended account on the "practical experience" of mindfulness and the "relief" it brings. This blending of the experiential and the pragmatic continued through the interview evolving a theme which I characterise as the willingness to query the obviousness of appearances, in particular the perception of self, of an "I". Not far into the interview, John offered a detailed vignette to illuminate this theme and, to me, assert its significance.

He was learning the classical guitar about 20 years ago and had become quite adept at playing a particular piece. John said he still has "a very vivid memory" of playing the "whole piece through" during a practice session and being "totally in the moment... mindful, just in the moment". It was "one of those aha moments" he said, "an amazing experience which has always stayed with me". While his tale lingered in the air John added emphatically, "I was not there...John wasn't there", before closing in a wondrous tone, it was "such an odd thing".

After a long absence, John said he had returned to Buddhist meditation about five years ago and talked about an influential therapist whom he has been seeing regularly for a decade. This person helped him to "get clarity" through "letting go" of "mental constructs", those states of mind that continually analyse and judge - I presumed he meant negatively - whatever was happening for him. Though he was concerned at first that he might be suppressing painful feelings like sadness and anger, he decided they were "dissipating" as he noticed he "didn't need to struggle with it [the feeling] two minutes later or two days later". The "relief" mentioned in his opening remarks was about these kinds of achievements.

Going to his professional life it seemed to me that John had figured out an educational approach to mindfulness though “generally” he did not call it mindfulness or speak about Buddhism as “clients may see that as preaching a religion”, an echo of previous interviews in this project. Likewise, he believed that he had to have a “personal practice” for it to be integrated into his therapeutic work. This nexus of the personal and professional was enhanced through postgraduate study in Buddhist psychology. Some time back, John had become “disillusioned with standard counselling techniques” and decided to take a year’s absence from his challenging work. Unexpectedly, not long after he commenced this break, he discovered and “jumped at” a counselling course that offered Buddhist understandings of mind and practices intended to enhance wellbeing. The planned restful interruption to his work life was itself interrupted by this unforeseeable opportunity that evolved into a major change in his life direction. The course brought a “much deeper examination of Buddhism” and “really upped my practice of meditation, mindfulness”. Not only that, the commitment he gave to the course was “grounding”, enabling him to “re-enter the arena” of counselling once more.

Picking up on the topic of self, John confided “that’s a fascinating one for me, a real struggle”. The explanations of mind given in the Buddhist tradition made sense to him including the “notion of no self” though it would be “mind-blowing” if people try and analyse the nature of self because “it’s something that can’t be analysed”. Despite this latter statement, John made much effort to articulate his thoughts stating that “when mind drops away” then there is “no room for self, there’s no room for ego”. It is mindfulness that makes it possible to realise the “absence of self, conventional self” and, importantly for John, to then recognise “our intrinsic nature, kindness”.

The “vivid memory” of two decades ago, the more recent significance of a particular therapist, and the completion of his course of study were imbued with transformative authority, especially with regard to knowing a sense of self and the movement to experiences he named “no self”. Through bridging the distant past with more recent happenings John gave continuity and coherence to his varied understandings of mindfulness across time and wove complexity into what at first appeared to be the simplicity of his stories.

Jeff

*“...this moment is an outcome of those intentions
and where this is going is an outcome of those intentions”.*

Jeff’s intricate and energetic depictions of his personal practice of mindfulness seemed to flow easily, suggesting an insightful familiarity with Buddhist traditions. This produced an overall evenness and unity to the interview which in turn gave credibility to his overt intention to attend openheartedly to the moment-to-moment events and experiences of his life and the lives of others. Asserting this intention and associating mindfulness with the “spiritual”, “worship”, “inspiration” and a “sense of mystery”, Jeff conveyed an inquisitive and expansive conception of relational identity formation within a progressive plotline.

As he traced the inspiration for his practice over the past 20 years, Jeff mentioned varied sources, especially influential teachers and readings from different religious and spiritual texts. In the beginning he felt “held” by a *Zen* Buddhist community. Eventually finding it too “rigid”, he sought a “gentle soft path” which led him to explore the *Theravada* forest lineage from northern Thailand. He described this latter path of practice, which continues to influence him, as “not trying to get anywhere”, “letting go” of the “sense of struggle”, and moving “towards silence”, the after-effects being “more energy, more lightness” and generosity. For him, it is not about “any strings to that [kind of] giving” as “it’s something that I’m just giving away because it’s there”, making a distinction with “a business transaction where you do something and you get something back”. In comparing his “spiritual process” with a commercial contract to acquire and consume, Jeff plainly marked out a preferred interpersonal territory that reinforced the overall compassionate nature of his account and a “joyful innocence” in mindfulness. At a later point, he spoke of feeling “very connected” and grateful to these past and current communities as they made it possible for him to deepen his meditation practice on retreats and hear discourses from experienced teachers, though he added the caveat that his commitment to his present teacher may also change in the future, a statement that seemed to fit with his declared purposes.

The young people he sees in therapy are “over and over again caught in the same traps, same old grooves of [distressing] thoughts and feelings and behaviours”. Jeff’s positive outlook and encouragement to them to be “more present to their experience, more interested in it, less judging of it” speaks to his commitment to developing ways of relating to themselves and others that are based on an optimistic kind-heartedness. Allowing and staying with difficult emotional or cognitive experiences may lead them to a “curiosity and openness and freshness” which in turn could bring hopeful ways of going forward in life, though not necessarily with neatly defined directions. Shortly after the interview, Jeff extended this part of the conversation via email describing a range of explicit and implicit “mindfulness-related processes” which drew attention to what I take to be a highly interactive, reciprocal and social version of mindfulness. Twining the introspectiveness of his private world with the shared spaces of his professional life, and imbuing them all with aspirations for compassion, generosity and joyfulness, Jeff created attractive and robust images of everyday life. He connected these aspirations to a mindful ethical life claiming that “knowing the moment that you’re in, feeling and knowing it is a deeply ethical process because you know what it is that you’re doing”. To him this meant being consciously aware of intentions, choices and consequences so that beneficial future action would be more likely.

As is characteristic of narrative knowing and expression, there were strong evaluative elements spread all the way through, with the consistent appearance of positive descriptors such as “liberating”, “openness”, “freshness”, “innocence”, “contentment”, “clear seeing” and “joy”. Placed in contrast to the much less mentioned “stuck”, “fighting”, and “struggling”, Jeff indicated his predominant view. What surfaces through these speech acts are the implications of the affective dimension in mindfulness practices and its part in the making of self and others, in the relational formation of identities. I am left with images of Jeff putting forth great efforts to find a lively openness in the mystery of each moment, to move away from the appearance of routine certainties, and to pursue contentment within an unpredictable flux of happenings.

Elise

*"This was something that I could experience in the East
that I couldn't experience back in Australia".*

During Elise's account there was a prevailing constancy. Explorations of mindfulness practices were predominantly located within the private sphere, Elise choosing historical periods that were crucial sites for the negotiation of identity in unfamiliar social and cultural contexts. Deciding to start with "what it means for me", she characterised mindfulness as an "awareness of awareness" of "things that are happening around, outside, and then the things that are happening inside". While she described it as "sense-based" she also included "thoughts and feelings".

From these definitional points, Elise shifted into an expansive chronological account commencing with growing up in the 1960s and 1970s and choosing to become involved in emerging cultural forms of self-expression including encounter groups, transactional analysis, psychodrama and psychotherapy. To begin with she pointed to professional development as an explanation for these ventures but soon after included her early life when she stated "there was unhappiness there that was really a source for my wanting something different". This preparatory remark led to Elise speaking later in the interview about "a lot of loss" in her childhood, with her mother dying when she was about 3.5 years old. Though retrospectively she can consider the physical and psychological journeys she undertook as consequential to, and given momentum by, the losses she endured, at the time she saw these series of intense encounters as "just getting to know myself more".

The specific impetus towards the knowledges and practices of meditation and mindfulness took various directions over the years sustained by the belief that "the world was composed on many levels and layers". Encouraging her to go further towards this assertion, Elise produced a potent narrative about rock climbing. She spoke of "the smell of the rock and the feel of the rock and...the sun drenching on it and the lyrebirds calling down the valley". As the telling gathered pace, her tactile descriptions of "absolute aliveness" and her lyrical expressions of "peak experiences" fashioned a persuasive textual layering, creating a linguistic resonance with her assertions. In response to my initial written *Impression* of her interview she

added later that “your partner’s life and your own depended on mutual alertness, total presence”.

What soon became apparent, and is of import, is that these demanding climbs took place within a supportive community of people. Similarly, memories gathered from long meditation sessions in a Thai monastery during monsoon rains, a period of *Mahayana* Buddhist training with “strong teachers” near Kathmandu, and two and a half “intense” years in Pune, India are shaped through the combination of private perspicuity and these complex communities of diverse peoples that “create the conditions for awareness to be more present”. Meditation practices, personal relationships, and work in the Pune commune were activities to bring people constantly into the present moment so that “you couldn’t avoid yourself”. Elise spoke about the gratitude she feels towards her companions in those communities knowing that her experiences would not be “as deep” without them.

From her view, the journeying has made valued qualities such as generosity, compassion and acceptance more possible in her personal and professional life. “I’m there to allow the other” she said, voicing an aspiration to be alongside people in her work without negative judgements so that they can express their “realness” and “authenticity”. This seemed to be achieved through recognising “interconnectedness”, nurturing the skill of “presence” and being with them so “they feel that it’s okay, that it’s safe”. Emphasising presence as a way of being with people is “essential”. Elise spoke of letting the self “dissolve” so that there is a “feeling of things flowing”. She wrote to me later stating she had developed a “wide view” or perspective so that she could “see the person in context to their whole life” and hold an “awareness of my awareness of the person”.

Invited to look back over the conversation, Elise concluded, “it was just experiencing a range of ways of looking at spirituality and understanding myself”. Placing trust in those understandings she simply took one step at a time, a guide to herself. In centring the telling on her private world of experience through an extended account of what she called “travelling”, Elise seemed to me to position herself as an explorer protagonist on a quest. In doing so she stretched out a linear and evolutionary trend

merging her “questioning nature” with the contingencies of wider social conditions and the influences of likeminded others.

Ann

“And if you ask me if I’m a Buddhist then I probably am, although I don’t easily fall to that sort of label. But I have had a constant relationship with one teacher”.

At the beginning of our conversation Ann spoke about her challenging work in a Rehabilitation Hospital describing the “great suffering, physical and mental” of the patients. Approaching people living in “a world of pain” and “utter anguish”, Ann saw herself as a mindful bridge, a metaphor describing her way of moving attentively towards potentially therapeutic encounters as many patients attempt to make sense of their seemingly random tragedies.

Drawing on the work of the Vietnamese *Zen* Master Thich Nhat Hanh, she spoke about the helpfulness of patients simply being “with their breath”. Imagery helps too, with disturbances of the mind settling like a pebble dropping into a turbulent river and sinking to the bottom where it’s calm. Her aim at those times was to assist people to find ways that are “self-soothing”. She thought of her work as aspiring to “great kindness, great respect, great compassion” and encouraging the skill of “being present” even to what is “very, very painful”. Staying with the emotional turmoil of patients, some of whom might be bedridden for months, was a crucial concern for Ann and demanded constant preparation. She spoke about the opportunity to engage in various Buddhist practices as she walked between different medical sections on the hospital grounds. Purposefully “you try to be conscious of what’s around you”, attending to the immediate present experiences of “the environment, in the trees, in the air”, adding she also invokes the presences of “deities”, revealing her spiritual connections to the *Mahayana* path of practice.

Ann’s mother was “really into Catholicism”, and the “rituals”, “noises”, and “smells” of incense were strongly attractive to her in childhood. These familial and culturally legitimated sacraments, a form of “theatre” she remarked, activated her inquisitiveness and brought joy, opening a connection to “this thing bigger than me”. Even so, in adolescence Ann did “an about turn on Catholicism” as she “saw a lot of

the hypocrisy, the guilt-ridden and the hellfire and brimstone” which she decided “didn’t work for me then”. I had the sense it was a persistent trepidation, the result of being “full of sins” while striving for an inaccessible “pure” state, which led to disillusionment and a shift in her faith. Later she took up Transcendental Meditation following which her ex-husband, who was a Buddhist and meditation teacher, became “a reinforcing catalyst” for her pursuit of those practices. A trace can be made from the relatable childhood memories of Catholic ceremonies and her inclination later towards Tibetan Buddhist rituals with witnessing and participation being perhaps curiously familiar.

For the past three decades a monk who escaped from Tibet with the Dalai Lama has been a constant inspirational source of generosity, kindness, respect, humour and harmlessness for Ann. She claimed his positive qualities made it possible for her to be “a better person” even when she was not in his physical presence, and it is mostly the practices learned from him that she has taken into her workplace to create “a healing environment” for herself. Given the length of their relationship I was not surprised when Ann revealed it had “matured” over the years, evolving from what seemed to be a devotional compliancy to a “respectful, connected, realistic” admiration, seeing her teacher as a “guide, a friend”. This heartfelt acknowledgment of the changing complexities with her longstanding teacher does not offer any closed extraordinary conclusions but rather asserts the plain importance of an ongoing candid relationship with a living teacher from a recognised lineage. Supportive community is also “so important” to Ann as practitioners join together in a “very open” way. At these times Ann experiences being “very, very home, very connected”, a connectedness she takes into her work with patients.

At times during the interview there were pauses, rephrasing of words, and sentences unfinished, to be replaced by more experience-near descriptions. Perhaps this liberality of language, the permission to revise speech and expression along the way, showed the limits of language when attempting to convey the accomplishments of Ann’s work and Buddhist practices. Shifting landscapes of consciousness, mindfulness and agency were linguistically linked and characterised as “spaciousness”, “kindness”, “making room” and “equanimity”. To me, these

intentions as performative identities exemplified the reflexive “theatre” of both Catholicism and *Mahayana* Buddhism.

Bhutanese Biographic Impressions

Yeshey

*“I see this in the Rinpoches, these new ways of doing things and practices...
they are translating the practices into a way that we can take it up”.*

Contemporary mindfulness practices for laypeople in Bhutan and the “very strict regime” of Buddhist monastic tradition led Yeshey to “think of two different ways of doing it”. Ancient mythologies, superstitions and intricate rituals, sat alongside a trend towards daily skills of mindfulness which she said were taking laypeople closer to Buddhist teachings.

As our exchange lengthened I was reminded more than once not only of the prominence given to the Buddhist tradition generally in Bhutan but also the special significance of the teacher and student relationship for identity formation within religious hierarchies. The influence of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh stood out as Yeshey resonated with his emphasis on simplicity and ease in mindfulness practices. Gently focusing on the breath brings her into the present moment so she can acknowledge what she is experiencing with compassion, thus creating calmness and “graceful presence”. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and His Holiness the Dalai Lama have been admired, influential, and necessary voices within *Mahayana* Buddhism as they speak to challenging contemporary social and personal concerns in Bhutan. Translations of long-established religious systems into accessible skills for laypeople by venerated Buddhist Masters also lessen the potential for conflict between traditional monastics and an emerging lay movement. To illustrate this change, Yeshey mentioned her father who is now practicing under the well-known and highly regarded Sogyal Rinpoche.

She also framed her developing connection to mindfulness through changes in her personal responses to difficult situations, moving from impulsiveness, anxiety and stress to calmness and patience. So I didn’t misunderstand and think this might have

been personally undemanding, Yeshey depicted her aspiration for calm to be a sometimes difficult struggle through her telling about a tense and troubling personal relationship. On one occasion when she was very much negatively affected by events, her usual talkative demeanor and enthusiasm for projects in the workplace evaporated. She recalled taking a short break, suddenly aware of the warm sunlight and remembering to just attend to her moving breath with self-affection, an intentional soothing of the hurt she was experiencing at that instant. This skill of present moment mindfulness, to be “there in that place”, with an emphasis on the breath’s movement within the body had become possible over the years owing to her intentional practice during everyday activities such as eating and walking. Because she saw encouraging changes in her ways of approaching difficulties, she has persuaded her younger brothers to consider developing these methods as well.

Although Yeshey narrated these events as personal achievements, her telling pressed a distinctly relational outlook. Events emerged from, and were marked by, a combination of communal, cultural and religious conditions woven within an assumptive Buddhist worldview with beliefs and values that undermined any attempt at a covetous individualism. Current personal practices were connected to secular and spiritual mindfulness, bringing to the fore themes present in all the Bhutanese interviews that followed. Her account of mindfulness went beyond a personal practice and into moral comparisons and responsibilities towards her family members, work colleagues, and young people and their families in counselling. It showed her as an active participant in a positively connoted social movement that affected religious, cultural and social life in her country. However, she also offered an opposing tale lest this all sound too even and laudatory. With what seemed a mix of disillusionment and perhaps annoyed disappointment she spoke of local monks who promoted mindfulness but acted with harm towards other people through their speech and deeds. Naming and facing these kinds of contradictions directly, in her life as well as in the lives of others, underlined the importance for Yeshey of how people lived life, not what they claimed they lived.

Tashi

"One cannot negate this idea that mindfulness is secular and it can be practiced by any people. Yes, this is true but at the same time I think as a Buddhist, I feel it is important to acknowledge the fact that the idea of doing certain kinds of practices came from Buddhism".

Speaking from "the Buddhist perspective", Tashi opened the conversation with descriptions of mindfulness concepts and practices noticeably framed by beliefs in the vital significance of "authentic lineage, authentic teacher and authentic student", if a person has the intention of enlightenment as envisioned in the ancient holy texts and in the discourses of living *Dharma* teachers. In stating that he was "not talking about something which is coined in the West" he highlighted his affiliation with an "authentic" Buddhist expression in Bhutan and his appreciation of *Shakyamuni's* discourses on the four foundations of mindfulness. This was evident when he made statements such as: "in Bhutan...most people feel that there has to be an authentic master" and "when I'm referring to Buddhism and such kinds of [mindfulness] practice I feel more authentic". Legitimacy occurred through his dedication to credentialed teachers including Sogyal Rinpoche, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and Muring Rinpoche. In positioning himself within discourses of lineage and authenticity he was refusing any simple adoption of mindfulness teachings for Western secular purposes, an assertion that seemed to gain credibility and momentum as the interview progressed.

Whether in private or in professional settings, every day the intention was to bring mindfulness to whatever might be occurring in a given moment "in the environment". Mindfulness within these contexts meant contemplating thoughts as they arise including both negative mind states as well as "the joys and happiness that you are going through". Turning to his teaching and counselling professions, Tashi stated that mind training, which included mindfulness, enhanced the beneficial qualities of a competent counsellor, their communication skills and genuineness. While mindfulness was initially given as "being aware of what is happening and being in the present moment", Tashi elaborated that it was necessary to know "what to speak, being mindful of what you think and being mindful what you do". This

emphasis on being aware of speech, thoughts and actions supported his view that mindfulness was about “trying to embody what you are practicing” as “intellectual understanding alone is not going to do the job”.

Still, these dominant features of the interview which created a cogent and harmonious feeling at times were qualified: “As much as I know about mind training and mindfulness”, “As far as I understand” and “I would like to say that it’s too early for me to say”. So while he took up a clear authority on his own experiences and cultural knowledges he allowed for uncertainties and was cautious with his claims, a manner that fitted with his view of himself as a novice in mind training and which, to me, strengthened his credibility rather than destabilised it.

Overall, three aspects stand out. First, he refused “to separate my personal and professional lives” as the two were inevitably interwoven and so must influence each other. From his viewpoint, they cannot be divided as to think of mindfulness in only one part of his life meant the other part was diminished in importance. Second, Tashi made sense of notions and practices of mindfulness through his primary identification with contemporary versions of Buddhist traditions, especially as transmitted by *Mahayana* Tibetan and Bhutanese teachers who have resided in the West for many years. What stood out most vividly was his consistency in appealing to the indispensable quest for lineage and its corollary of authenticity. This establishes a moral authority that vitalises mindfulness and other forms of mind training for the realisation of human potentials within a given cosmic order. Finally, despite the singular context of Bhutan and the primacy given to Buddhist teachers, Tashi believed it was important to teach mindfulness in a “very secular way” to students in schools, a move I took to be a careful straddling of socio-religious authority and secular pragmatics.

Dendup

*“I have started feeling that I should get these teachings
from an authentic master with an authentic lineage.”*

Dendup strung together a narrative excursion from early memories to recent events evoking a strong sense of continuity. Being born into an intact Buddhist Kingdom,

Dendup was bound to absorb the all-encompassing customs and beliefs that surrounded him including “indirectly this mindfulness thing” he said. While his communities of origin had offered dependable ancient and prescribed opportunities to engage with Buddhist beliefs and values they also formed a potent foundation from which to explore other knowledges and practices that are linked to, but not defined by, Bhutan’s Drukpa *Kagyü* and *Nyingma* traditions. However, it was not until he studied the philosophies and meditations of various Buddhist schools in Thailand in 2006, an experience he said was “very valuable” and made him aware of the “richness of Buddhism”, that he was inspired to begin “exploring deeper”.

Over the intervening years Dendup has developed a “stronger” feeling that teachings needed to come from “an authentic master with an authentic lineage” so further aligning mindfulness with a common Buddhist necessity. With Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche as his main guide, Dendup takes “mindfulness as a path” to enlightenment, a “spiritual quest”. He has turned away from it as merely about “personal gain for worldly things like health...or relaxation”. Positive effects in his private life and in his professional work in the addictions field were a “by-product of my practice”.

He spoke tenderly about his belief in the interconnectedness of all phenomena giving an example about appreciating “everybody involved in bringing this rice to your plate” including not only the farmer but the “nutrients in the soil and the sun” and the “animal which tilled the soil” so that “you are dissolved into all”. If this *Mahayana* Buddhist conviction can be held strongly he claimed “the notion of self disappears”. Whatever can be achieved in this lifetime towards that aim will be “accumulated” he said and “the merit will be carried over” to the next birth. Such a framing drew on intricate philosophies of *karma* and rebirth, suggesting an epic journey, one that is to be found in this very life, is prefaced by lives that have already been lived, and holds the promise of lives to come.

The idea of a journey is a common metaphor to denote spiritual pathways and while habitually characterised in personal terms, they are usually undertaken with influential companions. Dendup’s narrative of spirituality was no exception as he told a “very interesting story” that featured the faith of others. As he travelled from the meditation centre in the forests of northern Thailand to Bangkok, he noticed

increasing sadness at the thought that he would not be able to continue the “calm” and “gentleness” he had cultivated through mindfulness of the breath and loving-kindness meditations on retreat. As this unhappiness grew stronger, so did a longing for a community of practitioners to maintain and strengthen his path. As it turned out, this desire was resolved due to the influence and encouragement of his wife, whom he described as “so spiritual” because her “entire family” comes from a “rich Buddhist lineage”, and an Uncle who introduced him to a new contemplative meditation centre in Thimphu. After some time he became a “very very regular” member forming a close relationship with the resident teacher. Contemplative communities in Thailand and Bhutan, and the contribution of his family members, especially his wife and his wife’s family, led to a sense of belonging to something greater than himself, his “ultimate quest”.

Taking me by surprise towards the conclusion of the interview, Dendup revealed that he had felt “uneasy to speak”, preferring that his descriptions of mindfulness were connected to the invisible presences of his Buddhist teachers, “my master Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche or Lama Shenphen or Sogyal Rinpoche”. This way of thinking he confessed had “some roots to my Buddhist background” as “you need the permission of the guru to teach something to somebody”, a comment that seemed to circle back to his remarks about authenticity at the start of the interview. This qualification served to underscore again the frequency and prominence of other people’s presences in shaping Dendup’s mindfulness, producing a coherent multivoiced narrative with familial, lay Buddhist, and monastic features.

Pema

“I would not like to call it meditation. I would like to call it rather mindfulness practice. Because when the moment you try to call it, label it as meditation, people [in Bhutan] have this tendency of thinking that it is something to do with religious activities”.

There was a progressive trajectory to Pema’s account as he sketched his growing knowledge and abilities in mindfulness. His opening descriptions proposed that mindfulness was a concept and practice for perceiving and understanding personal states of mind to enhance wellbeing through reading texts, listening to teachings, and

daily private practice, the latter being the most important for “unless one practices it, one may not really get that kind of experience or the benefits”.

Although he believed mindfulness was “strongly connected to Buddhist principles and ideas” he approached it within a “purely non-sectarian” outlook, a point highlighted when he stated “I think it [my approach] has nothing to do with religious practices” but rather “for your own self, exploring yourself deeper”. Emphasising this aim further, he added he was “not even thinking about enlightenment, not even thinking about... relieving ...sentient beings from suffering”, but rather learning a practical everyday skill. Pema noted various mind training methods including “facing an object ... concentration on that object, very gently” and “just observing your breath whether on the outbreath only, or the inbreath and outbreath”, all without any religious purpose. Yet, at a one point, he added emphatically “you cannot forget the fact that it has been borrowed from the Buddhist principles” and has a “strong connection with Buddhist tradition”. Although “at this moment, at this point of my life” he wanted to link his personal practice to a secular intention, the “religious oriented” mode was not far removed, so taking hold of his cultural inheritance before resolving that it was “very important to hold both the views”.

Influences have come from Buddhist teachers such as Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Minju Rinpoche and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and importantly an ongoing association with the contemplative tradition of education taught at Naropa University in the United States. In describing his part in developing counselling courses for teachers in Bhutan, it was through a “most enriching and then inspiring” semester at Naropa in the second half of 2011 that he “got to really get into the concept much deeper”. Each step provided encouragement to persist and challenge the predominant Bhutanese cultural view that meditation was “only for the monastic body or the people who are in that religious tradition, like monks”. In the educational sphere Pema took the view that mindfulness as it is being taught “is democratic” and “nothing to do with the religious orientations” so that “anybody can practice”. Commenting on the emergence of mindfulness and meditation practices in the West and Bhutan, Pema again harked back to his central themes when he stated that the main “differences lie in the attitudes and beliefs of the people, not in the actual

approach of the practice”. While the Bhutanese people have the general tendency to believe “this is for the monks and religious practitioners”, in the West “people do not associate it too much with any kind of religious orientation” or a “purely Buddhist tradition” and so it is “accessible”.

Pema’s optimism about the potential for mindfulness relies on his intrapersonal experiences and his part in the development of a novel Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling offered to school educators in Bhutan. These are “blended” with the influences of his respected teachers through several mind training retreats. The tendency throughout is to join these sites of identity formation in the life of one person, pointing to drifts in the religious and cultural conditions of Bhutan with a potential loosening of any assumed monastic/lay divide when it comes to mindfulness, a move that brings cultural and social consequences.

Wangji

*“...it is a form of integration...I think you have to know it, what is the intention.
And you have to also look at the consequences for this...
maybe the moral and ethical practices that you have.”*

With a buoyant tone and straightforward language Wangji put forward a personal and secular version of mindfulness identifying and depicting it as “paying attention”, being in the “present moment” and “more focused”. He mapped the evolution of his mindfulness practices highlighting a 2010 retreat at the nonsectarian Kolkata centre of the *vipassana* meditation teacher S.N. Goenka. This encounter with a mindfulness retreat was “very intensive” and, in hindsight, he thought it was “too difficult for me”. He compared that time with another Goenka training completed some years later, one he found “much more comfortable”, an evaluative conclusion indicating to him some progress in his meditation.

In contrast to these prolonged sitting meditations on retreats, and perhaps as a consequence of them, he decided to engage in the “contemplative side” of his life briefly and whenever he had “free time” such as “walking to the college” or when his children have gone to sleep. Dwelling on this ability to be consciously “flexible”, to find a place for mindfulness in everyday life, he chooses “to practice anywhere,

not the traditional way”, closing with the claim that people from “any religion, any nationality they can do it”. This stance, one which casts Buddhism as a religion and his mindfulness practice as secular and private, was supported by a number of other statements as he navigated the conversation: “it is not like a religious sitting or religious meditation”, “Buddhist practice is nothing to do” with it, and “I don’t have any Buddhist connection” to mindfulness. Through collaborative efforts with Pema, other Bhutanese teaching colleagues and foreign practitioners, he has been partly responsible for initiating the counselling course in Samtse. This sequence of events from his earliest retreat to his key involvement in teaching mindfulness within the education sector of Bhutan has consolidated the nexus between direct practice and professional training, creating opportunities to “integrate the Western psychology and Eastern psychology”.

Similar to other conversational partners, his tilt towards distinctly individual practices and the positive features of mindfulness was somewhat altered when he introduced a notable caution concerning the potential for mindfulness to have negative effects on others. He stated, “if you become too much obsessed, you may forget...the other”, referring to comments made by his wife after he returned from a long retreat and took up a sitting meditation at home. When and where he might practice this silent approach to meditation required him to negotiate with her, highlighting a range of issues including the importance of that relationship, his intentions for practice, and the binding of personal actions with consequences for others. What was described as ostensibly a private matter was now placed within a relational attentiveness that seemed of critical importance to Wangji, speaking as he did of his wife and children at different times throughout the interview.

Going even further on this track, and leading the conversation to the wider interpersonal and social realms of his life, he made a series of forthright comments about an obligation to “look at the interests of the other people also” when considering whether to commit to a sitting practice of mindfulness meditation. Requiring practitioners to question “whether it is helping them or whether it is harming them” seemed to indicate he was not convinced that mindfulness alone would automatically bring fairness and accord in relationships. Rather, he saw mindfulness as linked to an ethical social life. The “*Dharma*” taught by the Buddha

Shakyamuni was about “how people should be living” with each other. This view was reinforced soon afterwards when Wangji spoke of “interdependence” as “a system” that “we cannot live without”, the realisation of which would lead people “to understand others, to develop sympathy, to develop compassion, generosity”, so linking his statements to Buddhist cosmology and its questioning of what constitutes an embodied moral living with others.

Towards the end of the interview I found Wangji’s coherent and convincing account both simple and complex. There was both a unified smoothness and an unsettling of certainties. His account appeared relatively straightforward when he spoke of personal introspective mindfulness, providing common linguistic tags to describe his experience. However, as his story shifted to a stronger relational inclusiveness, he showed his preparedness to challenge any views that mindfulness practice was intrinsically positive regardless of context, so leaving me with a picture of his willingness to assess his intentions and actions, and their effects.

Second Tier

Australian Responses to Biographic Impressions from Bhutan

Ann

“I felt very deeply connected with all the [Bhutanese] dilemmas”

Though geographically distant, for Ann there was an immediate affinity with the *Biographic Impressions from Bhutan*, prompting reflections on her past 30 years of Buddhist practice, especially with regard to relationships with teachers and the associated long-established institution of authenticity. Slipping into this topic, Ann said she was “amused” at the familiarity of practices and understandings of her far-off colleagues’ traditions, hinting at the curious ways in which contemporary religious modes of life are taken beyond their borders of origin.

This expansion, however, raised a number of concerns for Ann such as the alteration of Buddhist teachings to make them “more palatable” for Western audiences. She

linked this to her intense concern that “tantalising” secular versions of mindfulness might neglect the “deep connectedness to the values that underlie it”. Calling on her *Rinpoche’s* cautions in this matter made him an enduring presence and voice throughout the interview, reminding me of our first meeting one year before and providing a striking resemblance to the interviews in Bhutan. And by turning towards values, a vital aspect of Buddhist tenets, she also set in motion a series of remarks by her research collaborators in Perth about the influence of secular and religious ethics.

John

“I had this notion that if you lived in a Buddhist country it’d be a hell of a lot easier.”

John expressed his great surprise at the Bhutanese descriptions of “meditation and mindfulness as the province of the monks” and its relatively new acceptance within a lay context. This ran counter to his imagined ideal about how mindfulness might be practiced in a Buddhist country. He posed a question as to whether the separation of monastic meditation from the lay people “might make it more difficult” for mindfulness to be considered part of professional skills in Bhutan.

What also stood out for John when reading the *Impressions* was the importance placed on “guidance” from an authorised teacher, a view he was “sympathetic towards” as he could appreciate this form of legitimacy. He added, “I’m not quite so sure it’s central in the West”, then immediately followed with “although I’ve had a mentor cum therapist for 10 years now”. This view, that learning might also come from “someone who perhaps has advanced”, not necessarily an “authenticated monk”, raised the subject of who has the authority to teach mindfulness and its practice in different cultural contexts. Though I didn’t pursue it much further with him, it appeared this issue spoke to closely held personal and social attitudes and beliefs that produce definitions, images, and acts that make claims about a genuine mindfulness.

Arabella

"Feels to me that's something that's embedded in a relational perspective that I don't feel like I have"

For Arabella the “stronger thing” in the Bhutanese stories was “the emphasis on the relational”, a perspective where the narrator’s self was inescapably linked with others. She surmised that it’s partly an available cultural artefact and juxtaposed this with the efforts she has made to bring that kind of relational awareness into her present life. As it doesn’t come “automatically”, she keeps being “surprised by it”. Going further, Arabella named a “conditioned self-reliance” as a restraint to being in, and acknowledging of, this “relational role” with others including her enduring connection to her Buddhist teacher.

To underscore her point, Arabella recalled regular visits to Thailand, an Asian nation steeped in Buddhist traditions, where she experienced a comparable relational sensibility. Speaking about her close-up personal ties in that country provided a backdrop to her remarks that although the research collaborators from Bhutan seemed to be “talking about themselves they’re sort of not, not in the same way”, which might be “more humble or something where they’re talking about the importance of the authentic teacher and the lineage”. Although offered as a tentative possibility, I took these comments and the movements between experiences of “self-reliance” and the “relational” as an ongoing and engaging perplexity for Arabella, and an invitation to further pursue the cultural intent of different mindfulness practices that might be coupled with notions of self-agency and intersubjectivity.

Jeff

"Mindfulness. You lose a lot if you take it away from practices that surround it."

Near the beginning of his responses, Jeff spoke about the importance of a broader “mind training” and the skilful ways that Bhutanese colleagues took up mindfulness as “very pragmatic” and “outside of a...religious context”. Yet, he also voiced strong concerns about any approach to mindfulness that separated it from the “Noble Eightfold Path” as he thought this might lead to neglecting Buddhist understandings of morality and wisdom. Following this concern, Jeff wondered if the proposed

secular understandings of mindfulness would include “impermanence and no self”, two aspects of insight from the Buddhist viewpoint he chose to emphasise and that he connected to the importance of intention in mindfulness practices.

Jeff then moved to the topic of teachers stating that, for him, “the experience of the practices and their impact on me” have been important and these may not occur “necessarily through a relationship with a teacher”, so attenuating the assertions made thus far regarding the vitalness of embodied authenticity. Extending on this view, he stated his respect for the notion of “authentic teachers” while at the same time respecting those discourses that “deepen...what I’m finding of value in the practices”. In taking these stances, it seemed Jeff placed himself in a committed relationship to ancient Buddhist systems of practice and yet at some distance from the Bhutanese partners’ strong claims to a necessary teacher authenticity.

Frances

*“I felt connected with them in this sense...
who is the authority on the use of this practice?”*

Considering the questions I had set at the beginning of this second round of interviews, being a part of all the subsequent conversations, and after rereading the *Biographic Impressions from Bhutan*, Frances connected each country’s research communities together with a single and seemingly simple inquiry: “Are we allowed to do this?” She said that while Australian “counsellors are supposed to be without affiliation in the way they work and open to people of all creeds and no creeds”, might it be possible for practitioners to adopt ways of working that had “a spiritual basis” and not be religious? She also reflected on whether it was practicable in Bhutan “to use mindfulness separate from religion?”

Speculating on these conundrums for both countries, Frances was led to wonder about authority “around the use of this practice” of mindfulness. Australian therapists she decided could draw on their preferred spiritualities, relieved of any requirement to identify with any particular religious tradition, while in the Bhutanese context she thought they were trying to negotiate aspects of religious and secular mindfulness in an “interwoven” approach. It was through a series of self-questioning

and closely followed self-answering segments that I understood Frances to be wondering about the expression of power within the professional and religious domains, relations that have shaped the discourses of mindfulness in both countries.

Bhutanese Responses to Further Impressions from Australia

Tashi

"When you're talking about impermanence and when you're talking about shunyata, emptiness, I think these are very advanced teachings, profound."

Tashi offered further reflections on the importance of the relational and beliefs about interdependence as part of his response to the Perth interviewees. For him, it is "very much relational here in Bhutan" and "interdependence is very important", both of which he said can be understood in secular and Buddhist terms. Because these are common ways of thinking for the people they produce, he suggested, the "strong sense of community, community vitality" evident in Bhutan. Nonetheless, he surmised that if an individual counsellor in the city of Perth was practicing mindfulness it would affect the client positively and would be, in that sense, "relational in Perth as well". Continuing, Tashi claimed that even "individualistic people" cannot "avoid interdependence" though he agreed that in Bhutan, a "very, very closely woven society", it is perhaps noticeably experienced.

Towards the end of the interview, in replying to concerns from some Perth participants that Bhutanese secular forms of mindfulness might leave out core Buddhist beliefs that could be helpful in the counselling context, such as the impermanence of all phenomena and the unique assertion of *Shunyata*, Tashi seemed hesitant to agree. His final remarks took the form of floating questions. Tashi queried aloud how such beliefs would "benefit the counselling system" in Bhutan and, if advantageous, how they could be integrated, seemingly at ease with not having any immediate answers.

Wangji

"We could encompass some of the Buddhist values but don't say this is from Buddhism. Say this is from components of mindfulness".

The cultivation of mindful attention as a private and secular affair was present in Wangji's initial interview and in responding to the Perth conversational partners he once again adopted this outlook, perhaps even more vigorously. This helped me to understand his firm opening remarks when he expressed great concern that if mindfulness was explicitly linked to "a [religious] teaching or something like *Dharma*" it would deter people who identified with other faiths from taking it up. He said such a link would be "quite disheartening" as a "certain distinction" would create "some kind of obstacle" to people using the methods. Mindfulness training in this way would also be confusing, and so unhelpful, for local people who identified as Buddhists as they would tend to expect such trainings to be given by recognised religious *lamas* for spiritual or religious purposes.

Going further, he said current social attitudes by younger people led him to conclude that there was a "degeneration of the religion and religious values" so much so that to associate mindfulness with Buddhism, or perhaps any religion, would make it susceptible to being rejected too easily. Wangji was convinced that overcoming all these constraints was only possible by separating mindfulness from any association with religiosity, so reemphasising in this interview both the familiar and ongoing problems he and his teaching colleagues face in a mostly Buddhist Bhutan, and also their seriousness in secularising the ways in which mindfulness will be taught into the future.

Pema

"If we say this is Buddhist practice then some students would have reservations".

Holding the focus on values and practices, Pema was not convinced that secular mindfulness methods would become separated from Buddhist ideals in Bhutan, supporting this view by stating that children from a "very early age" are "brought up in that [religious] manner". He added that "secular mindfulness practice would actually enhance" those values highly prized by their culture such as honesty and

having kind thoughts about others, pointing to established and accepted childrearing attitudes and beliefs about social harmony. Extending this claim, Pema said that the basis of the Buddhist Eightfold Path and Four Noble Truths, if considered a way of life rather than a religion, would be suitable to all people as they are “very pragmatic”.

Though he supported his colleagues in not overtly or strongly connecting mindfulness to Buddhism when teaching in counselling courses he said that “sometimes we say these are based on Buddhist principles and philosophy”. He was quick to add however that this did not remake the mindfulness practices they taught into a religious method. This back-and-forth movement between a nonreligious education in Bhutan and common cultural meanings of Buddhism as a religious faith was mirrored in a brief personal vignette. While secular ideas informed his being mindful with others and aided in the living of a “happy life”, Pema felt “deep inside” that this was sustained by being “strongly connected” to Buddhist beliefs which were “motivating, encouraging” of his practice.

Dendup

“Make our practice stronger by following these values and precepts [of Buddhism]”

After listening to Tashi’s talk with me and being asked to consider the *Impressions* of the Second Tier of interviews held in Perth, Dendup expressed definite concerns about mindfulness being separated from Buddhist values and beliefs. Though he could identify with other people’s desires and expectations for “worldly aims” like stress reduction, he believed practicing mindfulness for personal physical and psychological gains was “a very, very narrow perspective” as there was little or no overt link to the wellness of the wider society. For him, these materialist ambitions were devoid of the Buddhist spiritual and ethical intentions for practicing, and so were of important but limited worth.

Addressing this theme further, Dendup made it clear that mindfulness practice was for the eventual spiritual wellbeing of himself and all others, those “we call the sentient beings”. In taking up this measureless and enduring intention, a distinctively Buddhist cosmology emerged and brought into sharp relief those mindfulness

practices maintained for a vast otherworldly purpose in comparison to techniques with secular aims and assumptions about the material limits of human existence. Dendup was not dismissive of potential health benefits, yet without doubt he preferred mindfulness in counselling contexts that recognised Buddhist sources and values. This conversational direction underlined a similar area covered in our interview 12 months previously indicating a continuing reliance on these beliefs.

Yeshey

"What I have always sensed is the age-old tradition coming in, taking a shift, and the knowledge from the West and East blending together to form something more."

Hearing the recorded voices of Tashi and Dendup at the beginning of our interview prompted Yeshey to wonder whether they were "more closer to...mindfulness than myself" because they still lived in Bhutan. The sound of their voices carried not only words to her but "a feeling, a sense" of another time and place that she took some moments to reconnect with and settle into. She was "at a loss" as to how to reflect on their remarks. At the same time this felt distance from Bhutan was soon accompanied by memories of the four of us together in "that little room" in Thimphu and this seemed to rouse a reconnection to her voice and knowing about the topic.

While Yeshey agreed that techniques or processes can be important learned skills she questioned why people might want to become proficient or, as she put it, what is "the whole purpose of practicing"? The joining of process and purpose was exemplified with her recalling an episode of The Oprah Winfrey Show when "a lot of people came forward talking about how being very mindful about their eating helped them be healthy". Similarly, she said we can consider the purpose of "practice in our daily lives" at the workplace or for students at school and afterwards when they returned home emphasising that "talking mindfully is a respect of self" and a "care of self". For Yeshey, an effectual narrative of mindfulness would speak to personal methods for achieving meditative equipoise and also prioritise watchfulness with others for the benefit of human relationships.

An Interchange of Places and Voices

In this section of the thesis the *Biographic Impressions* have introduced the counsellors and psychotherapists in Bhutan and Australia through compressed portraits of their interviews, highlighting crucial ways they understood mindfulness and its place in their personal and professional histories. They expressed heartfelt responses to human suffering, theirs and others. Evocative salient incidents in early life and key episodes in adulthood meaningfully shaped their life choices and influenced their views, attitudes and beliefs. In retrospect, some Australians spoke of conflict and difficulties in childhood and a couple of Bhutanese mentioned constructive childrearing approaches they linked to a mindful life. Stories of gratitude to various teachers or mentors were prominent. Some of these figures appeared in the professional domain. Most turned up in religious and spiritual spheres including in monasteries and ashrams. Bhutanese partners especially spoke devotedly about the importance of lineage and authenticity whereas the Australians generally took a less reverential attitude. Partners attributed a range of characteristic qualities to mindfulness and emphasised developing affective intentions such as kindness, compassion and generosity along with mental spaciousness and curiosity. The tendency to hone in on these skills came from what they have found beneficial in their private lives and the distinct settings of their professional work. Some partners raised questions about noticing the effects of practicing mindfulness, not assuming it is always positive. As well, the *Impressions* revealed matching and differing opinions on the theme of removing mindfulness from its Buddhist context and placing it into secular environments aimed at enhancing physical and mental health. There was a general concern expressed by the Australians at a possible distancing from Buddhist values and philosophies in taking a secular direction in Bhutan and a consistent reassurance from the Bhutanese that this separation will not occur.

As would be clear by now, I consider these conversations not only responses to the questions I ask, they were to-and-fro social actions, a multiplicative reflexivity of expressions that composed the narrative trajectories of the interviews. Though no line is sharply etched to define endings and beginnings, this constructed processual

linearity illustrates how events can be linked progressively through time to develop plots with implied or overt themes. These connective patterns foreshadow the chapters ahead, the landscapes to be traversed through careful attention to the digital recordings and the transcripts. My aim is to explore further how these happenings in partners' lives may have been enabled and constrained by the personal, social and cultural arrangements of people living in particular times and places.

6

Episodes of Consequence

unfolding the song

Embracing suns and moons

Stepping into a nameless future

Leaves dripping with the dreams of spotless tears

Storytelling obliges people to look backwards and suggest or clearly mark the introduction of a narrative segment from a vast excess of possibilities, negotiating the interplay of living a life with the interpretation of a life as lived. Commonly, experiences are assembled in a forward moving direction with already known conclusions. Protagonists sometimes hold in mind what might have happened but didn't as a means to assess significance, make personal phenomena understandable, and arrive at conclusions about what did happen and why. Moving along a timeline, a characteristic storymaking convention, enhances the appearance of continuity and consistency thereby creating the sense of a persisting conscious, and perhaps authentic, person over time to whom these events occur.

During the interviews I watched for the appearance and disappearance of topics in the flow of dialogue. Hints of prominent episodes usually surfaced in response to my probes. I took these as possible openings to speak further, perhaps foreshadowing decisions made at critical moments that had encouraging or negative consequences. I wondered about their comparative importance, keeping a lookout for patterns of agreement, contradiction, uncertainty, congruency and so forth. How were partners' understandings shaded by historical and relational encounters in familiar and foreign locations? In what ways were their meanings about mindfulness, ideas on authenticity and authority, and their notions of self and ethics, construed and re-construed retrospectively? How we all positioned ourselves, and how we were positioned by each other, remained an abiding focus.

I followed anecdotes that tweaked my curiosity and yielded to the partners' desires to express their views and speculations, encouraging them to tell me why they chose certain episodes and the personal meanings they made of the events including the effects of what happened at the time and the enduring influences on decisions and actions they would take across the years. Narrative intensifiers often turned up through poignant or evocative words or phrases, repetitions, silent pauses, a single word or two tagged on at the end of a sentence, or an array of metaphors or analogies selected by the partners to underline standout issues.

In bringing these events together into shared themes, I fragmented the transcripts, lessening the constraints of linearity by shifting time and place around, and interweaving separate incidents from different partners. Placing them more or less side-by-side, I sought to illuminate lines of action, associated meanings, affective tones and evaluative remarks, and to study the similarities and variabilities within and between cultures. There are variations in the quantity of partner's contributions, an outcome of how we organised ourselves within the accruing exchanges. This cannot be a measure of import as fewer words by some partners conveyed greater significance to them. Under these conditions, I sought speech equity, attempting to do justice to the spread of topics that each partner decided was most pertinent. Keeping this in mind, the following four chapters on the context of striking events, issues of legitimacy and authenticity in teachings and relationships with instructors, the creation of personal and professional practices of mindfulness, and the performative features of ethical selves, are intended to complement the *Biographic Impressions*.

Following their return from postgraduate studies abroad, Wangji and Pema in Samtse and Tashi in Paro were charged with developing Bhutan's postgraduate counselling course at the College of Education. In a reciprocal academic arrangement, staff from Naropa University in Boulder taught in the counselling course and the three Bhutanese were enrolled in Naropa for a semester. Given the prominence of these initiatives it was not surprising that, when storying their mindfulness histories, these partners mostly retrieved events surrounding this opportunity to study in a concentrated way at the university founded by the Tibetan-born Chogyam Trungpa. They also mentioned other trainings that shared the

characteristics of being institutionally directed and taking place in other countries. Pema elaborated on the “enriching” and “inspiring” effects of the Naropa program when a student in Boulder.

Pema We have been there for about a semester and
 then the entire semester we attended classes.
 And somewhere in October,
 we had to undergo retreat for two weeks extensively.
 And I think that really motivated me to keep on practicing.
 So starting, then I started sitting,
 at least for five minutes every morning.
 And before that I wasn't really interested.
 Of course, as I said, I knew the concept,
 I understood what it meant,
 but I wasn't really inspired to practice myself.
 So that retreat component in Naropa University
 really motivated and inspired me to at least sit for a while.

In this excerpt Pema added dynamic momentum to his story with a series of ever-tapering temporal descriptors: “semester”, “October”, “two weeks” and “five minutes”. This pulled it forward towards a practical ending: a morning meditation routine. To accentuate the importance of the retreat he employed a characteristic narrative strategy when he divided and compared his past experiences, caught by his term “before that”, with his after-that meditation approach. The adjective “inspired” named the process through which an idea of mindfulness became an action. Tashi offered a similar contrastive example in speaking about his Boulder retreat and earlier trainings in Bhutan and India, both of which he had wanted to end sooner. He put this “tremendous” and “totally different experience” at Naropa down to his altered intentions. In the following lengthy excerpt, Tashi elaborated on his single purpose to “just [be] in the present moment”, an aim he enacted by refusing persistent requests by other retreatants to be organised and put forward a list of goals. He didn't want to get caught up in such “small, small things”.

Tashi ... people were asking so many questions about are you prepared,
what are your aims,
what are your intentions.
Before the retreat, “yes” I said, “I don’t have any aims”,
“I don’t know how to get prepared”,
“I have no intentions”.
“I have just come here and sit”.
Meaning just in the present moment.
That’s why I think I really enjoyed the retreat.
I thought that was a tremendous experience for me...
It was a totally different experience
because my intentions were different.
And you know, when people are asking me as to how I was prepared,
I said “I don’t know how to prepare”.
If there is at all a preparation it happens here in the mind.
Yes, because people were, you know.
Before the retreat there was so much of arrangements,
who is going to sleep with whom,
which room,
what medicine to take for example,
what clothes to take.
And all these things, small, small things we were trying to prepare.
And who is going to travel with whom and all this.
I said “I don’t want to do that”.
“I just want to go there and sit”.
“Keep the present moment”.

With his last words Tashi reiterated his instruction and reaffirmed his achievement, a not uncommon way to mark the end of a success story. Wangji recalled a Kolkata mind training in 2010, an extremely taxing 10 day *vipassana* instruction in the tradition of Satya Narayan Goenka. This was when he had his “real in-depth practice of mindfulness”.

Wangji I found it was very advanced already, high level.
 I had difficulties.

Ian I don't think you're probably alone [in that difficulty].
 I think other people...

Wangji Other people were also there.
 I think in the beginning we are 28 of us,
 but at the end, on the last day,
 I was extremely happy to see
 that I was among the 15 members who have completed.
 I think 14 have left.

Without wanting to make too much of what seems at first glance a relaxed chat, I offer a comment on the intent of my remark and Wangji's reply. People I knew who completed long retreats had often interpreted their struggles through interiorised personal psychological meanings which sometimes amplified feelings of isolation and distress. My statement was designed to indicate he was not "alone" in experiencing the difficulty of the retreat in that sense. Wangji interrupted me from continuing and reminded me with a reassuring tone, perhaps to comfort me, that other people were present at the retreat. These few words can be read as a misunderstanding of my meaning, though listening carefully to the digital recording some weeks later it's also plausible that his language and mood appeared to reposition my framing of his difficulties from a personal feeling of separateness from others into a relational reading of my words which included all the other retreatants. I suggest our interaction unintentionally illustrates different views of selfhood in the West and Bhutan, a point I will make a stronger case for later in this thesis in different ways. I am not dismissing what might be a mix-up in understanding but rather I propose that multiple explanations can exist concurrently, each having their own credibility and bringing different prospects for the next conversations.

Moving on, Wangji remembered the visit to Bhutan of "some professors from Naropa University to integrate the Western psychology and Eastern psychology" and to offer the Diploma's foundational students, as well as him and Pema, some

contemplative methods through a five day retreat. For both of them it was a life-changing period. This training became the template for the Diploma, a blend of Western counselling approaches alongside a one week mindfulness retreat.

Like Wangji, Pema and Tashi, Dendup also shared an overseas experience. On this occasion the setting was far into the forests of northern Thailand, a country steeped in *Theravada* Buddhism. Dendup attended a six week mindfulness intensive with a small group of international retreatants. It was guided by a facilitator trained in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. Here he “got introduced to actual mindfulness practice”, his heightened volume giving the word “actual” a strong conviction. After these opening remarks, surely evaluative conclusions, I asked what he was “drawn to” or “that made sense” or “liked about” the training, an invitation to fill in the gaps for me and the others listening. Dendup didn’t give a direct answer. Instead, to underline the importance of his being there, he compared it with preparations he had made to leave Bhutan. Back then he was “looking forward to having a good time in Bangkok [and] Chiang Mai” he said, and would “see a lot of places and have a nice shopping”, a reference to the fact that Bhutanese people travel regularly to the Thai capital to acquire manufactured household items, clothes and other goods. But he was surprised, almost shocked: “it was just the opposite”.

Dendup We were in the forest and there was nothing,
 just 12 or 13 of us.
 Sometimes in a hut.
 Sometimes in a lonely place.
 But it gave us a good feeling I think to sit together.
 And even to, you know...
 The trouble with me,
 I can’t find appropriate English words to describe my feelings.
 Things which I had read down there [in Thailand].
 Like from morning to evening we were kept on toes,
 we just moved out.
 And there will be suddenly the duty for the day.
 We’ll keep our card somewhere.
 Stop and breathe three times.

That's the kind [of practice].
So we can see that anywhere.
Even in the toilet,
stop and breathe three times.
So you're eating
and then you are washing plates.
Sometimes it's near the washbasin.
Stop and breathe three times.
So we were always kept on our toes for six weeks.
So we were always alert.

Maybe to make up for being without “appropriate English words” he conveyed his feeling of the retreat through his touching reverential tone before swiftly giving some details of the skills taught. What struck me in listening to the digital recording and even now as I'm writing is the charming and harmonising chant-like phrasing where, in three places, he looked intently at me repeating slowly and compellingly “stop and breathe three times”. I experienced this double triplication, three verbal injunctions to breathe three times, as quite mesmerising and it seemed to generate a calming effect not only on him and me but on our audience members. Perhaps I imagined that we all exhaled together and more deeply? Or did it remind us all of familiar meditations, adding a collective accuracy to his story. Dendup later described “very funny feelings, sometimes I feel shy to share, very funny feelings I got within those six weeks”, indicating relatively unfamiliar and certainly unplanned-for ways he started treating other people and himself for an extended time. Soon, he named these “funny feelings”: “I think a gentleness developed in me...we were always close to each other, friendly, very friendly, gentle every day”, the tag “every day” accentuating the retreatants' vows.

In one way I can read his account as not unusual. People regularly have their expectations upturned. Yet it is this commonness regarding expectations that can make invisible the routes by which we revise our narrative selves. We all make forecasts, as Dendup did, by placing past events into an imagined continuity designed to give the feeling of a reliable future. This projected storyline is unimpeded by the unknown, those contingencies that crop up with their varying

degrees of importance and which may compel us to make modifications. In mediating the dramatic dissimilarity between his “shopping” self and his eventual sense of someone who knows “how to appreciate even a blade of grass”, Dendup moved between dichotomous experiences that can be parsed as restlessness/calm, shopping/no shopping, city/forest, crowded/12 people, and noisy city/peaceful nature. These destabilised his settled prediction of what was going to happen and who he thought he was going to be on his trip to Thailand. The person he was becoming was created from what he was given. Such accounts lend credence to the notion of moveable and multiple versions of self which can be prominent, or less so, when negotiating the holding of prior expectations alongside emerging actual circumstances.

This social process was also evident with Yeshey, the only Bhutanese partner who offered her country as the place of a defining moment, an episode I cited briefly in her *Biographic Impression* and to which I now return. In the interview I asked a wandering question that included “...can you tell me a story about when you perhaps were introduced to these ideas [of mindfulness]...a story about books that you’ve read or someone you’ve met...or a particular event or...?” Her instant response - “So many things coming, I’m trying to select” - is followed by an appreciation for Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings. Then, pausing briefly and prefacing what she was about to say with “if you ask me my own story”, Yeshey made a candid confession: “being mindful was out of the window at that time”. These rhetorical moves can encourage trustworthiness as listeners are invited to lean towards her personal revelation and to consider her remarks as honest explanations about what happened.

Continuing on, Yeshey remembered being beset for some hours with disturbing emotions over conflict with another person, finally reaching “the edge, really the edge”.

Yeshey I looked outside
 and then I said [to myself]
 “I’m actually forgetting to look at the sun today”.
 That was the first thing that came to my mind.
 So I took a deep breath,

I looked outside and it was warm outside.
And then I sort of looked into myself, things that I was going through.
That was a whole lot of anger. And I looked at that anger.
Not just looked at it,
I just sort of thought,
“Why is that there?”
“What is it really?”
But it wasn’t anger actually.
It was hurt.
Then I was thinking about things I did
in just two hours in the morning.
Things that I wouldn’t really do.
And I hurt people.
And I shocked people...
And then, that’s really not me.
So I said [to myself], “What do I do to correct it?”
‘Cause I only had to acknowledge the hurt
right here in my chest and in...
It was just here in my chest, it was like a sensation,
really feeling that hurt.
And I’m saying “Guess you’re trying to teach me something.
Something that was very important that was hurt”.

Yeshey’s account was different in a number of ways from the others considered so far in this section. Though people were present, they were not with her in a mind training retreat but engaged in office responsibilities in Thimphu. It was what she said in an uncaring tone to people she knows very well and respects that play a part in noticing, catching and transforming her inner anguish. Realising how she “hurt” and “shocked” her work colleagues contradicted her desired way of being seen by them and led her to remark “that’s really not me”, an evaluative identity statement only possible after she had both “looked outside” and then “looked into myself”. She recognised the earlier hurt and saw its unwanted legacy appearing in a different context with close colleagues. Curiously, her use of the metaphor “out of the window” foretold how she returned to a tranquil caring place. She suddenly

remembered to “look at the sun”, my thought being this action soothed her troubles with its blending of sensory warmth and mental spaciousness. This reminds me of occasions in therapy when a client person makes a remark that turns out to be an unintended linguistic clue as to how we might resolve their concerns. Eventually, Yeshey did “acknowledge the hurt right here in my chest” and moved towards the “sensation” to “really feeling that hurt”, personifying it as a teacher whose lesson she grasped: “something that was very important [to me], that was hurt”. In answer to the witnessing partners’ reflections, Yeshey clarified and elaborated on the incident. She “noticed the anger subside” before she “started investigating” it which then led her to realise “it was a big hurt, a big hurt”. Probing further she knew those distressing feelings were “because of injustice”, describing poetically how she began “to cry along with it [the hurt/injustice] and then notice it, just let it be, it was like washing myself”.

Holding her text in front of me makes it possible to trace the transformative moves of Yeshey’s emotionally charged states by gathering together certain verbalised change-markers, which can be considered momentary self-markers too. Her account not only showed her observer self at work, she also demonstrated an investigative application of mindfulness. She actively interpreted events, marked out directions, and moved towards responses that fitted with how she wanted to be known to herself and perceived by others through narrating her “I” through a series of recalls and actions: “I called it the edge...I looked outside...I’m actually forgetting...I took a deep breath... I looked outside...I sort of looked into myself...I looked at that anger...I hurt...I shocked people...what do I do to correct it...I only had to acknowledge the hurt”. This performance of meaning-making by an embodied “I” took place across two temporal sites: the location of the original action in Thimphu and the recalled events during the interview when Yeshey’s distress and her settling the hurt were witnessed and acknowledged by her colleagues and me. My writing frees these temporal-bound events with their fluid expressions from their specific sites of production, transposing those lived moments into the fixed script of a document, a process that acts as another form of acknowledgment and simultaneously constrains the telling into text.

While most Bhutanese conversational partners located their pivotal moments within Buddhist retreats, Frances, Ann and Arabella answered my questions on early influences by recalling their childhoods inside another vast religious institution, Catholicism. I have touched on these associations somewhat in the *Biographic Impressions* and now reconsider them given the centrality of religious atmospheres in their early lives. Frances cast her time with Catholic nuns as “foundational” to her “spiritual journey” and her connection to an “inner spirit”, with mindfulness “a technology and practice that allows that to emerge”. Ann became engrossed with that religion’s “uplifting” rituals, finding them “incredibly beautiful” spectacles, a vibrant mix of “the creation of the space and theatre”. Maybe there was a feeling of belonging too, as later in life she didn’t find it “strange” to have a similar attraction towards the “theatre and noises and smells” in Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies. I was curious as to what the Catholic rites and ceremonies evoked for her as a child. She paused, reflecting, maybe giving them due reverence before saying calmly it “always” took her to another place. I understood this to be a kind of transcendent consciousness, an experience of beauty and peace. Arabella was also attracted to her given Catholic faith and kept “coming back to it, 'cause it seemed to hold a lot of promise”. Yet both Ann and Arabella, in their own ways, turned to Buddhism, albeit to different schools with their particular understandings of spiritual paths and meditation. Not that this was easily done.

Rehearsing adult identities, a young Arabella imagined being a Catholic nun and tried the persona of veterinarian, the latter dream cut short by a “ghastly chemistry teacher” and the former left behind because it didn’t allow for “not knowing”. The Mother Superior would “just kept telling you where you were”. Arabella yearned for people who valued “enquiry, that curiosity, the wonder, the being prepared not to know”, a stance which led her to seriously question her spiritual life and her place in the world. She became “a bit of a traveller, [as] Catholicism wasn’t journeying anywhere”. Still, she “persevered” for many years, not “entirely sure why”, and met “odd people that were similarly wandering” during the 1970s. Then, in “probably '92, '93, that’s when it really took off”.

Arabella That’s when I had some pretty,
 had been in the throes of internal earthquakes,

and had had some various crises arising.
And fortunately found myself landed by a particular wave,
in a particular meditation hall,
with a particular teacher.
And it's a bit like it was with Carl Jung
there's that sense of being home.

Ian Being home?

Arabella And so from then on, yeah, I haven't had to wander about.

Reflecting on the “journeying”, Arabella went straight to the years when “it”, her spiritual quest, “took off” in the midst of “earthquakes” and “crises”, circumstances that heightened her intense relief when she eventually sat before the person who would become her principal meditation instructor. From her long and broad outward search, she narrowed her story to focus on a single “wave”, “hall” and “teacher”, the recurrence of the prefix “particular” being a linguistic marker to cue listeners on the importance of this moment, and suggesting to me this might be an opening to her current views of mindfulness. This conjecture later proved to be so. Rendering the event as “fortunate” and evocatively describing it as a “sense of being home”, reminded her of sitting before the televised Jung. Two happenings that are separated by decades - one, an electronic image of a celebrated European psychiatrist and psychotherapist beamed into her lounge room from thousands of kilometres away, the other a soon-to-be well-known English-born Buddhist monk sitting before her - are merged through Arabella's collapsing time and naming them both as “being home”.

Ann too struggled to find Buddhist mind training that suited her, recalling an excruciating “sweaty sitting in a shed in the [Perth] hills, 21 days of Goenka”.

Ann So if anyone's done that,
 where you can't move and it's so hot.
 But I tell you I had a great experience there.
 And it was the first time

where I was aware of extraordinary pain in my back.
And he [the teacher] kept saying “Just notice it and it’ll change,
notice it and it’ll change”.
And one day it just did.
It became a tingle.
That for me was a quite an important moment.

Ian How come?

Ann Because, how come!
Because, oh my God!
Maybe there’s something in it...
It was great, I must say.

When the words Ann chose to express her difficult situation - “you can’t move”, “it’s so hot”, “extraordinary pain in my back” - are combined with the desperateness I heard in her tone of voice and the twisting gestures of her body, the story achieved a fuller dramatic force, confirming the limits of words alone to transmit her intended meaning. Against this intensity, in the midst of the telling, she placed a contradictory evaluative comment, “I had a great experience”. We do not wait long for this to be resolved as she immediately juxtaposed the images of suffering with the transformative power of her mindfulness meditation. Ann was instructed to “Just notice it and it’ll change, notice it and it’ll change”, and to her astonishment it “became a tingle”. Her exclamatory repetition of my query, “Because, how come!” and its follow-on “Because, oh my God!” amplified her tentative wondering about “Maybe there’s something in it”. She went further.

Ann The practice was, was quite effortful.
Just notice your breath,
notice your breath,
couldn’t move,
I was sweating.
It was just, just hard work,
just completely hard work.

This excerpt illustrates how Ann validated her preceding statements and further portrayed the agony and unusual severity of her circumstances through the intensifiers “effortful”, “couldn’t move”, “hard work”, “completely hard work”, leaving no doubt as to her struggles and her subsequent achievements. Professional literature tends to highlight the calming effects of mindfulness, downplaying other aspects. Yeshey and Ann, in different locations and times, gave nuanced pictures when responding to their distress. Ann faced severe physical pain on a chosen retreat. Yeshey was swamped by the anguish of an unasked-for injustice. Yet they share a tenacious effort in facing their circumstances, a willingness to be with and look closely at what was happening. Along with this attentiveness, both adopt a continuous conscious intention to carefully assess their experiences, so complicating a definition of mindfulness as a technique of non-judgemental acceptance.

John spoke to this subject at the conclusion of his guitar story when he said: “I hadn’t actually thought about such things as the complexity, the blend of mental and physical that actually demands my attention”. Leading up to this point in the interview, he had said mindfulness was “quite simple” but in expanding his story he noted the “practice again and again and again”, realising that focusing on the “music” and “fretboard...sets me up for that moment I suppose”.

Ian Sets you up?

John Sets me up.
So that’s an interesting elaboration on that,
I hadn’t really thought about.

Ian What’s interesting to you in that?

John I just thought, I just had that memory.
That was really a moment [in time].
I hadn’t actually thought about such things as the complexity,
the blend of mental and physical that actually demands my attention.
There’s a lot of mindfulness exercises that I use that are very simple,
wash dishes,

clean my teeth,
stand in the shower.
I guess this is what, to get back to it [playing the guitar],
this is why the *Zen* school uses more complex rituals.
I hadn't really thought that experience through in that context.

As stories are told and re-told, what appears to be known and settled can be changed into something unforeseen, an account that hadn't been, or couldn't have been, considered before. This segment of interview with John shows how even brief conversations evolving through purposeful dialogical loops can make prior meanings prone to this kind of narrative expansion. What was initially described by him as "just [a] thought...that memory...a moment" became re-remembered and imbued with a growing "complexity". As he lingered, this shift was reflected in his selection and length of words when he took a meta-position on our conversation: "I hadn't really thought", "I hadn't actually thought about such things" and "I hadn't really thought that experience through in that context". This sequencing illustrated his emerging interpretations about the same event, underscoring their significance through their previous absence.

The physicality of his playing without discursive overdubbing, his initial reported experience as "a moment", is now set alongside a passing reference to complex *Zen* rituals. In doing so I suggest he came to know not only another reading of the event but another version of himself by way of an associative object that is of significance to him, his guitar. Too often in narrative studies the grounds for composing a sense of self can become reduced to the intersubjectivity of conscious human minds with an emphasis on social interactions. This can obscure the contributions of treasured material objects invested with constitutive power. My conversation with John reminded me that if I am to seriously consider the ways in which people compose narrative selves, then I am bound to seek significant events where the relational is redefined beyond human-to-human encounters to include other sentient beings, nonhuman objects, the natural environment and also what some people might conceive of as mystical, divine, otherworldly or spiritual. John reminded me of the potential for multiple readings of events in context which, in this account at least,

were not confusing but an intriguing fresh take on well-used memories as he bridged different mindfulness methods of complexity and simplicity.

Complexity could also describe Elise's transformative phases of life when travelling overseas in the late 1970s. She "wasn't really into acid very much...just dabbling" and believed "there was something behind what was happening" in Western cultures at that time. With dissatisfaction at the emphasis on material acquisition, she began to search for an "understanding of oneself, a deeper basis" for living. Her early childhood was described as both "difficult" and "marvellous", a time filled with "a lot of loss...lot of change...lot of moving and things". For Elise, these vicissitudes led to "something that was incomplete" which propelled a personal and urgent desire to discover "some way to move through that". With these inner struggles and the accessibility of Asian countries, Elise turned to Thailand and India for inspiration, countries some of the Bhutanese partners were to visit more than 30 years later, though under very different cultural and personal circumstances. Entering a training monastery in Thailand took persistence.

Elise I wanted to meditate and I asked around...
Each temple I went to in Chiang Mai said "oh well, no, no, no.
It's the rainy season you can't come".
You know they're very polite
and they don't want to say an outright "no".
But they're basically saying no.
I don't take "no" for an answer very well.
So I'd go to the next temple and ask "Can you take me in?
Where can I learn?
Can I stay here to meditate?
I understand you teach some Westerners?"
And usually the same answer.
The third time I asked at another temple.
A monk said "This is the third time you've asked?"
And I said "Yes".
He said come back tomorrow.
And he went and saw the Abbot.

I didn't know it
but if you ask for teachings in the East three times
you can't be refused.
So they had to let me in.
So I went to the little monastery,
was out in the fields.
Well beyond Chiang Mai,
north of Chiang Mai.
A good hour's ride in a little taxi truck...
I was there for three months.
Thought I'd stay a couple of weeks.
And was meditating up to 20 hours a day.
And then start again.

Elise left Australia open “to experience everything I could”, a claim that set an adventurous tone and an expectation that listeners will hear an unusual tale. Knowing that meditation was “something that I could experience in the East”, she arrived in Thailand primed for study. Living in the northern city of Chiang Mai, not far from what would become Dendup's destination decades later, she “asked around” to see if she could stay for some weeks. The “rainy season” had begun, a reference to an annual three-month retreat when *Theravada* nuns and monks usually remain within the temple grounds to practice intensively. Called *vassa* in Pali (Sanskrit: *varsah*), it is commonly spoken of in the West as the Rains Retreat. Although monasteries initially refused her request she told the research group, in an aside, that she doesn't “take no for an answer very well”, a remark that foreshadowed the outcome. She repeated her request three times, unwittingly invoking what she presented as an inviolable cultural convention of the East, a word-charm binding the hearer to give way. I wondered whether this drawn-out process also bought time for the monks to assess the sincerity and readiness of the practitioner to undertake a rigorous program of isolated meditation. Anyway, despite the taxing conditions, or perhaps because of them, she chose to spend some months at the “little monastery”.

As she told this story, sneaking up on me unawares, I smelt the pungent dank forest of Thailand, saw the shiny glow of immense multi-shaded green foliage, and

breathed the enveloping mists with effort, as if I was drinking the jungle. Walking steadily and carefully watching footholds through cascades of perspiration, I glanced somewhat nervously ahead, expecting strangeness in this remote location to the north of Chiang Mai. In 1986 this younger me, half my present age, stood on a hillock staring at the Mekong's brown grey vigorous swirling as it charged southwards, the forested shores of Myanmar and Laos hanging close by. Neither river nor watcher knew they would meet again in Vientiane many years further on. Unexpectedly, the characteristic Catholic images and odours of our meeting room where I sat before Elise competed with my nostalgic felt-senses of these other places and times. I was straddling two entwined places, one bursting with heat and wetness and the other serenely dry and coolish, both vying for and deserving recognition, and both making me sympathetic to Elise's yearning and eagerness, as it was mine too. She spoke my words when she said her journeys were "just getting to know myself more" through "experiencing a range of ways of looking at spirituality". What occurs to me, stepping back as I write, is that Elise told an emblematic narrative of the lone, and sometimes lonely Westerner, backpacking through Southeast Asia in the 1970s. She performed a subversive counter discourse that declined participation in the materialist-led desires of post-World War II Australian communities, instead taking a spiritual turn which eschewed comfort, ease and excessive cleanliness. Maybe we were both borne along by a soothing anonymity and the security of financial and material privileges that made it easier to search for non-material spiritually-infused millennial wisdoms in exoticised foreign countries.

In her interview Elise also presented a common description of mindfulness in the therapeutic literature, namely, paying close attention to the senses as a means of calming mental activity. Dendup found these kinds of practices gentle and peaceful whereas Elise, on the other hand, seemed to experience the opposite, her meditation during the afternoon monsoon "exciting" and "very, very intense" and taking her to "ecstasy". Overwhelmed by the monsoon, she admitted "it was very hard" to simply observe what was happening as "I was so open, so raw, so just washed clean, that this would enter me". She named her dilemma as not having "much guard" on her senses, a Buddhist phrasing meditators use to mean she wasn't protecting her mind from being absorbed into attractive external sensory contact. Knowing of her difficulties, her teacher monk instructed her to "come back", to return the mind to

mere observation and not proliferate mental constructs. This had no success, Elise stating that a lack of mature meditation was the problem as she was only 28. Following her stay in Thailand, she lived at the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh ashram in Pune, a city in the Indian state of Maharashtra. I return to this period of her life in Chapter 7, briefly retracing her contact with Osho - as Rajneesh was later named - and how ashram life influenced her views on spiritualities.

In striking contrast to the other Australian partners, Jeff doesn't offer any specific turning points or epiphanies. My probing questions were put aside as he laid out a different route, one of slowly awakening to the potentials of mindfulness through an "inspiring" *Ajahn*. Through listening to talks or being in his physical presence, Jeff said he had "been able to deepen the path", to become "clear" so that insights have arisen, the effect being "more sort of letting go, contentment, happiness". A strong feeling of appreciation carried these words along. These few remarks by Jeff in response to my searching for a standout event left me a little unsettled at the time, maybe even disappointed, by the absence of any challenging past moments and my assumption that this would shape his encounters with mindfulness. In not complying with my imagined scenario, I was somewhat stumped as to what to do next. After a pause, I decided not to pursue his account of steadiness and joy further but go straight to his relationship with his teacher.

Looking back, I believe there are two factors that contributed to my decision. I still had a tendency to gloss over optimistic storylines as being of less import compared to distressing plots, as if what is achieved straightforwardly by a person is a natural outcome of well-meant intentions or the obvious expression of their deeper human nature. Under these essentialist explanations, it follows that additional enquiries are unnecessary as the person is simply demonstrating they are in touch with their true, precious and beneficial intrinsic self. Explanations of this kind regarding why people do what they do and the effects of their activities on others and themselves can silence further enquiries. Historicising events peters out. What a protagonist thinks, feels or knows with regard to their achievements are unexplored and this absence influences the content and trajectory of the conversation. Questions about their intentions, hopes, desires, and longings as well as conclusions drawn about their identity are muted and opportunities for richer understandings are lost. I think this

was an unseen influence on my questions, or lack of them. The other factor that swayed my choice to pursue Jeff's views on his relationship with the *Ajahn* is more justifiable. This theme had already been identified as highly pertinent for the maturing of his practice and, as mentioned in preceding chapters, was a strand of enquiry I was keen to pursue with all partners.

Implicating Others in Time and Place

When partners in this project drew on distinct and poignant memories from the near-past and distant-past they spoke mostly about intense brief incidents or longer periods of time, none of which they could foreknow. Whether occurring when younger or older and whether unsettling or soothing, all partners' experiences with others led them to reconsider what was of value in their life and the kind of person they thought they were becoming. This appraisal of happenings as they occurred and afterwards - a dialectic of perceived negatives and positives - was an uneven process and idiosyncratic, taking place in response to what was on offer locally at the time, the events of subsequent years and the circumstances of the research interviews. Such dynamic to-ing and fro-ing between what was familiar and what might be possible exemplifies the ways in which mindfulness was storied and intensified through relationships with other people, nature and nonhuman objects. Frances included Catholic nuns, Arabella a chemistry teacher and a Mother Superior, Ann her retreat guide, Elise a Buddhist monk in Chiang Mai, Jeff his *Ajahn*, and John his beloved guitar. Wangji and Dendup mentioned their respective retreatants, Pema and Tashi their association with other students at Naropa University and Yeshey her office colleagues. Whether abrupt and vivid or slow and steady, partners continuously spoke as selves-with-others adopting linguistic and somatic markers to situate events within relational spaces, inviting all of us who were witnessing to authenticate their accounts of mindfulness. As such, their storied pathways were indeterminate, not appearing effortlessly in the spaces between incidents, the retelling of them, the witnessing of these accounts, and their re-retelling by the primary speaker.

The similarities and variabilities in the partners' narratives were also highly influenced by value-laden wider social conditions. Government initiatives concerning the growth of counselling services in Bhutan, the subsequent directives to send Wangji, Pema, and Tashi to Naropa and the ongoing association with that institution, have had major consequences for their understandings of mindfulness. Selected under these circumstances, where the initiative mostly resided with senior officials, means there was limited personal choice whether to go or not go. To decline to participate would be to refuse the honour of being favoured and to forgo considerable financial remuneration. Dendup personally applied for training in Thailand with the full support of his government office, his Director being an ardent meditation practitioner. These institutional commands promoted secular discourses of mindfulness in Bhutan and permitted government educational institutions, such as Yeshey's, to take up its study with the aim of contributing to the wellbeing of the recently declared democratic nation. Yet it was not surprising that Buddhist religious discourses on mind training were also prominent. The predicaments the partners all spoke to, here and elsewhere in this thesis, concerned how to navigate the loosening of sacred traditions alongside the growing influence of secularity.

Long-established Western democracies such as Australia experienced potent social movements during the 1960s and 1970s including the growth and distribution of material prosperity, more permissive notions about personal freedom, the acquisition of private books to spread knowledge and the changing family life cycles. There was an assertive expansion of life possibilities that would have been inconceivable or unattainable for the majority of the earlier generations. In certain ways these words could describe contemporary Bhutan. But the Australian situation supported a fervent individualist perspective that applauded liberality and legitimised potent quests to achieve personal autonomy and fulfilment. Prescribed annual holidays and other forms of employment entitlements meant extended time away from paid work was feasible, with Western passports and affluence frequently opening doors and offering security in foreign lands. Travel, as an inventive stretching into unknown zones, veered towards an enigmatic Asia for the adventurous or rash. Under these conditions, the Australian partners' plotting of mindfulness was legitimised via their own authority and was relieved of any nation-state obligations. This is not to suggest the Australian partners believed in the promises of individualism or were constraint-

free, only that they were able to configure a sharper sense of themselves as active agents in their lives due to their new social arrangements.

There is no account of mindfulness possible without particular cultural and historical contexts producing the conditions for certain kinds of relationships and the ordering of events into meaningfulness. The history of mindfulness is the history of cultural inclinations. Partners' sense of themselves, their relationships with others and their place in the wider world are highly shaped by these relational and contextual understandings of mindfulness, suggesting these dimensions are significant when making sense of its benefit or otherwise in counselling and psychotherapy.

7

Legitimacy and Authenticity: Seeking Teachers

*Smells smell, sounds sound while
incense and wood-smoked winds blow by.
Chattering drums, chiming bells and soft footfalls charm the mind.
The cleansing crispness of an autumn morning spikes the senses,
padding its way to dreamy twilights*

Throughout this project, in staying close to the reflexive narrative metaphor, I was guided by the research partners' emphasis on key episodes and relationships they associated with mindfulness. In the preceding chapter, my aim was to focus broadly on standout events whereas here I pursue the ways in which partners related their encounters with noteworthy people who have contributed to their knowledges and abilities. Conversational entry points turned up in different ways. Some partners took the lead, introducing their gurus, *lamas*, *Rinpoches* and secular teachers before I had asked about them while others named them following my enquiries. When they appeared, I signalled my interest in collecting vignettes to clarify how these relationships were arranged, noting the partners' chronology of events and the implications of these associations for their expressions of mindfulness in personal and professional life. We treated the topic like all others, going where the unfolding exchange seemed to take us and not calculating precisely how much time to allocate.

Partners retrieved resonant events from social spaces and imbued them with a range of meanings including friendship, intimacy, ambiguity, practicality and reverence. Nominating a starting place back in time and plotting an advancing sequence of happenings, they showed how the personal past can be selectively recalled and relocated into other contexts with different purposes and given newly crafted social meaningfulness. This recalling became not only a present storyline about past allegiances but a potential future memory that can be retrieved in other settings. In

doing so, all partners created for me, and each other, a momentum and endurance with regard to their hopes for these sorts of associations, contributing to an overall sense of authenticity, a construct I will elaborate on shortly.

Picking up from the last chapter, I open this section with Jeff's response to my questions about the ways he made sense of his relationship to his Buddhist *Ajahn*.

Jeff [Name of teacher] is very important...
 Although it's funny,
 I mean I was reading...
 I mean he's just someone who is sort of saying
 this is what it's like for him.
 But he's so inspiring.
 He's lovely.
 Even his voice, with the sound of his voice,
 I get an immediate condition ahhhh [exhaling with a calming sound].
 You can hear it.
 You can hear the freedom in his voice.
 The joy in his voice,
 the letting go in his voice
 and then he has just some really great ways,
 metaphors, ways of thinking
 that allow you to free your mind.
 To go "ah, I'll let that go".
 So he's a very inspiring teacher.
 I don't, it's not a personal relationship.
 I mean I think I've only gone on one of his retreats.
 But I've listened to a lot of his talks, watched his videos.
 And I find them very inspiring.
 I can listen to them
 and just my mind becomes very still
 and very happy
 and I learn a lot from that.
 So it's very important

because he's just a great teacher for that path.
That really suits me right now.
I mean, maybe in the future a different way.
I'm not sure.
I am continuing to have just have lots of fun on this path,
learn a lot.
So it's working for me.
So I'll just keep going.

Jeff's initial statement that this person was "very important" gained credibility and drive through a series of tributes such as "you can hear the freedom...joy...letting go in his voice" with the word "inspiring" ascribed to both his teacher and the methods of his teaching. In between this constancy, Jeff threaded another view and, though not contradictory, it reduced certainty about the form this may take in the future. Commencing with a truncated "Although it's funny", Jeff spent a moment trying on various words before deciding the *Ajahn* was "just someone" reporting his private experiences - "what it's like for him" - before adding their relationship was not "personal" and that "I've only gone on one of his retreats". In case I read these words as questioning his teacher's proficiency and the implied distance between them as somehow diminishing, Jeff quickly returned to the enthusiasm of listening to him and being in his company. This he said "suits me right now" before again casting some doubts on their future with his cautious "I'm not sure", a trailing off I took as a closure. This was premature as straightaway, and matching the oscillations so far, Jeff reasserted that the "path" is "working for me", his criteria being it's "lots of fun" and he can "learn a lot". He decided to "just keep going".

Throughout this passage Jeff wove two co-occurring plotlines, admiration and tentativeness, in a crisscross fashion, each seeming to require the other for its telling. I read the plotline of tentativeness not as doubt or bewilderment but rather a refusal to declare a final position. He seemed to occupy a reassuring willingness to alter this relationship in response to futures that none of us could foresee. I believe this extract highlights the ways in which tellers might, second by second, narrate key relationships from various perspectives, rearranging allegiances and positioning themselves and others within a relational fluidity as opposed to a settled certainty.

Such identities-in-motion were also depicted by Elise when she spoke of not being “very interested in [her teacher] Osho at first” until “about six weeks later I just felt I really had to take *sanyas*”, a Sanskrit word meaning renunciation from conventional life. This dramatic shift led to her staying in Pune for the next two and a half years. In this setting, she said, the student is not “devotional”. The guru is a transmissive “vehicle”, their experiences offered “in a way that allows you to experience it yourself”. And while she stated she is “extremely grateful to Osho” and others, she didn’t “latch onto any one of them”, breaking away if she was restricted. “Every time I have felt confined I’ve got out”, a remark that may be designed to counter any misunderstanding concerning over-identification with and submissiveness to any guru.

Ann, in contrast with Jeff and Elise, offered an enduring settled tale. After I asked her about the history of her practices she paused, and then posed a rhetorical question “Well, it’s a long story isn’t it?” I too would have likely given this answer/question knowing the impossibility of decoding many years into the comparative meagreness of the time we had together. Taking a breath to arrange her thoughts, Ann then spoke candidly of a “constant relationship with one [Tibetan] teacher for a very long time”. She described her beginning with him as “quite powerful, in a sense emotional”. It was a time when “you’re all so ‘oh, yeah, yeah the guru!’ ”, signifying in that one phrase her loyalty and keenness. Yet her meanings seemed mixed, her tone perhaps also conveying the naive romanticism of some Westerners towards enigmatic Eastern spiritual and religious figures, not an uncommon occurrence. This does not imply she devalued those former years but she did realise that “it is a relationship”, meaning that closeness will bring the “positives and negatives” depending on the “different attachment...sort of inclinations”. I heard this remark as coming from Buddhist views on the mental conditions of grasping and aversion, the human mind’s fundamental afflictions. Warming to the topic, Ann noted how her earlier years of excitement had given way to a “very respectful connected realistic relationship”.

Ian Realistic, meaning you...what does that mean?

Ann Yeah, what does that mean?

Whereas I have highly devoted friends,
that is not my particular path.
I have very devoted friends
who put me terribly to shame.
But that's the way they are.
And my particular path is more one,
and he has verbalised it, as a spiritual friend.
He and I have talked about this many times.
So he's a guide, a friend.

Ian Which is different from?

Ann The guru...
my relationship with him,
not within the practices.
In the practices there's something different.
But in my relationship with him as a person.

Ian As a person, yeah, right.
So like a spiritual guide would be a way of describing it?

Ann Yeah, yeah.

Ian Okay. So if I'm getting this right,
partly when you say about maturing,
part of it is like revising the relationship
as you've gone through the years.
Somehow there's been some shifts in that?

Ann Yes

Ian And...

Ann But always connected

Ian Always connected and yet different?

Ann Yes, there's been change and growth.

I think otherwise I could have just split off
in a million points you know.

This excerpt commences with my decision to ask about the adjective “realistic”, an expression I invariably want to problematise as it may suggest a triumph of clarity and good sense with the reasoning for such claims remaining elusive. In restating pensively “Yeah, what does that mean?” Ann re-presented the question to herself, indicating she had no rehearsed answer and was willing to think about one. This led to a comparison between her “highly devoted friends” and “my particular path”, telling us she was “put...terribly to shame” by their adoration. A typical reading of her appraisal could imply a personal inadequacy but in her tone and language Ann gave a benign characterological explanation, “that’s the way they are”. By implication she was, and is, not that way. Putting words to explain her “particular path”, she decided her teacher was a “spiritual friend” or “guide”. Seeking precision, I asked her to clarify by way of a “different from” question. To Ann, he continues to hold dual roles: he is the Buddhist *lama* and she has a friendship “with him as a person”. The construction of friendship and guru, a doubleness of identity positions, has been navigated over many years, the latter highlighting the affective dimensions of devotion or *bhakti*, to use a Sanskrit word. Such ardent faith is required in many derivatives of Indian spiritual traditions and seemed more available to her companions. Through these descriptions, Ann shaded her relationship with her teacher, the person who she considered him to be, and who she considered he was not, altering over time.

When I validated these relational “shifts” for her, I was acknowledging they have been hard-won and part of the maturity she named. Ann agreed, adding that throughout the “change and growth” she had still been “connected”. She gave weight to their intimacy by comparing it to the effects of its potential opposite: “I think otherwise I could have just split off in a million points you know”. This captivating remark encouraged me to seek a fuller picture of the man who has been central to her life. I was also inquisitive because it reverberated with my life. I too have sought out

gurus, *Rinpoches*, *lamas* and other spiritual figures and know how they can influence their adherents, positively or otherwise.

Ann described her Tibetan instructor as “extremely kind and generous” and “very, very funny”, before surprising me by saying “sporty”, an attribute connecting him to Australian culture she said. Continuing with “respectful, harmless and energetically, quite a strong energy”, she conveyed the image of a commanding and stirring figure, someone whose “great kindness” became a gift to her: “that’s what he’s given me”. Recognising and embracing this kindness made it possible for Ann to return to her “better person” in his physical presence and know she has “the capacity to be in that space at all times”. A short time later she concluded her succession of reflective tributes by noting “his capacity to be really present and giving and do the best thing at every moment and opportunity is something that I’ve learned from him”.

While Ann dwelt exclusively on one Tibetan teacher, Frances initially spoke about two Hakomi instructors, Greg Johansson and a “marvellous trainer” Julie, a woman from Colorado who was “steeped in *Zen* Buddhism”. She also talked about a Hindu meditation guru. This led her to make a distinction between mindfulness as a “more psychological level of awareness” or a “more spiritual” path. To attain this “deep spiritual connection of the divine”, Frances emphasised the necessity of an association with a person “who radiates that presence”.

Frances ...[then] it’s very easy to go into a whole sense of being connected
to the flow of life,
the core,
the divine,
whatever you want to call that...
But if you stay with watching your own psychology...
watching the breath...
And only that,
you might miss whole other realms that can happen.
And that’s welcomed by spiritual groups.
When I’m using it [mindfulness] in psychotherapy
I’m not going there.

Speaking about her Hindu guru, Frances elaborated on the difference between the spiritual domain and psychological mindfulness. Both involve a focus on immediate experiences, the critical factor being intention. In the spiritual master's company it can be "very easy" she said to be "connected to the flow of life" which she also named as "the core" or "the divine". Breath watching and only attending to a person's psychological life on the other hand can "miss whole other [spiritual] realms", a baffling remark for me as Frances had described "mindfulness as connected to a spiritual journey". Much later, during another partner's interview, Frances clarified that for her mindfulness is "right between the psychological and spiritual", thus elevating its standing by placing it at the nexus of key ways she makes sense of her life.

Unlike all the other partners, Frances then leapt from "many different Eastern practices, all of which I've loved" to vivid pictures of her parents, placing them amongst her spiritual and professional teachers. She described her father as "an atheist, declared, and he was a philosopher really, a self-philosopher". As she grew older Frances had limited opportunities to "talk and question with him", this only happening "when you were walking with him". Otherwise "he would keep silent". The admiration for her father was palpable through a series of warm tributes, far outweighing the brevity of her words. Having a curious mind he "loved learning" she said, purchasing "encyclopaedias when no one in the street would bother with books" and supporting girls' education "which no one in my neighbourhood did". His socially progressive attitudes encouraged engagement with other knowledges while her mother, on the other hand, was portrayed as "a very blind Catholic". Their irreconcilable worldviews left Frances in a "sort of ferment", the result being a "challenge really for me" across the years, her poignant tone lingering quietly with the group. In the *Biographic Impression* I said I was "left puzzling" as to how these early life conditions tilted Frances towards her later spiritual inclinations. Listening to her account, I heard her parents accessing and conforming to the prevailing and fundamental bifurcation of modernist discourse, the supposed incompatibility of science and religion. Through frequent encounters they gave what might be considered localised social performances of these views, crafting divergent identities with their beliefs and values. This was told by Frances in contrasting terms such as atheist/devout Catholic, had his own views/she did what you were told,

curious/obedient and science/very dependent. To address the “challenge” they inadvertently set, Frances embarked on a sacred journey embracing, refusing and integrating what she was offered, and reconciling, more or less, these different dimensions.

In contrast to other partners, John spent less time talking about this topic, his opening line - “I have to have a teacher to do it, I suppose” - suggesting it may not be necessary. Soon though he moved on to a time “about 15 years ago” when he was “doing the normal thing, burning out, falling apart”, his dry humour giving a clue as to the seriousness of the situation. On the suggestion of a colleague, he decided to visit a male psychotherapist who after “four sessions...brought me straight back to earth”. Seeing this person regularly for the past 10 years in “a mixture of therapy, mentor, and sometimes professional supervision”, has led John to positively judge him as “quite influential, influential”.

I now turn from these variously parsed encounters by the Australian partners to Tashi in Bhutan who referred to “very important teachers in Bhutan such as Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche”. This highly revered person, mentioned many times by the Bhutanese partners, was born in their country, travels extensively and has centres in the West dedicated to social service and Buddhist training. He is also a noted filmmaker and writer. Tashi said such people “always talk good things” and speak to the aspirations of “Buddhist people”.

Tashi Now in Bhutan
 when we are talking about practices,
 most people feel that there has to be an authentic master
 and one has to have his teachings or her teachings
 and blessings,
 and empowerment.
 But in the West I have come across people
 who don't necessarily believe that.
 That there has to be authentic master.
 Anybody can,
 anybody with some experience can

conduct some kind of mind training workshops
or whatever.
Run the program.
So that is one of the differences in the West.
I think more and more people feel it secular
and they want secular things to be very secular [in the West].

In this segment Tashi situated his account within the familiarity of traditional mores declaring “most [Bhutanese] people” would only receive teachings from “an authentic master” who can legitimately give “blessings” and “empowerment” (Tibetan: *wang*), the latter being *Vajrayana tantric* deity rituals given from authorised *lamas* and designed to awaken a listener’s ultimate Buddha-nature. Tashi reemphasised “definitely from a Buddhist perspective it’s important to look at the lineage”, adding the caveat that the *Rinpoche* must be practicing, not just having an “intellectual understanding”. Elaborating further at another time, Tashi supported the common triad of “authentic lineage, authentic teacher and authentic student” as prerequisites for the attainment of a Buddhist enlightenment. Contrastingly, he referred to his personal travels in the West where he met people who didn’t think an “authentic master” was necessary but rather “anybody with some experience” could teach. He saw this as a “secular” approach, repeating the word and adding the intensifier “very” to accentuate his view. Following reflections from Yeshey and Dendup on this theme, Tashi continued to elaborate, beginning with a perplexing comment: “You may also come across some masters who may be arrogant” and “not so loving and kind”. I pick up the transcript after I requested him to “make sense” of what he said.

Tashi The thing is to determine whether they come from authentic lineage
or not.
I’m purely talking from a Buddhist perspective.
Authentic lineage.
And then if you feel that this master is authentic,
from a particular lineage,
even though they may act crazy,
but still one has to think beyond their craziness

and see what sort of intentions these people have.

Ian So part of this is the intentions behind the actions as well?

Tashi Yes...

there is a very popular term in the West called crazy wisdom
which was attributed to Trungpa Rinpoche.

Crazy Wisdom.

And Trungpa Rinpoche said [if] you have wisdom first and craziness
later, good.

But crazy first, wisdom later, [then] no.

That sort of thing.

And then it's going to be very difficult to find out whether,
what sort of intentions a particular master would have.

In his reply to me, Tashi addressed the seeming contradiction of a conceited and unkind teacher of Buddhism, a religion associated with compassion and modesty. He said, if trust in an authentic lineage and master has been established then whatever happens, though it may have the appearance of “craziness”, is actually an expression of “crazy wisdom” a term spread by Trungpa Rinpoche. Tashi asserted that observers of this “crazy” version of wisdom needed to look to the teacher’s intentions though he admitted this is “very difficult” to figure out. If I hold to the relational and narrative understandings of human identity I have adopted, Tashi’s views pose a problem. His account seemed to place “crazy wisdom” beyond evaluative ethical dimensions. I return to this subject in Chapter 9 where I speculate on the differences between a person’s declaration of wisdom, their intentional actions and the actual effects on other people irrespective of whether they think of themselves as secular or Buddhist.

For now, I turn my gaze to certain features of Yeshey’s transcript. Thich Nhat Hanh, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche were people she mentioned as they have challenged the rigid separation between ordained people and laypeople when accessing Buddhist teachings including mindfulness. In the past,

predominately monks and nuns would be given meditation teachings in Tibetan *Choeyki* which lay people could not understand.

Yeshey We grew up in a tradition...
 rituals where it's called Buddhist practices...
 We grew up in a country like this.
 And we have a very strong tradition of practice,
 traditional practice,
 which is mixed with myths and superstitions and rituals...
 [Now] this new thinking to come in.
 This is also Buddhist
 You can do it in your everyday life.
 Now someone is not talking, [nor] chanting in *Choeyki*.
 But someone is now coming down to a language that is practical
 that we can really understand
 and believe in.
 And actually taking us closer to the teachings...
 So that is coming in.
 Which is new actually, that trend has started new.
 So that voice has to be very strong
 against the traditional ways of how things were done,
 needs to be somebody who is recognised.
 ...I don't think I would have read
 if Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
 was not Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche,
 and what he said about old cup and new cup
 and the way things are done.
 I look at it, read it because I look up to him.
 And I know he is born to this.
 And I believe it, his teachings, because of that.
 And I can believe because he is somebody who is much respectable.
 [So there is] that way.
 And I can look at the other way, the traditional way,
 and say I really don't have to go by something I don't believe in now

...but if [the new] was not really powerful
then I think the traditional power would still remain strong for me
and other people.

In this lengthy excerpt Yeshey went to the cultural landscape she and her co-partners “grew up in”, a country where Buddhism lives in the realms of “myths and superstitions and rituals”. Despite these deep-rooted beliefs, there are recent changes, one of the most conspicuous being the replacement of *Choeyki* with “language that is practical”, a reference to a directive by the Je Khenpo, the Head Abbot of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan, to offer teachings to laypeople in *Dzongkha*. The consequences for her and other Bhutanese was dramatic. Now they “can really understand and believe in” teachings that were only available before to monastics in temples and monasteries, or through participating in annual house pujas, ceremonies designed to remove malevolent spirits and ensure family success in future endeavours. Yeshey believed this “new...trend” is “actually taking us closer to the teachings”.

As my Bhutanese colleagues spoke, colourful images flashed by. I have attended a number of *Tsechus*, annual Drukpa festivals held throughout the country to honour Guru *Padmasambhava Rinpoche* who is credited with spreading Buddhism throughout Bhutan. They are an assertion of collectively held worldviews, performances that define and strengthen people’s experience of cultural authenticity. Apart from their great religious significance, the gatherings are vibrant social occasions as people from the local area are on holidays during these celebrations which can last for up to five days. They are especially sustaining for those living in isolated valleys who meet to relax and enjoy each other’s company. Watching a mesmerisingly intricate masked dance about nine years ago, I asked a trained tourist guide, who would have seen this performance numerous times throughout his life, to explain its meaning. He said that only the monks could tell me. Perplexed in that moment, his remark now settles.

But for this “new thinking” to take root Yeshey said it requires not only a “strong” voice but advocates who have “certain status...certain power, certain respect”. In Bhutan there have to be “people leading who are recognised”, returning our talk to

lineage and to Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, a man “born to this”. The authorised figures who usher in these transformations must be “really powerful” or “traditional power” will “still remain strong” she said. Yeshey’s words convey discursive processes where certain established authorities contest their own customs and create cultural forms that may subsequently become future traditions or perhaps optional religious or spiritual movements, as has already happened elsewhere in Buddhism’s long history. Using a shared language to distribute Buddhist doctrine throughout the nation gives fresh explanatory power to its values and beliefs, changes people’s personal understandings and convictions, and the ways they live the teachings of the Buddha. Traditional and contemporary discourses are in dialogue: words and worlds are co-formed.

Between the taken-for-granted stability of the old and the uncertainty of the new, partners spoke of the necessity for teachers to be practicing what they are speaking about. Yeshey said firmly, they must be “practicing and living it, living that presence”, offering a vignette of the opposite.

Yeshey I’ll tell you the image that I got,
 is one of the very senior monks.
 I don’t know what you call it.
 They wear yellow inside [their robe] when they become the leader...
 So it was before Losar [Bhutanese New Year].
 We went to this meat shop.
 I didn’t want to go
 My Auntie wanted to buy some fish.
 Oh my God!
 This *lama*, his hands were all folded up,
 and he was, he was fighting for meat,
 and he was getting into fights with people around.
 He was pushing people away.
 Oh my God!

Up till then, the stories partners had been telling gave a mostly benevolent image of teachers but Yeshey went to an incident I alluded to in her *Biographic Impression*.

She reluctantly accompanied her Aunty to buy fish and saw a disturbing scene. A “very senior” teacher was being aggressive, using his fists - “his hands...folded up” - and “pushing” other customers. His behaviour offended her. Recounting this, Yeshey moved the focus of our discussion from approved lineages to the everyday actions of certain *lamas*. “Are they [people] living and bringing it into their presence?” she asked, accentuating her question by repeating it as a statement, “bringing it into their presence every day”.

Yeshey I’ve known people who do meditation.
 And then suddenly they come up,
 jamming up things and wiring up.
 And from morning they talk about mindfulness
 as if it is their heart and soul and bread-and-butter.
 But suddenly they are the ones who are most angry,
 most hateful towards other people.
 Ooh, it contradicts!

Unlike the Australians, the Bhutanese partners are surrounded by large numbers of Buddhist monks daily, some of whom are teachers of varying status. Within this context, Yeshey recalled an incident that countered the pervasive images of peaceful, kind and patient monastics. Some people may meditate, she said, and even encourage mindfulness “as if it is their heart and soul”, but they can be “most angry, most hateful”, her final exclamatory statement a powerful disapproving conclusion. Without dismissing the cultivation of benevolent qualities as possible, it seemed to me she was stating clearly that they may not necessarily be found within a lineage or embodied in a *lama*. Her words constrain automatically interpreting the actions of Buddhist teachers and mindfulness practitioners as innocent or benign and invite an ethicised conversation. In the professional literature there is a view that mindfulness will inevitably lead to principled social activities, a spontaneous outcome of keen practice. If this automaticity is a taken-for-granted truth, it follows that texts on ethics and therapeutic mindfulness will be slight or even redundant. In contrast, scanning Buddhist literature, listening to the interviews with senior *sangha* members, and hearing Yeshey’s vignette, mindfulness is clearly linked to ethics though not in a simplistic way, a difference I explore before long.

For his part, Dendup said he has a “strong belief” and a “strong feeling” that teachings must come from a person who “is not only a practitioner” but someone “coming from an authentic lineage”, his approach to mindfulness showing a spiritual intent. This led him to the conclusion that he “would not go to the secular but only to someone from an authentic lineage”. Coming at this from another angle, Dendup thought mindfulness in the West was only a technique for “well-being and health”, such “outer knowledge” paling in comparison to detailed sacred teachings that “go beyond...this worldly life”. When he was the primary conversational partner, he went further.

Dendup I think that I wouldn't have mind,
 before I got introduced into this mindfulness aspect in-depth.
 I wouldn't have mind attending a session
 with any person teaching me...
 But now,
 after I read more and more about this Buddhism,
 then I have started feeling
 that I should get these teachings from an authentic master
 with an authentic lineage.
 It has made my feeling stronger for that need.
 Because I thought that others
 would have superficial knowledge on mindfulness,
 being either practice or theoretical knowledge.
 But whereas the authentic teachers
 who have been authorised to teach,
 I guess they have that required practice
 and required theoretical knowledge behind it...
 This is the reason why it should be from an authentic master.

Dendup's response clarified why he had decided to only attend mind trainings by “authorised” instructors. Their endorsed legitimacy guaranteed they had completed compulsory courses and had the requisite theoretical grasp of intricate Buddhist doctrines and cosmologies. He justified his stance, the “feeling stronger for that need”, as the outcome of studying the Buddha *Dharma* and mindfulness “in-depth”.

He then listed his admired teachers from *Theravada* (*Ajahn Chah*, *Ajahn Buddhadasa* and *Ajahn Brahm*), *Zen* (Suzuki Roshi, Thich Nhat Hanh) and *Vajrayana* traditions (Lama Shenphen, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Rangshikhar Rinpoche), emphasising once again their official validity. Further, he aligned with the contemporary nonpartisan *Rimé* movement which acknowledges how the *Kagyü*, *Nyingma* and *Sakya* schools of Tibetan Buddhism can be followed depending on the inclinations of the practitioner. Pressing on, he named an attractive directness in Rangshikhar Rinpoche and Lama Shenphen's approaches deciding this is possible as they "have understood the value of impermanence". Like professional literatures that argue for a return to early Buddhist texts to discover the genuine meanings of mindfulness, Dendup asserted his revered guides embody authority as contemporary carriers of sacred traditions.

On this same topic, Pema told me he had not received any "formal teachings", so was not "ordained as a practitioner". If he was to "begin with the [customary] four preliminary practices" (Tibetan: *ngondro*) of Buddhism, then he must "receive from some of the great teachers, Tibetan teachers". Then he added, "I would like to actually", a future promise. I enquired as to particular people and he mentioned, as did other Bhutanese partners, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche.

Pema ...and the other one is Mingyur Rinpoche
 who does it very humorously.
 And even the Dalai Lama, his Holiness the Dalai Lama.
 I have actually a collection of all those teachings in my computer.
 So whenever I find time I just play one of them
 and then listen to it.
 And that's I think how it really blended the practice.
 What I was doing at Naropa University,
 complemented by all this teaching and also readings.

Though he had not received official initiations, Pema was active in compiling and listening to respected practitioners, experiencing how their words "really blended" with his studies at Naropa University. This amalgam appealed to him though he reminded me that his mindfulness skills at this time have "no connection to any kind

of religion”, that they are “non-sectarian” and anyone “can practice it on your own”. Nonetheless, he tagged these remarks with “Of course the idea came from, it is strongly connected to Buddhist principles and ideas”. Similarly, Wangji stated “I believe in Goenka”, claiming the *vipassana* training in Kolkata was the same as taught by the Buddha *Shakyamuni*. Reading the transcript, I could take Pema’s non-sectarian stance to mean he was appreciating the differences and parallel attributes of various schools of Buddhism. But then again, if I take non-sectarian to be the equivalent of secular, a not unreasonable view given his other remarks, then both Pema and Wangji seemed to dispense with the duality of mindfulness either as Buddhist or secular. Varied mindfulness methods may then be related to context and purpose.

In the Second Tier of interviews, Perth partners focused on the Bhutanese assertions concerning the importance of authentic teachings and teachers. Jeff noted “it hasn’t really been something that we’ve [Australians] highlighted” and when there has been discussion “it’s just sort of passed a little bit unnoticed”. This contrast provoked the group to wonder about the Bhutanese colleagues’ priorities, Jeff suggesting there was “the desire to preserve the value of what is being taught” and know the “teachings come out of that exchange and presence in relationship”. And though he appreciated this outlook, for him it was about “what I’m finding of value in the practices and in the teachings” and this may “not necessarily [happen] through a relationship with a teacher”. If the tradition allowed for a “fuller expression of experience”, an “alive connectedness in the moment”, then it was authentic, not just when “authenticity has the rubberstamp” of lineage he said. Similarly, John was also “sympathetic” to the Bhutanese “cultural tradition” but he queried whether that kind of relationship was “central in the West”. He put the view that an “authenticated monk with 2000 years behind him” or “someone [unordained] who perhaps has advanced” could equally be valid instructors, although we didn’t explore what signified “advanced”. What is important, he said, is the “physical presence”, not just reading texts because then “you’re still in your own mind”.

The importance of her *Ajahn*’s physical presence was echoed by Arabella who said, “if I’m just left to my own devices it would be hopeless”. Speaking on this topic later she revealed a curious predicament.

Arabella And I think,
 and this may be my narrow projection onto the material.
 And again it's, they're talking about...a teacher.
 And I don't even think I've got a teacher.
 But I have.
 But then I don't think I have, like I think...
 Partly because of the tradition.
 The Buddhist tradition is a bit different in the *Theravada*,
 where you don't get,
 I don't think they do it in quite the same way as,
 the little I understand of the Tibetan tradition. But...

Ian You have a teacher?

Arabella Yeah,
 but I don't think of it as my teacher
 or in that relational role.
 Which I think is bizarre on my part.

Ian Because?

Arabella Because he clearly is.
 And when my attention is drawn to it I recognise it.
 But it's sort of like I don't otherwise.
 I don't know. It seems a bit weird.

Arabella referred, in passing, to the differences between *Theravada* and Tibetan *Mahayana* traditions, a comment we didn't pursue then as she indicated her lack of familiarity with the latter. What came over strongly was Arabella thinking it "bizarre" and "a bit weird" that she didn't see her *Ajahn* placed as "my teacher" except when her "attention is drawn to it". For her, he doesn't exist within this designated relational arrangement, but then he does, and then doesn't again. I asked whether this might be "about your own practice" or was it "something to do with a cultural difference".

Arabella I think some of it's cultural.
 ... I think I've got such a conditioned self-reliance
 that I actually think I'm doing something on my own.
 Quite delusional.
 Until I, until something breaks through it.
 Like I realise that interconnectedness...
 I get those sorts of experiences [of self-reliance],
 not knowing that actually I'm entering into that sort of experience.
 And it happens,
 it still happens,
 I've been meditating for 20 years
 and it still happens.
 I think, bloody hell, you're nuts.
 You know just recently when I had something going on personally...
 and I was intensely sort of constricted
 into my protective self-reliance.
 I'm almost like an automaton.
 And going to the temple
 and sitting down
 and sort of feeling like,
 in a sense to some degree going through the motions.
 But somehow,
 because I'm not actually doing it on own my own in a sense,
 I have the experience,
 out of the blue it seems,
 like driving home: "oh, I can actually see".
 And it felt like I'd been brushed clean, washed.
 And there was a word that was coming up before
 about being authentic
 or that feeling of how you might know.
 To me it was like being enlivened...
 enlivened and that sort of awake,
 that's sort of what it feels like to me...

Arabella acknowledged that a “cultural” reading of the Bhutanese partners’ connections with their *lamas* was possible but in the interview she left that topic and the differences between Buddhist schools, deciding instead to speak about her personal “conditioned self-reliance”, an interior psychological state she described as “delusional” and “nuts”. She was disappointed that after “meditating for 20 years” she remained unaware of “entering into that sort of experience”, a time when she becomes “like an automaton”. Yet, it was the momentum from long years of practice that took her to the succour of her Buddhist temple. Even if she was just “going through the motions” in “sitting down”, eventually she was freed from a “constricted” feeling through realising “interconnectedness”. Genuineness for her was to experience this “enlivening” shift, the “what it feels like” to regain a larger perspective on her life. Pressed by me, Arabella thought the relative invisibility of her *Ajahn* was a mix of “cultural stuff” and “personal and family conditioning”, admitting “it feels even funny to say my teacher” even though she has been taking guidance from him for decades and “his presence is intimately connected to [me] actually feeling the authenticity a bit”.

Caught in the split between declaring an obvious teacher and noting his absence perplexed Arabella. Perhaps she was implicitly comparing a relational and interconnected conception of self with a more individualistic notion of an inherent separate self. This was confirmed for me when, comparing her words to the Bhutanese partners, she noted they had a “different starting place or something”, a place she wouldn’t consider “in a million years” because in speaking about her mindfulness “there was a whole lot of very distinct ‘me’”, a word I took to mean a reified and bounded modern person. Reading the *Bhutanese Impressions* led her to see their relationships to their teachers as “quite different”, as if “they appear to be talking about themselves [but] they’re sort of not, not in the same way”. Ann, who has practiced Tibetan Buddhism long-term, also supported this view. While she appreciated that an event can be “authentic for you” as an individual, she queried whether a person who might be “clouded and ignorant”, from a Buddhist perspective, can know “how deeply you’ve touched the well”. Hence, she said, the necessity of “someone who’s gone before you”. During the Second Tier of interviews in Bhutan, Dendup agreed with this perspective wondering rhetorically “why do people [in Australia] want to experiment on their own?” when a legitimate

path with its authorised teachers was already laid out. In a similar vein, Tashi spoke about the idea of “freedom in choosing [teachers] in the West”. Though we didn’t unpack his words much, their location in the interview and his tone certainly queried the benefits of broader choices and the notion of autonomy.

The affiliations each partner spoke to were distinct intimacies and unique storied linkages emerging from their personal lives, local social arrangements and the unusual interview set-up. They acted as observers to themselves and each other, so making a range of interpretations available for review, a process that highlighted the ways in which relational truth-making takes root as all parties co-generate knowledges to further the aims of a conversation. In this project, the physical presences of the group mingled with the imagined presences of Buddhist *lamas* and *Rinpoches*, Frances’s Hindu guru and her parents, and secular instructors of mindfulness. The direction and content of conversations was organised in part around an ongoing linguistic characterisation or voicing of these internalised others in terms of familiarity, distance, intimacy, hierarchy and power. Partners were not only sharing their experiences but coming to know what they knew as they spoke it, a generative circular process that exposed nuances and dappled complexities, giving each colleague an opportunity to rethink the vitalising qualities of teacher and student relationships. There was a yearning to speak and restate what is precious and to ensure they had conveyed due admiration and gratitude, perhaps even reverence or intense devotion. Sometimes partners storied their influence via contrast such as when Yeshey recalled her negative encounter with a *lama*, Frances revealed her parents’ different outlooks, Arabella was bemused at her *Ajahn*’s coexisting presence and absence, Ann compared her lack of devotion with her friends’ faith and Jeff swiftly zigzagged his commitments. Discerning and arranging such contradictions and comparisons, partners named and approached the kind of person they aspired to become and in doing so were inescapably impelled to align themselves with certain ethics, even if these were not openly professed at the time.

Authenticities

As would be evident in the transcript extracts, partners were not merely repeating a chronicle of things that happened but were responsive to their purposes in the telling. Considerable time was given to the notion of authenticity (Tibetan: *yang dag pa*) by the Bhutanese, a word that seems to speak what it says. But, as occurs frequently in narrating life accounts, assumptions regarding the meanings of fairly common words and the ways they are deployed can be highly problematic and may lead to unproductive confusions. Perhaps the more common the word, the more likelihood the misunderstandings. To lessen this risk, I consulted with the Bhutanese partners who introduced the notion of authenticity, attended to the Second Tier reflections of the Australians, and considered the final remarks of the Bhutanese made during my second visit. In tracking statements and replies in this manner, I was trying to be faithful to the reflexive research method detailed earlier.

Turning to the interviews in Bhutan, an authentic Buddhist lineage presupposes a worldview that encompasses validated teachings and an authorised teacher who plays a crucial role in deciding what is given status when it comes to mindfulness instructions. I was struck by the vividness and intensity of these connections in Bhutan, in due course understanding that to think and speak of mindfulness as part of their personal lives and professional work is to remember and bow before their teachers, to recall and show the esteem that must be given to them. As we spoke, I was reminded of visiting temples in western and central administrative districts or *Dzongkhags*, where I watched, and participated in, an order of prostrations immediately upon entering a temple or shrine room. The first and most essential three-pointed bow is to the raised seat of the resident *lama* or *Rinpoche* as a living manifestation of *Padmasambhava*. Without the corporeal teacher there is no embodiment of transmission and consequently there cannot be a realisation of mindfulness's potential nor other factors required for liberation from the endless rounds of birth and death. Only after this due respect is given will there be bows to the images of Buddha or *Padmasambhava*, and to other figures such as Green or White *Tara* or *Avalokitesvara*. A dedicated Buddhist inhabits these images, symbols and gestures to signify the precious vastness of the bond between the spiritual guide

and student across the millennia. Without devotion to past and present teachers there is no enlightenment. To verify your identity as a Bhutanese Buddhist and to be credible in the eyes of others, there is an obligation to emulate how the ancestors worshipped, to reproduce and sustain revered Buddhist lineages, to become a person who is a carrier of ancient beliefs, ethics and practices that not only enhance the mind's skillfulness to respond to the circumstances of this life and the next, but also to enhance the aspirations of the nation and its religious institutions.

Australians too, usually with extra prompting, identified the genuineness of teachers from professional, Buddhist and other religious or spiritual traditions who had significantly influenced their life choices and pathways though some cast these relationships in ostensibly more detached, ambiguous or practical ways. For instance, Jeff's independence ("I mean he's just someone who is sort of saying this is what it's like for him"; "it's not a personal relationship"), Arabella's dichotomy ("I don't even think I've got a teacher, but I have"), Elise's autonomy ("I don't think I latch onto any one of them") and John's hesitancy ("I have to have a teacher to do it, I suppose") are in contrast to Tashi's reliance on authority ("there has to be an authentic master"), Dendup's certainty ("it should be from an authentic master"), Pema's conclusive (we must "receive from some of the great teachers") and Yeshey's reverence ("I know he is born to this and I believe it, his teachings"). The expressions by the Australians can be read, as in the previous chapter, as acts congruent with a relatively autonomous individual. To be true to oneself is to champion uniqueness or exceptionality, to uncover one's personal innermost real feelings or desires as a guide to social interactions. For the Bhutanese, to be true is to align personal life with a verified lineage and receive authorised teachings. Mindfulness, as one of the indispensable factors of this kind of authentic sanctified life in Bhutan, is central to their creation of personal and relational coherence through the immensities of human life, death and rebirth.

However, my concern is that if I construe either the Bhutanese or the Australians words too much through these lenses I am confronted by the ever-changing social movements mentioned by the research partners. My interpretations may then seem a forced convenience. Influential hierarchical lineages in Buddhist Bhutan are mingling with aspirations for a democratic secular state which classically involves a

greater separation of monarchy, government, and religious institutions, at least in principle. Paradoxically, the initiative to achieve a uniquely Bhutanese democracy based on these ideals came from the powerful King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. One small example of this move towards a so-called separation of powers is the promotion of secular mindfulness in schools alongside Buddhist religious teachings. The responses of the Australians too cannot be tidily encapsulated in descriptions like autonomous which might suggest a self-centredness or an uncaring attitude towards others, and a lack of appreciation of contexts. On the contrary, I understood choosing spiritual guides was, in part, a decline to participate fully in a consumption-driven late capitalist society dedicated to the development of economic and entrepreneurial selves. The Australians, acting from within this social and political location, are markedly different from the Bhutanese who identified with their dominant cultural values and beliefs which are based on Buddhist principles.

Though partners and I hardly dwelt on the subtle and external differences and similarities in teacher and student relationships in the *Theravada*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* schools of Buddhism, I believe these also contributed to their comments. To gloss over what are sophisticated and intricate arrangements, the *Theravada* student places primary authority in the Pali Canon (Pali: *Tipitaka*) not the *Ajahn*, and the solitary enlightened person (Pali: *arahant*) is the ideal practitioner. In the *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*, the student must develop a wholly trusting and intimate connection to the *lama* or *Rinpoche* through devotion and submission, as this is the foundation for the awakening of an enlightened consciousness. The ideal practitioner is the *Bodhisattva* (Sanskrit) who wishes to remain in *samsara* for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Given these varied constructions, authentic relationships were enacted differently. As gleaned from the interviews, teachers and students were required to take coordinated actions, reliant on each other for their ongoing particular kind of authentic moments of mindfulness. This social process can only be known as it emerges in each instant. Leaning into or away from their preferred teaching encounters, an interplay of accord, uncertainty, contradictions, harmony and tensions resulted as all people involved negotiated the expertise of each teacher and each student within a distinctive intimacy. Through this process partners progressively

repositioned themselves and others over time demonstrating that any claims to being authentic are emergent reflexive happenings within diverse sociocultural and historical contexts. The student may acknowledge the teacher's legitimacy as based on many years of meditation practice and performing rituals or being recognised as a reincarnate *lama*. The teacher also has to decide whether to endorse the student as genuine. These reciprocal acts of meaning-making suggest that authenticity is not simply the outcome of an essence located inside either the student or the teacher but is a performance intelligible because of cultural circumstances. To come before a *Rinpoche* and bow and sit quietly with eyes lowered or to sit in a circle and look directly at, and talk openly with, a secular mindfulness instructor are culture-laden hierarchical arrangements of respect and correctness, of silence and speech. Consequently they reinforce different forms of authentic relationships and their symbiotic corollary, the enacting of authority with its inferred or explicit moral positionings. Authenticity and authority are activities accomplished together. If this is the case then an authentic mindfulness cannot be acquired once-and-for-all but must be continuously re-experienced and reinterpreted, leading to multiple accounts of authentic mindfulness across various dimensions of culture. It is worth noting no partner in either country mentioned female teachers as influential which I can only speculate is mostly due to the comparative invisibility of women in traditional Buddhism. Earlier in this thesis I stated I would not focus on gender unless partners identified this as significant, however not raising this issue during the interviews now leaves me uncomfortable with my likely complicity in perpetuating this inequity.

With authenticity as socially performed in situated moments, its expression must be accorded fluidity, be pluralised to authenticities and viewed as emerging from the intertwining of individual experiences and cultural beliefs. Given there are innumerable cultural arrangements, there can be coexisting multiple pathways to enact authenticities through a relational process that is embodied, time-bounded and in motion. There is no solid edge between authenticities and inauthenticities. The experience of authenticities surfaces through the ongoing negotiation of worldviews, and associated values and ethics. Authenticities cannot be split from these politics of production, the relations of power in which mindfulness, however it is conceived, is immersed. In my view, we reflexively performed and re-performed these kinds of

negotiations in front of each other as part of our research community, each group constituting its own authenticating audience to these performances, physically and dialogically. The kinds of storied selves partners regarded as conceivable in the interviews were also influenced by the parameters of the research project and my authority as researcher. In specifying these contextual arrangements, the linguistic utility of descriptors such as genuine or authentic mindfulness become problematised as situated discourse markers that reside in worldviews rather than transparent global meanings.

8

Depictions of Personal and Professional Practices

*Composed worlds appear
and melt
and reappear,
swifter than an eyelid flicker.*

The critical narrative approach at the centre of this project exemplifies the co-constructed production of conversations between the partners and myself through a close and comparative reading of the transcripts of interviews. In the past two chapters, designated key events and associations with influential teachers and instructors have revealed the relational and dialogical features of mindfulness as embedded in the historical and cultural contexts of Australia and Bhutan. Degrees of similarities and differences have emerged. I now turn to my usual opening question in the interviews: “What comes to mind when you think of ‘mindfulness’?” This was an invitation for partners to commence with an ending, an up-to-date comment on their views of mindfulness. Although these enquiries were made at the beginning of the interviews, I place them at this point in the thesis, a temporal rearrangement that accentuates how their initial replies are history-saturated. I believe this placement offers vantage points from which to interpret their enactment of personal and professional practices in multiple ways.

I commence with their commitments to a range of personal methods which enhance their own physical and mental wellbeing, followed by descriptions of mindfulness approaches that assist client people to address their concerns. Along the way, differences and resemblances between common definitions and practices of mindfulness in the professions and the partners’ understandings will be elaborated. Topics covered will include whether a committed personal practice is necessary for therapeutic work, the potential usefulness of distinguishing between acceptance and

acknowledgement, the differing opinions on whether counsellors and psychotherapists should explicitly recognise Buddhist influences with client people, and a reconsideration of definitions through dialogical and constructionist perspectives.

Living Personal Commitments

Both Australian and Bhutanese partners commonly started their answers to me with a blend of concise expert definitions, personally significant words and the effects of practices. These were frequently mixed into the same sentences or paragraphs, either preceding or following each other. For Arabella, mindfulness can be a “big word” with “lots of layers” embedded in “context”, a word that foreshadowed the diverse backgrounds we were all to encounter as we moved within and across cultures. Then she added, “I guess”, suggesting she might embrace a context-free stance at other times. Instead of going further down that line, Arabella at once moved to her personal approaches and offered a description of mindfulness as “intentional openness” with the choice of a “small lens” focus or “a more expansive” awareness. John picked up on these two broad options, calling them “focused” and “whatever is arising around you”, before characterising mindfulness as “being in the present moment”. To this Arabella added the “really crucial element [is] kindness”, making a distinction between that quality and “non-judgmentalness” which she said “doesn’t quite do it for me”. In the professional literature the term “non-judgmental” may imply a non-condemning or non-evaluative stance towards all experience. This was too cognitive for Arabella. True or “actual” mindfulness for her was a blend of “heart mind” and kindness, or as Frances said later in her reflection, it is a “loving presence”. Arabella then added a number of descriptors including “openness, this curiosity, this wonder, this being open to not knowing, letting go of knowing anything and the energy, [and] the joy”, before coming back to “just being simple”, a phrase she repeated later.

Arabella Being like in sensation,
 being open to colours,
 just following the breath...

So I find that enormous relief
that actually all I've got to do is watch the trees,
the leaves on the trees.
Or the light shining through.
Feel my feet on the ground.
And then things drop away,
the [mental] proliferations drop away.

Paying close interest to the breath or the natural environment with a nonconceptual purpose revealed her preference for the bare attention technique favoured by the *Theravada* school. Likewise, John often sat in his garden “trying to just be”, a “tuning in and out of different senses, different stimuli” or he practices when “eating more mindfully”, noticing the food, “the chewing, the texture and so on”. Or “washing the dishes”. He summarised the process as setting an “intention” to release the calculating mind by “taking the step” to “follow my breath” as it moves in and out of the body, detecting if there is too much “effort” to make something happen. If he was “caught up” in discursive judgements, he gently released them. This method was designed to create calmness in daily activities by simultaneously “letting go” of “analysing and judging and thinking” and attending to the breath as an “object”. There was no attentional vacuity, a common misunderstanding when mindfulness is merely phrased as “letting go”. John’s formal sitting meditation consisted of “twenty-five minutes in the morning” beginning with “ten minutes concentration meditation [on the breath]” followed by “about fifteen minutes *vipassana*” when he observes the coming and going of somatic sensations and mental impressions.

John Sadness arises,
 watch the sadness,
 breathe into it and don't struggle...
 Just watch it,
 breathe into it
 and it dissipates.
 I'm quite amazed with emotions.
 Anger I'm not too good with.
 Anger is pretty much a dragon.

But emotions such as sadness, jealousy, fear.
As long as I can catch it at an early stage...
It is amazing.
It's one of those aha experiences,
just to watch it dissipate.

This explanation showed his purposeful mental work. John said that if an experience was present, he could decide to name it, for example as "sadness". He was not trying to make sense of why it was there but wanted to create a mental spaciousness so it could just be observed non-reactively. His "letting go" or releasing of all emerging thoughts and emotions subverted any tendencies to reify passing phenomena or fuse with them and proliferate concepts about them, sometimes unhelpfully. Given the strong propensity for this to occur, I asked him how he can tell the difference between what he called "repression" and "dissipation".

John [With dissipation] it tended not to jump back.
I didn't need to struggle with it two minutes later,
or two days later.
I was able to experience it,
the sadness.
But it wasn't overwhelming.
It was "okay, I'm sad".
I could feel it,
I could see it,
I could breathe into it.
It's there,
and then it dissipates.

He surmised the reason it dissolved was because he had learnt to "drop my self" so that the "emotions can't attach", the inference being that undesirable afflictive thoughts and feelings were distressing due to his thinking that they totally belonged to him and were a true statement of who he is. John's words reminded me of the routine use of the word "acceptance" in definitions of mindfulness, a description I have found problematic when working with some client people due to a tendency by

them to equate acceptance with agreement or resignation. I return to this issue later in this chapter.

Jeff spoke of “being curious and open”, and then declared “mindfulness is innocence...a joyful innocence...emotional and experiential”. Later he added enthusiastically, “freshness” or “being totally available” to whatever was occurring “moment after moment”, not by thinking about what was happening but “just being here” so that “anything can happen”. Labelling mindfulness in these ways linked him to John, as does Jeff’s comment that mindfulness can be “a surrendering...non-describing state”. These remarks struck me as similar to the common definitions in the literature which include the terms openness and being nonconceptual. He also referred to a “more cognitively oriented mindfulness” which “will allow you to see things clearly”.

Jeff [to] choose what you need to be in the moment.
 Because then you’ll be present.
 You’ll be able to choose,
 separate from all these disturbing emotions
 and cognitive distortions et cetera.

Different from nonconceptual mindfulness, Jeff asserted there would be “clear seeing” with positive choices in life more likely. Frances also chose to emphasise these cognitive aspects. Mindfulness can be a way of “inviting oneself into noticing what is happening within” and “noticing the flow of consciousness” with “an attitude of kindness and curiosity” she said. This ability to view life from various outlooks has twin aspects: “staying with” experiences and, at the same time, not being “caught too much” by them. The practice requires keenly observing without distraction, without being drawn into mental and emotional events, and without being so overwhelmed that poise is compromised or lost entirely. A similar stance was also revealed in Elise’s rendering of mindfulness as “awareness of external and internal” events and having the skill to “stand back”, to reduce the likelihood of being “carried off on to side streams of thought or associations as easily”. For her, it was “more than sense-based” or the recognition of sensory impressions as it included “thoughts and feelings”, accompanied by an alert capacity to intentionally watch the mental

processes of liking and disliking. Then “you don’t have to be governed and pulled” by them but respond to them skilfully. This approach gave mindfulness a “reflexive quality” and, to go further, she said “an awareness of awareness”.

Turning to the Bhutanese partners’ responses to my initial question, they mostly saw mindfulness as a mental process of watching the internal motion of thoughts and the external activities of life. For Wangji, it is “to know whatever you do, try to sense it, know what you are doing” in a “focused” manner, and to detect whether the “mind is always with you” or “wandering” or “going far away”. Pema suggested it is “a process of working with one’s state of mind” and gave a lengthy stretch of speech which articulated a range of practices mentioned by several partners in Bhutan and Australia. He began by acknowledging there are “several styles”, “brief” and otherwise, before focusing on “visualisation”, a reference to the *Vajrayana* inclination to bring to mind highly evocative mental images in the service of realising the ultimate empty nature of all phenomena. Pema also referred to external foci which could include “facing an object in front of you”. Though he doesn’t mention it, I know visualising can include the deliberate conceptual fusing of the practitioner’s mindstream with deities or lineage holders or personal gurus. As Pema spoke I was reminded of Ann telling the Australian group about her Tibetan Buddhist “visualisations and the mantras, and the sutras and sitting”. Due to my long-established contemplative meditation routines, one of my Indian gurus flashed vividly before my mind. Large and small Buddha statues and *thangkas* also flickered by.

Not allowing me to linger, Pema went to a highly familiar method from all Buddhist traditions, that of “just observing your breath”, the “just” being an instruction to focus on the immediate corporeal undoubtedness of sensation. As he has been “oriented in that approach”, his aim was to “to focus on the inbreath as well as the outbreath” for “about five minutes every morning”. He described where he sat and how he was “comfortable” there. But he was not finished yet. After succinctly ranging over a number of diverse mental activities, stating “there could be many things” to be mindful of, and revealing his routine, Pema located his personal practice within his social milieu, explaining to me that it would be “very difficult” to “sit on the cushion” for an extended period as “we do not have that culture” as

laypeople. This was a reference to the appearance of home-based meditation and its perceived oddness by the majority of Bhutanese people. On this issue, Wangji said his wife found it amusing that he was acting like a monk. Her response prompted him to develop no “fixed time” to practice. He can be “walking to the college” or, after arriving at his workplace, he may “just sit on my chair...maybe five to ten minutes”.

Wangji And if I don't get time in the college,
 when I go home
 and my kids are sleeping...
 I don't sit on the cushion
 because I want to practice anywhere,
 not the traditional way.
 So I want to practice just before going to bed
 because children will be sleeping
 and wife also.
 Although she may not be falling into sleep...
 [and I tell her] “Distract me not until I speak to you”.
 Then [I] just on the side of the bed.
 I just sit for maybe five to ten minutes.

In this excerpt Wangji again marks his approach as different from his nation's usual religious routines which include going to the temple at particular times, seeking teachings from *lamas*, and reciting prayers. Like all the Bhutanese partners I interviewed, he endeavoured to include regular mindfulness along with his family and work obligations.

Ian So that's a way of finding time?

Wangji Because to give a fixed time,
 I think, since I am a flexible person,
 I need that flexibility,
 not a fixed time.
 Because if I have a fixed time,

whenever I have to travel to another area
that fixed time may not work.
So I'm finding my own time.
But I happen to [meditate] at least once in the day.

Listening in, Pema became appreciative of Wangji's "random practice" as he called it, contrasting it with his own "as soon as I get up" timing. And after admitting he hasn't "really thought about it", he nonetheless suggested there may be a "risk" that without a "fixed schedule" a person might "tend to forget" and "not be able to do it even once in a day". He reminded me of an idea, shared by many spiritual paths, that a consistent habit of sitting in the same place for a fixed time may lead to the mind being able to re-enter meditation more smoothly at the next allotted period. Pema's cautiousness may also relate to the widespread view in Buddhist circles that formal meditation designed to settle and stabilise the attention is the foundation for mindfulness in the midst of activities.

Pema It's just like,
 I think, reading about driving.
 You know all the theoretical aspects of driving
 but you wouldn't know
 whether the person knows how to drive practically
 unless the person is made to sit behind the wheel.

Even though Pema learned about mindfulness through reading "different books" and "listening to the teachings" it's not possible to "really get that kind of experience" without being dedicated to the daily practices. Tashi too, after visiting Naropa, realised that "intellectual understanding alone is not going to do the job, it's all about practice". He understood through his retreats that a progressive mindfulness may not only be about nonconceptuality or being non-judgemental but being continuously "aware of what was going on in my mind [thoughts, feelings]" and "in the body". To reinforce this view, Tashi said the Tibetan word "*gom*" or meditation means to become frequently acquainted with all mental states, adding that "when one becomes very familiar with [meditation], then that is being carried over into daily life". Referring to Naropa University and Bhutan's Tibetan religious heritage, Tashi made

it clear he was “not talking about something which is coined in the [secular] West”, placing our conversation conspicuously within Buddhist teachings, “basically...the four foundations of mindfulness”.

After seeing a number of interviews and reflections, Dendup also drew on his cultural and religious background to change his understanding of mindfulness from it being “a tool” to realising it is part of “a [Buddhist spiritual] path”. He stated “indirectly this mindfulness thing was already” there in our culture “but we didn’t know actually that that was mindfulness” until recently. As I have mentioned already, even though local words have comparable meanings, the term mindfulness has not generally been used in Bhutan by ordained *Mahayana* Buddhists and only of late by laypeople, mostly due to the importation of accessible and affordable English language books. Wangji told a related story, saying that all Bhutanese children are instructed to close their eyes and say Buddhist prayers every morning at school which he thought of as a “link of attachment to mindfulness”. Pema was attracted to his colleague’s comment about the nation’s school prayers.

Pema When Wangji was talking about the concept of mindfulness
 that he has had [that instruction],
 even in his schools.
 I think that’s true.
 Even for me,
 which I did not really,
 it really did not strike to me.
 What I,
 when you asked me that question,
 I was thinking only in terms of mindfulness in English.

Hearing Wangji’s remarks, Pema suddenly experienced a cultural reverberation making it possible for him to recall his own school teachers’ advice. He remembered through Wangji’s remembering that mindful attitudes were given to him and other students throughout their formal education years. Their present work in teaching mindfulness to teachers who can then take it into the education system achieved a striking circularity. Pema went on to emphasise that “mindfulness has been always

there throughout” as it is “deeply rooted in our culture”, offering another example from his home life.

Pema Even as we were growing up our parents would say,
 be careful,
 be mindful,
 in local dialect...

Wangji *Rim drim*

Pema *Rim drim*

Wangji *Rim drim daagzin bey*

Pema *Sem daagzin bey*

Wangji *Sem daagzin bey*

Pema All those [*Dzongkha* words],
 hinting towards being mindful.

In response to Pema’s reminiscence of home life as a child, Wangji broke from his witnessing place to recite common phrases in *Dzongkha*. These internalised parental voices were later translated for me as “to watch the mind” or “take care of the mind”. I invited Pema to clarify further and he repeated and elaborated on two matters, one an explanatory construct and the other an observation on our dialogue. Mindfulness means to “pay attention to your mind or whatever”, indicating that it is an intentional noticing of particular mental objects or a noting of the flow of phenomena that arise within the field of awareness, the choice depending on the purpose of the practice. Then, moving promptly to our interview, he revealed how he came to say what he said the “first time” in response to my question, stating “my thinking got confined only to the English term, mindfulness”. Both men chuckled at this admission. A close reading of Pema’s apparent duplication of his previous statement (“I was thinking only in terms of mindfulness in English”) shows it was altered by the word

“confined”, suggesting he became separated from some cultural knowledge when I posed the question in English. Perhaps the fact that we were speaking in English, or because of my nationality, or due to the invitation and questions I sent being written in the English language, or maybe because of our earlier teacher/student relationship in Australia, Pema selected a response “only” from English. Hearing his colleague talk about Bhutanese experiences in answering my question, Pema was freed from the forgetfulness induced by this linguistic constraint. Instantly he repositioned himself, stepping out of Western English-centric understandings of mindfulness to recover unspoken private and collective cultural memories. He and Wangji synchronised a response-frame with chant-like phrasing, a mutual and reiterative linguistic performance of meaning-making situated within unique Bhutanese Buddhist heritages. This positioning asserted their cultural and religious upbringing. Had this back-and-forth not happened, I would have been left with different ‘facts’ about the ‘truth’ of his interview. These social processes were also evident when I re-interviewed Yeshey in Perth.

Yeshey First of all a response.
 Was a feeling, a sense,
 that being away from Bhutan
 I felt as though both of my friends
 have been more closer to that understanding
 and practice of mindfulness
 than myself.
 I just felt like, oh, I’ve come a long way away.

Ian Which understanding is that?

Yeshey Seems like I have been away from mindfulness,
 left mindfulness back home in Bhutan.
 That was the first feeling I had when I heard that.
 Because Dendup’s talk specially was easy to bring me into,
 with my earlier conversations with you.

Ian Reminded you of something?

Yeshey Reminded me...
 that was the first thing that just came

Ian What did it remind you of?

Yeshey Just reminded me of that little room.
 There were four of us sitting down talking about...
 And at that time, how you asked questions
 about the monastic and secular.
 And I had a point that I thought I had a place,
 at that time I was at a place,
 knowing what I felt about the monastic practice
 and how people do it
 and how I feel about the secular.
 And suddenly here, as soon as you ask me this question,
 I was at a loss at the beginning

Listening to the digital recordings of her colleagues, Yeshey immediately experienced “a loss”, a separation not only from her homeland but from her understandings of mindfulness. To accentuate her feelings, she placed her colleagues “closer” and herself “a long way away”, suggesting not only geographical distance but a remoteness from her cultural knowledges.

Ian And then you hear this [the interviews] coming from Bhutan
 and it’s sort of somehow reminds you of that context again?

Yeshey Of myself...

Ian Yes?

Yeshey ...in that context.
 Otherwise I am at a loss.
 That would be the exact word.
 Of not thinking about it,

I've completely forgotten mindfulness for myself as well
because I'm also doing something different.
So in this span of time how things have really taken a big jump.

In recalling what she had said in Thimphu, Yeshey aroused a prior sense of herself, a credible and knowledgeable Bhutanese person, who had spoken to the features of mindfulness and its applications with confidence. If the authority of this person cannot be reimagined and restored then "I am at a loss" she stated, implying her familiar "I" had faded and "something different" had appeared in a brief "span of time", a reference to the months she had spent in Perth so far. The intonations and linguistic constructions of her colleagues' voices and the evocative background sounds of Bhutan mixed with the sights, smells and sounds of Perth, producing a flow of jumbling images for Yeshey. Maybe this prompted a kind of liminality, a neither here-nor-there identity space, an unknowing place. As the interview proceeded, she slowly retrieved the memories of our interviews in Thimphu and her words "at that time" and "at a place". Her experience of "loss" and the related amnesia of knowledges on mindfulness, those understandings she said that were "forgotten", were gradually replaced by the felt-sense of a culturally belonged person, a transition that created the conditions for further knowledge-making during our interview.

I found these exchanges with Pema, Wangji and Yeshey affectively potent and a striking illustration of how they came to know what they knew through reciprocity, influenced by language, present time contingencies and associative memories. In my view this exposes a continuous process of self-forgetting and self-remembering in the creation of all partners' stories. They hold to and release their various sociocultural settings and structures through which they generate and communicate notions about themselves, their relationships and mindfulness. To pursue these notions further, I now turn to the Australian and Bhutanese partners interweaving of their personal methods with their professional services.

Expressing the Personal as/in Professional

Supporting Frances's remark that "mindfulness is most helpful to the therapist really", Ann said she aspired to create an "equanimity of practice" with "effortlessness" when working with hospital patients. Arabella agreed that "the first place where it [mindfulness] comes about is within me", the intention being to cultivate "an open, attentive, being aware, kind, open heart". A consistent "practice of meditation seems imperative" she said as "I couldn't keep myself honest enough just to say just be mindful" since "I get too pulled", too caught up in compelling thoughts and emotions in the midst of her therapeutic work or on other occasions. Arabella also delivered a strong critique of colleagues setting "prescribed" exercises from handbooks without "internal experience" and, in response to Jeff's interview on his professional work, she contrasted the "diversity" of approaches available to experienced mindfulness practitioners and the "narrow, narrow focus" of contemporaries "just doing the cognitive skill". Later she stated "there's a difference between [mindfulness] practitioners and those who use mindfulness as a technique [with clients]". Going on, Arabella cautioned that "trauma survivors can't do an internal mindfulness", a detail that "more manualised approaches" don't understand. Revealing her approach, she "would anchor someone first in a more external practice". John too was convinced that if he wasn't "practicing, then I don't think I could integrate it into my work". Through their meditative life, the partners offer choices from a broader range of flexible methods for client people in comparison to mimicking prearranged procedures in instruction handbooks. Tailoring mindfulness skills for client people can address present problems and prevent or reduce future difficulties.

Partners often claimed that mindfulness created a present-centred spaciousness in their work, or as Ann put it, "making room" for "pain" in "the present moment" when she visited people "at a bedside" in the hospital. These "difficult situations" can mean the patient "isn't going to be necessarily talked-in by the clinical psychologist", so Ann will offer nontalking "help and assistance" when "they're in pain" or in bed "for like eight weeks and not move". Jeff too hoped he was "available to the moment" with client people, assisting them to generate a "less

judging” stance towards their own experiences and “without lots of elaborations, cognitive elaborations”. This attitude “helps them to see things more clearly” so they can release themselves from, or let go of, the “same old places” of “fighting or struggling”. Drawing on Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, Jeff has found that mindfulness allows people with a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder to stay with “fear, trauma memories” and not resort to “taking drugs or becoming suicidal or self-harm”, though he understood why people would want to “escape” from the overwhelming intensity of the effects of past ordeals. Jeff appreciated that facing these negative effects within a larger less reactive spaciousness in present time would be “a huge achievement for them”. In the same way, Elise believed her professional work was about “creating a space between you, and with the other person” as a “technique” and “a way of being”. This encouraged the client person “to be themselves” or “to be who they are” she said. The likeness of these descriptions reminded me of earlier comments by Frances that “mindfulness practice is very familiar in terms of psychotherapy practice”. Therapists from different theoretical persuasions can be adept, she said, at “holding the space and opening their own consciousness to noticing everything that’s happening inside of them, between them and the other”. Mindfulness in the professional domain has “unleashed something” she said. The “personal”, which was once “out of bounds”, was now permissible. With an assertion and a yearning, it seemed to me, Frances stated “you [practitioners] are allowed to have heart and passion”.

All of the partners in Perth, implicitly or explicitly, invited client people to gently pay attention to the changing sensations in the body or specifically to “notice and contact movements and shifts in the face and shifts in the gesture”, to use Frances’s words. This aligns with both Buddhist and professional literature which prescribe mindfulness of breathing for calming agitation. However, partners were wary of imposing skills that do not heed the particularities of people’s circumstances. In the hospital where Ann works, “a world of pain really”, she saw herself as “a bit of an enticer” or a “wheeler dealer in these skills”, including learning how to be “present” to whatever is occurring.

Ann Even though being present to what they’re experiencing
is very, very painful.

Because it's a physical assault usually.
So in order for that to happen, you know,
if someone's killed their baby for instance
and damaged themselves at the same time,
then you have to find a way to bridge with them and link with them.

Watching the breath can be very difficult to achieve and possibly even harmful in these tragic circumstances, so Ann has developed "a bridge to work with that [agonising loss]", supporting people with her own "mindful state when I speak to them". The *Theravada* tradition in particular has a leaning towards skills that encourage a narrowed tactility such as focusing on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath and the associated sensations at the nostrils, the abdomen or the whole body. In contrast, Ann has adopted a method of guiding patients away from the body initially and towards soothing natural phenomena. Through potentially peaceful thoughts and images of birds, fish and trees, she has sought to connect them to larger worlds of experience outside the hospital walls. Eventually these images come to sit alongside the personal and intimate word "breathing".

Ann Thich Nhat Hanh's connecting your breathing
with the breath of the world.
You know, when he says as you breathe the birds are breathing,
the fish are breathing,
the ocean is breathing,
the great trees are breathing.

This "progression" was "really important" to her. As the patient's agitated somatic states and cognitions were pacified through her tender language and the evocation of natural surroundings, they would also be peripherally conscious of their breathing. During these moments her intention for herself was to stay connected to "equanimity" and "spaciousness" as these were a way of "embodying the practice". With some composure and mental stability it may then be possible for patients to begin "really noticing [the breath], just barely, like just being and following". Blending this "connectedness to things" has been "the most powerful for me".

If people were in intense pain, Ann could offer to teach them “loving-kindness towards themselves”, though she didn’t use this Buddhist term but rather spoke about “kindness, great kindness, great respect, great compassion”. She may introduce other forms of guided breath meditations that attend to the mix of bodily sensations, eventually incorporating the physical sites of trauma. Ann used these approaches when it may contribute to calming fears and anxieties, and she made use of “imagery...and light is my other way” to encourage a “self-soothing”. She was often “not sure where I’ll start” as patients in the hospital were in an “experience of great suffering, physical and mental”. Again, her sensitivity to context stood in contrast to programmatic approaches in the professions and, agreeing with my research partners, I believe the choices she made and the fine details of her work are possible due to her decades-long commitment to personal practice. To me, her delicate cautiousness may also point to the lack of critical thought in professional discourses given to the potential for mindfulness to exacerbate psychological and emotional distress.

Moving to a cognitive application of mindfulness, Frances talked again about her trainer from Colorado who invited her to note and name experiences with a word or phrase as a way of growing an “observing awareness” which could then be used to disengage from unhelpful thoughts and storylines.

Frances One way to do that is to allow yourself to
 just call it a name that clumps the material.
 Like call it “thinking”
 or call it “remembering”
 or say to yourself ‘this is happening’ ...
 ‘remembering’,
 ‘memories’,
 ‘images’,
 ‘sensations’.

This brief list of names gave me an inkling of a skill which can capture the immediacy of content-laden experiences under broad categories such as “memories”. Frances also said she encouraged client people to be curious about their inner worlds, to develop “an investigative approach to themselves, to be interested in themselves”,

suggesting to them to wonder “why this is so, or how this is so, or how this might be linked to that”. In these descriptions, Frances shifted from a nondiscursive observational stance to mindfulness for the purpose of making meaning, a distinction that highlights two modes of intentional action. A blend of nondiscursive and discursive applications of mindfulness was part of Arabella’s clinical work too. She said “somewhere along the line most people are doing this [mindfulness]” though “they may not call it that or know that’s what they’re doing”. This has led her to look for these moments, to ask people to reflect on the details of the events, and to notice the quality of their attention at the time and its potentially calming effects. Throughout these therapeutic conversations she preferred to “use their language” as the words hold pertinent and precise meanings. Together they may plan everyday sensory-focused activities in natural surroundings which are designed to increase peacefulness, including “watering the garden”, going for a “walk on the beach”, being near a “particular tree in the garden” or noticing the “smell of their dog when they’ve been in the ocean”.

Australian partners drew on the secular, spiritual and religious domains, adopting different applications under different circumstances, and emphasising sensory methods and self-compassion for soothing and calming purposes. Broadly, mindfulness was conceived as being “available to the moment” (Jeff), and cultivating an attitude of “being present and...evoking that spaciousness” (Ann) with an “open heart” (Arabella). John’s simplicity in watching the breath, or Ann’s guided focus on exterior objects and growing warm-heartedness, or Frances’s offer to “clump” mental phenomena and take “an investigative approach to themselves”, or Arabella’s decision to “spin...and grow” pre-existing skills, may be helpful depending on the context and intention of the mindfulness.

Like the Australians, the Bhutanese partners refused to artificially split personal meditation skills from their therapeutic and organisational work. But, in contrast, they offered fewer comments on methods of mindfulness with client people. I surmise this is partly due to the shorter period of time that counselling services have been available in Bhutan, and the even less time where a service is based on, or supported by, mindfulness approaches. Reflecting on her professional work, Yeshey said she “would see two sides to it”, one being the techniques she gives “young

people”. Though she was not precise about the skills they might or might not take up, I was left in no doubt as to her persistence in “bringing it [mindfulness] in” and “always trying”. The second side was her personal desire to “go in-depth”, become “very self-aware as a therapist” and cultivate desirable qualities like “calmness” and “patience”. Dendup said his personal practices have positive effects on his stressful work life. Though hesitant to claim too much, he said recognising impermanence allowed him to switch “step by step, one by one” from work to home life and vice versa. He gave himself kindly reminders such as “this will go away, don’t worry”, and “finish this” and “let it go”. Such phrases were a “big change”, the outcome of dedicated mind training. Tashi described mindfulness as noting “whatever is happening in your life” including “the joys and happiness that you are going through”. This struck me as an astute observation and one that fits with Buddhist views. As he put it, “it’s not only about being mindful of certain frustrations or bad thoughts”.

Attempting to locate other professional activities in Bhutan, I asked Yeshey to tell me where mindfulness was being taught or practiced and if she could compare Bhutan to the West. On the last query she noted a “lot of similarities” and “some differences” before saying she didn’t “know the exact answer”, and would be “assuming” and “just guessing”, a series of qualifiers that led me to expect her comments on the subject would be somewhat constrained. She started off by making a general statement about appreciating the resemblances with the West in “this new [secular] way” in Bhutan, then noted a major difference is the “hold” from the “very traditional”. This prompted her to become critical of the nation-wide schools implementation program.

Yeshey I’m straightaway thinking about how it’s going to the schools.
 I think it’s a torture sometimes
 that our students will have to sit for two minutes
 and not know why they are sitting like that.
 And just watch your breath
 and sit silently.

She said the teachers can have a “very strict way” and may be “expecting a lot” from children who are told to “just sit down there” and “breathe and be silent”. Her remedy was for mindfulness to be conveyed in an easy-to-reach manner, to have someone “telling them what it is” and “asking them to appreciate it” before going to “very simple” and “practical” methods for young schoolchildren. I followed her lead into the contrast between “strict” and “simple” asking whether there was much “influence from the tradition?”. “Strong” she said emphatically, speaking about the instructions of “the Monk Body” to teachers and principals who then pass them on to students. A “struggle” can ensue.

Yeshey So I can see that the students will resist
 and say “my God, I have to do it again” [the practice].
 It’s not something they appreciate
 and make it everyday theirs,
 but something they have to struggle [with]
 and do it because you’re demanded to do it.

Due to its professional relevance, Wangji also spoke about the same Ministry of Education directive and what he observed when supervising students on placement. He was uneasy as there was “no objective” to the meditation. Teachers just “make them [the pupils] to sit for two minutes” and then “dissolve” with “no follow-up”. He acknowledged their good intentions but believed the teachers “offer in the wrong way”, letting me know that a sitting practice should aim to take its positive effects into the day’s activities. Interviewed in different groups, both Yeshey and Wangji offered a similar framing of the situation though her comments implicitly referred to mindfulness’s location within wider cultural relations of power. She named the authority given to the “Monk Body” as having a negative impact, with students resisting when they are “demanded to do it”. Wangji’s remarks explicitly insist on everyday aims and effects. Taken together, they reveal how institutional decisions in Bhutan intermingle with social and religious understandings of mindfulness, influencing what it may be for and how it could be put into daily life. Bhutanese partners are continually positioning themselves in response to ancient customs and modernisations, between religious authorities and secular priorities in education, and between personal experiences and institutional obligations. There are no once-and-

for-all decisions as they engage in various repositioning moves when faced with the contingencies of the moment, trying on lenses through which certain perspectives come into view and gain credibility. Dendup offered another instance of this positioning. Feeling “joy and pride” following completion of a Masters in Counselling in Australia he was “taken aback” when the Executive Director at his workplace told him the degree was “nothing without a little bit of mindfulness”. The most senior person in his Ministry then told him that “without a little bit of Buddhist mindfulness practice in your counselling I don’t think your counselling can change a person”. These unsettling remarks led him to read religious texts and English translations on mind training and to keenly practice meditation. Eventually he came to the same conclusion, “that it is very important, very important” to incorporate understandings from “the Buddhist perspective” in counselling in Bhutan, which seems to put him at odds with the Government’s insistence on secularity.

However they described the innovations and predicaments of mindfulness spreading in Bhutan, the partners spoke from an embodied personal/professional nexus. For instance, Yeshey remarked the “very simple ways” of Thich Nhat Hanh’s teaching to bring “the breath home...your mind home to your body” was something “very significant” for her. Images of Ann on her on hospital rounds came to mind. For Tashi, life is interconnected: “if I practice in my personal life” then “this [mindfulness] will happen even in my professional life” and “practice in my professional life” will affect the personal. He stated emphatically, “it’s about trying to embody what you are practicing”, refusing to “separate my personal and professional lives”. His remarks signified an anti-binary perspective, disposing of any ideas that would divide his day-to-day lived world into the well-ordered designations ‘professional’ and ‘private’. In his clear and resolute view, Tashi aligned with all other partners to disrupt my already doubtful partitioning of personal and professional lives. They reminded me such divisions may be useful as interrogative devices for ordering and studying these sites of identity formation but any separation cannot be bound through tidy linguistic measures.

Acknowledgment and Acceptance

Two aspects stand out and have particular relevance for this project. I was surprised that the word acceptance was hardly used in the interviews though it saturates definitions in the professional literature. The other aspect relates to the origin, arrogation and spread of Buddhist mindfulness for secular purposes.

The Australian partners did speak of watching closely and compassionately whatever arises and simply letting these experiences pass by without rejection, grasping, approving or even subtly changing what is occurring. This method could be considered the type of acceptance mentioned in the literature, yet I found it curious that this word was not used and wish I had enquired from them as to why that may be so. Similarly, Bhutanese colleagues spoke the word a few times only, but in contrast to the Australians they included the word “acknowledge” many times. Yeshey illustrated this usage during her account of “anxiety or stress in my body”.

Yeshey I simply go hmmm
 and acknowledge what’s going on with myself...
 Just to acknowledge it,
 sense it,
 but without struggle,
 but with compassion.
 And just be aware of it...

Following this verse, Yeshey reiterated it was essential “not to struggle” and to “be compassionate”. Otherwise there is “a double pain to it”, meaning her bodily tensions and distressing feelings became worse if there were desires for them not to be there. This may then lead her to unkind actions towards herself or another person, a not unusual course taken by people seeking to escape from painful events in their lives. She preferred “to acknowledge” or recognise distress and think about the “reason” for it “at this moment”, the inference being it may change in the next instant. Adopting this process she can “let it be” without harshness, even though

“you know those emotions are there”. In their reflections on Yeshey’s interview, Tashi and Dendup give linked views at different times.

Tashi ...what I have read
 and what I heard my teachers say
 is that experience is just experience.
 Not holding on to it,
 not trying to get rid of it
 is the best really.
 And then acknowledge and observe it.
 And then let it go.

Dendup I have been taught a lot of times by my teacher
 that acknowledge it,
 watch it,
 don’t react to it
 at that moment...
 Just try to see in-depth into it.
 [But at first]
 do not analyse,
 just watch,
 just acknowledge
 and just watch.

Both men deferred to their teachers’ authority when they stated “acknowledge and observe it”, “acknowledge it, watch it” and “just watch, just acknowledge”. Their comments point to the benefits in detecting an experience is happening, then discerning or knowing the kind of experience it is, and finally deciding on a course of action depending on the purpose of the mindfulness and the context. A difficult emotion or thought may merely be observed as in Tashi’s and Dendup’s non-evaluative mode or, as described by Yeshey, it may be helpful to initially recognise the undesirability of an afflictive emotion, and generate non-condemnation followed by self-compassion. Further, recalling the incident already mentioned in Chapter 6, Yeshey said she “started investigating” this “big hurt” and giving a “lot of softness

towards myself...to hold it [her feelings and thoughts] with affection". I asked her to explain to the group the advantage of this approach.

Yeshey Yes, that's the question.
 If you don't know about it,
 I would say,
 it's like you are sending the cows without reins,
 or whatever you call it [in English],
 into the wilderness.
 And they're just lost,
 going on and on.

Ian The cows?

Yeshey And there's chaos.
 They're running around in the wilderness
 and I think we become like that.

Answering my general enquiry on benefits, Yeshey confirmed its significance with the response, "Yes, that's the question". She gave an analogy from a familiar rural setting where cows without restraints may wander into rough country and become "lost, going on and on". Suddenly, I had a fleeting image of the valley where her family lives, leading me to seek more details from her with a prompt, "The cows?" Her reply however was short: the consequences are "chaos".

I then sought to clarify whether she thought of mindfulness training as nonconceptual or an "awareness of thoughts and feelings" or maybe something else?

Yeshey Not sure.
 But I'm only sure of one thing.
 [The] mindfulness I know is much more beyond [the nonconceptual].
 I would say mindfulness is beyond this.

Again her response was clear and strong, referring to the importance of “investigating” feelings, thoughts and actions that “I’m going through”. She can “hold” them and “understand someone else” and “understand myself”. Drawing once more on the authority of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, Yeshey said she applied mindfulness to enhance her reflective skills, to look for a “lesson” in what was happening and to “stop something” negative occurring for her or someone else. This protective intent was different from simply calming the mind. She knew when a disturbing experience was present, and briefly named it before deciding whether to let it go or alternatively engage in an exploration of its negative and positive effects. This sequence safeguarded her and others from being taken over or infiltrated by afflictive mental perceptions and emotions and was akin to some of the comments made by Australian partners.

The strength of Yeshey’s answers and other assertions by Bhutanese partners spoke to personal methods that not only have reflective or monitoring features but were intertwined with the social locations of problems and the relational significance of their teachers. Differentiating between acceptance and acknowledgement has implications for conceptualising mindfulness and the ways in which it is taken into professional settings.

Buddhist and Secular Discourses

The second aspect that is pertinent for this study concerns the recent publication of therapeutic and Buddhist literature that explores the provenance, acquisition and deployment of mindfulness for secular outcomes. Research partners varied in whether they openly linked their personal practices or professional work to Buddhist traditions. For example, both Pema and Wangji were forthright in their support for the stance taken by the Bhutanese education system and in their commitment to secular day-to-day techniques.

Pema I do not really like to associate this mindfulness practice
 with the religious practice...
 To me, I think it has nothing to do with religious practices.

It is purely for your own benefit,
for your own self.
Exploring yourself deeper.

Pema's version of mindfulness "is purely non-sectarian" and able to be "practiced even by the Christian" or within any other "religious belief system". He preferred not to call it meditation as "[Bhutanese] people have this tendency of thinking that it [meditation] is something to do with religious activities". This restrained them from learning mindfulness skills because they reasoned "this is not for me, this is for the monks and religious practitioners". Even so, he admitted mindfulness "might be similar with the religious practice", a line I try to tease out.

Ian I guess you're saying that the difference here for yourself personally,
that mindfulness is not connected to the Buddhist tradition...

Pema Did I say not connected to the Buddhist tradition?

Ian No, you didn't say not connected. You said for you personally.

Pema Personally, yes.
I see because the way I practice,
I practice it for myself at this moment...
Just thinking about myself and trying to focus on myself,
explore myself further, at this moment.
So of course I think the mindfulness practice
has very much strong connection with Buddhist tradition,
which I am very clear about.
But at this moment, at this point of my life,
I am not really trying to make it a more religious oriented practice.

In this excerpt Pema further delineated his personal inclinations and Bhutan's religious heritage through interrupting me with a question. It was a linguistic positioning move that gently challenged my loose phrasing and achieved a resolute quality not only through his directness and steady tone but also in his reversal of the

usual researcher/participant question/answer pattern of interviews. The effect was a destabilisation of my assumed authoritative researcher position, which then required me to be more accountable for my part in the conversation through revealing my understanding so far. Though it took me by surprise, it also gave me comfort as it offered evidence that we were in a cooperative social venture, our previous relationship and the prearranged ethical conditions for our research meeting seeming to make it possible for him to speak openly and contest my statement.

Satisfied with my response, Pema then reiterated mindfulness is both a “focus on myself” and a recognition of its “strong connection” to Buddhism, the former being relevant “at this point”, a time tag suggesting the likelihood of a shift to the latter. This was reinforced for me when he said “I cannot forget the fact that it has been borrowed from the Buddhist principles” and other words to that effect a number of times. Wangji agreed with Pema remarking that historically for Bhutanese people “mindfulness is something to do with the monastic setting” where “we need to get ordained, we need to get initiation, we need to get the sermon from the spiritual leader or the master”. And like Pema, Wangji asserted a “democratic” secular mindfulness that “anyone can practice...no age, any caste, creed or any religion”. This inclusiveness, he said, is “quite significant to me, interesting to note it down”, a passing reflexive remark that underlined how speakers can become intrigued by what they know as they speak it. I too was absorbed in these statements, deciding to be persistent in my endeavours to shed light on how the two colleagues were placing themselves within traditional arrangements and a lately arrived, and increasingly popular, secularity.

Ian So how important is that for you,
 to hold the democratic side of mindfulness
 as well as the Buddhist connection.
 How important is that?

Pema I think that at this point,
 I think it is very important to hold both the views.
 Because people are reluctant to get into this mindfulness practice,
 probably because they do not know

what mindfulness practice really is about, firstly.
Secondly, as I said, the belief system,
that it is for the religious figures
and people in the monastery body.

To underscore the implications of their stance, Pema used the intensifier “very” to convey that they, with a small group of others, are the carriers of an evolving and profoundly different attitude towards the cultural location of meditation and mindfulness in Bhutan. Just now, he conceded, there is “hesitation” and “reluctance” by people to take up a secular-based skill, their personal unsureness arising from its newness. In response, the partners said they were advocating in their educational roles for training that is not aligned with religious institutions. To my ears, this is a far-reaching challenge to the assigned hierarchies of traditional power, especially when Pema added their actions may “help get rid of the [old] belief system” about needing “initiation or blessings or teachings” from authorised *lamas*. I heard this as a deinstitutionalising stance. However, it turned out that what he proposed was another pathway to Buddhism. A “number of years down the line” these approaches will “automatically...make people” want to follow the religious life.

Like her colleagues, being raised in Bhutan has led to an immersion in esoteric and mundane Buddhism for Yeshey. Meditation for monks was “very strict, like a regime to practice” and she “never heard of it [mindfulness] though till I actually started reading”. Introduced to “simple practices”, she decided “it is for me also”. And similar to Pema and Wangji, she saw “two sides to it”: the “traditional way” and the “new ways of doing it for people like us” who want methods to “bring it into your daily life simply”. This “makes it difficult” as she has to “think of two different ways of doing it”. I decided to follow-up on the inference that the “two sides” don’t sit neatly together and am baffled when she replied she didn’t “see any conflict yet”. Clarifying, Yeshey agreed that the “traditional way” and the “the other way” can “battle in the minds of people” like her who want to include “new ways of doing things”, but as long as contemporary Buddhist teachers such as Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche are “strong” and “recognised” then they can transform ancient teachings into current relevance, and then “we can take it up”.

Tashi offered compatible views with regard to the cultural mediation taking place between Buddhist and secular approaches, stating that mindfulness “has now become more accessible to the general public” and the belief it is “only for monks is slowly declining”. He supported teaching school “students a very secular way, in a very modern way”. Still, he agreed “it is fair to say that the idea of doing such a mind training is from the Buddhist tradition”. When he thinks that way he feels “more authentic and I feel there are more blessings, if I may say so”. While he understood how some people in Bhutan and research partners in Australia are concerned about the expansion of secular approaches, he believed they were “oversensitive” as people will continue to have a choice: “we cannot force people to practice in a very traditional way and neither can we force people to practice in a very secular way... I think it’s up to the individuals”. Living this very choice, Dendup reiterated his personal aspirations and devotional sensibility to an authentic lineage stating he would be “very uncomfortable” with a secular teacher. He revealed our conversations have made “clear in my mind” the distinction between mindfulness for the “worldly benefits” of mental and physical wellbeing and mindfulness for “those who wish to go beyond these worldly things” and walk a spiritual path.

The Australian partners answered my queries on the adaptation of Buddhist-based mindfulness for secular ambitions by centring on their professional rather than personal lives. John placed mindfulness beside a number of other common therapies to lessen the possibility of it seeming too strange or perhaps aligned with Buddhism.

John I don’t declare that I use a bit of Rogerian.
 I use maybe a bit of Kleinian,
 and I may use a bit of CBT.

He described a secular approach as “more of a teaching”, “technique”, “exercise” or “useful tool”, an imparting of skills that are more likely to be practiced. Generally he didn’t label what he taught as mindfulness. Taking a widely held view, he stated he would “rather keep away from that [Buddhist language] in my work” as it could be misconstrued as “teaching religion” and “we’re a secular service”. Besides, he stated, “mindfulness isn’t a Buddhist technique” and it “wasn’t invented by the Buddha”, which led him to conclude “I don’t think there’s anything to declare” to client

people. Frances likewise averred that therapists are “trained to not impose your own frameworks”, although they are “much freer” nowadays to speak about what might be seen as religious or spiritual topics but “without declaring it is kind of how it happens”. Though not aligning openly with any particular spiritual or religious institution or group, and perhaps because of that, Frances said she can connect with people’s “way of being”. Some of them “feel that I am of their religion”. She didn’t see herself as “particularly Buddhist” though she likes the “philosophy” and “will draw from it”. In finishing, she was critical of professionals who train colleagues in a “very clear technology of mindfulness” but do “not acknowledge Buddhism”, deciding this was “rather unethical”.

Reading the *Bhutanese Biographic Impressions* unsettled John’s “kind of ideal” view that therapeutic mindfulness was going to be a “hell of a lot easier” to implement in Bhutan. He wondered if it could be even “more difficult” because “lay people haven’t got that kind of conception”. On the other hand, he thought “these people are the same as me really” and their “experience of mindfulness is the same as mine”, a universalising perspective on the “human condition” John found “kind of reassuring”. His quick revision of his assumptions about the accessibility to mindfulness training in Buddhist Bhutan and the effects of its cultural location on counselling, something he “hadn’t thought of...before you raised it”, illuminated for me how assumed discursive realities constrict or open up the possibilities for understanding other people. The *Biographic Impressions* gave him fresh understandings which “helped me along the way” by confirming “if I practice mindfulness then the practice itself brings me to the conclusions” in Buddhist texts, to the “Buddhist experience”, which he called “those deeper insights of no-self, authentic connectedness”. Arabella took another tack, saying she didn’t usually talk “about the soul or spirit” but referred to the mind as a legitimate topic for a psychologist. “Buddhism talks about the mind” so it “sort of fits”. She may or may not expressly name mindfulness as coming from Buddhist sources, the decision to do so “varies with every person”. Even people who have been fundamentalist Christians have taken up mindfulness, though she doesn’t call it that with them and she associates it with prayer or God. In these ways she made it clear that she was not “trying to have it neat, the language”.

Sometimes Ann deliberately makes a “very big point” by telling her patients it “does come from within Buddhism” followed by her reassuring them it “is not a religion, religious, you know, practice per se. It’s something that you may find useful”. After reading the *Impressions from Bhutan* she said that while it might be “very tantalising” to “cherry-pick” and offer people “easy to do” skills that lead to “very nice” experiences, she was “worried” about the secular trend in Bhutan, and especially how “younger people...may dismiss Buddhism”.

Ann ...or Buddhist practice
 or mindfulness
 or whatever, meditation.
 Or whatever you want to call it,
 because it is the institutionalised religion of the country.

In this excerpt Ann, a diligent practitioner within the *Mahayana* school, voiced her concern that the last Himalayan Buddhist country may succumb not to military invasion as in Tibet but to an imposing Westernised secularising of mindfulness that may desacralise, commodify and reduce its sophistication into simplistic and pleasant techniques. In sympathy, Frances said the *Impressions* accentuate the “very new, very thin” and “very borrowed” ways in which mindfulness is being understood in the Western therapeutic field.

I was not surprised that partners in both countries were quick to offer their views on whether to explicitly link therapeutic mindfulness to the Buddhist tradition, the result of carefully thought-out perspectives. The discursive uniformity of Bhutanese speakers is due, in part, to closely shared lives. Although growing up in different geographical locations in Bhutan, they are of similar age and have collectively experienced the same religious ceremonies and cultural occasions in the remote mountain Kingdom. Through the influence of renowned and well-travelled Buddhist *Rinpoches* and the expansion of internet services, they have been exposed more recently to various interpretations of mindfulness. Partners were clear that a separation between mindfulness and Buddhism was essential and yet they were just as adamant that the Buddhist origins of mindfulness should be recognised. Generally the Australians thought there were no reasons to reveal a Buddhist connection to

client people as it may compromise a well-established professional secularity. Despite this concern, or perhaps because of it, Anne and Arabella, longstanding Tibetan and *Theravada* practitioners respectively, were the most likely to mention mindfulness's Buddhist roots if it was therapeutically viable, a deliberateness that suggests confidence in knowing how to negotiate this delicate terrain.

Depictions, Purposes and Practices

The research partners' versions of personal and professional mindfulness given during our interviews can be read as mediated truth-like claims to knowledges gained from their histories of the present, remembered histories of the past, and desired histories for their future selves. Transforming those living conversations, the performative space of this project, into the relative solidity of text, I write to retrieve the transience of our words and present what I hope is a close rendering of our intentions and meanings.

The broadly agreed understandings given by the research partners can be viewed as the social surfacing of shared internalised constructs of contemporary and traditional mindfulness. They offer recurrent ways of speaking in conveniently abbreviated linguistic codes which stand for the nuances of contemplative skills. To arrive at these descriptions, the Australians drew on the credibility of prominent secular mindfulness advocates in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy, as well as internationally known Buddhist teachers. The Bhutanese allocated comparatively more time in the interviews to their personal practices often linking them to their country's immersion in a system of ancient meditative mind training, social rituals and family arrangements that have encouraged people to look at their constructive and harmful mental states, social interactions and physicality. They located themselves within localised cultural shifts where mindfulness is being taken up by laypeople. These new directions in Bhutan have somewhat destabilised customary lines of Buddhist authority and cultural responsibilities. Like the Australians, the Bhutanese partners aimed for a congruence of stances, forms and relationships in both personal and professional settings.

Specific historical conditions led all partners to actively situate themselves and others in an ongoing discursive swirl, making possible a fluid reworking of their understandings over time. This required them to position and reposition their sense of personhood within similar and contrasting professional and personal knowledges, without necessarily rejecting or adopting them, but gradually discerning where they stood. This process made explicit what they believed mindfulness may be at a point in time and, implicitly, what it may not be.

As became clear through our conversations, when people address problems in their lives they often identify their desired outcomes. Mindfulness and its associated methods can be considered as ways to achieve their context-specific longings and hopes. A Buddhist nun or monk may take up mindfulness to address what they perceive as the problem of *samsara* by, among other things, growing insight into the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself. They may want to develop qualities like kindness, compassion, forgiveness, caring, honesty, courage or determination. People in secular worlds may have related or different problems and therefore related or different aims, practices, and depictions of mindfulness may emerge. For the research partners, mindfulness was conceived in various ways including paying attention in the present moment to “things that happen around us [and] within us” (Tashi), “a process of working with one’s state of mind” (Pema), being attentive to “whatever is arising around you” (John), an “awareness of external and internal” experiences (Elise), a way of detecting whether “the mind is always with you” or “wandering” (Wangji), and an “intentional openness” (Arabella) with “equanimity” (Ann). Some partners spoke extensively about a nonconceptual present moment attention to mental events: a “non-describing state” (Jeff) that was “just being simple” (Arabella) through a “letting go” of “analysing and judging and thinking” (John). For partners, the general purpose of mindfulness is to disengage from routine harmful patterns and to create the conditions for calmness where there is agitation and enlivenment where there is dullness or laxity. To reach these aims, mindfulness, introspection and gentleness may be deployed with nonconceptuality towards the immediate present experience. Watching and releasing the coming and going of thoughts and emotions reins in the proliferative tendencies of the mind and subverts the inclination to reify conceptual worlds.

At times mindfulness practice was described as being intentionally “focused” (Wangji) on “a particular thing” (Arabella) without being “caught too much” by them (Frances). Frequently partners placed the body at the centre of this activity: “sensations in your body” (Tashi), “bringing your mind home to your body” (Yeshey), the motion of the “breath” (Arabella), and “very gently...observing your breath” (Pema). Attention is rested on the tactile field of activity such as the rise and fall of the breath at the abdomen or the movement of air at the nostrils. Repeatedly and softly returning to these physical places with an attitude of non-condemnation assists in stilling the body, releasing mental and emotional preoccupations, and stabilising the mindstream. On other occasions, partners gently direct attention towards the entire body or one or more specific visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and kinaesthetic sensations. Whatever the focus, phenomena are not grasped, dismissed or reified but observed as a flux that is continuously emerging, dissolving and reforming. Introspection notices the mind drifting away from any sensation and its movement towards another sensation as it happens. The intent is to detect this inclination immediately or as soon as possible afterwards so that steps can be taken to return the mind to the chosen object and produce a more balanced mental state or equipoise. This can be considered a kind of bare attention, though I prefer not to use that phrase as it seems to suggest that pure qualia may be discerned directly. I lean to the view that there is no blank consciousness waiting to receive raw experience. Consciousness and its perceptible objects arise simultaneously. All experiences, including the sensory, are mediated by other experiences.

Mindfulness may also be placed away from the body and onto the natural environment, noticing the presence of “trees [and] light” (Arabella) for instance. This outwardly engaged practice can converge with interior somatic sensations: “in the presence of the sun, the way I feel in my body, the greenness around” (Yeshey) and “tuning in and out of different senses, different stimuli” (John). Slowly walking and paying attention to the breath while in a garden or making and drinking a cup of tea on the verandah become mindful moments and movements. A “more expansive mindfulness” (Arabella) can include “noticing the flow of consciousness” (Frances) or “an awareness of awareness” (Elise). Being mindful of consciousness itself allows for the continuous releasing of emergent sensory, cognitive and affective phenomena.

All these methods aspire to stay with whatever arises in the present without discursive elaboration. There is a muting of analysis or evaluative commentaries as the practitioner gently returns again and again to the selected objects with a calming non-discursiveness and, in doing so, with non-condemnation. This training in stabilising the mind, whether in regular formal meditation or informally, may give a client person or a professional therapist the skills to stay with significant distress in emotionally steady ways and with less troublesome mental embellishments. Regardless of emphasis, these kinds of mindfulness applications are designed to produce serenity and are drawn from Buddhist traditions (*samatha* | *shamatha* | *shyiné*). They are a crucial foundation for insight applications of mindfulness (*vipassana* | *vipaśyanā* | *lhaktong*) which, in part, comprise a close observation of physical sensations, mental formations, affective tones, and felt-senses to realise their impermanence.

Moving away from nonconceptuality, partners emphasised these kinds of “cognitively oriented” modes (Jeff) which can include “inviting oneself into noticing what is happening within” (Frances) or, more widely, an ability to know “whatever is happening in your life” (Tashi), developing an “observing awareness” (Frances) or “clear seeing” (Jeff) and knowing “what you are doing” (Wangji). This encompasses both “the joys and happiness that you are going through” (Tashi). Acknowledging certain sensations, thoughts, feelings and qualities are present, followed by a brief introspection to evaluate them, can determine whether they are more or less beneficial or harmful: “What is this? What am I experiencing? What else can I notice? What else am I observing?” These deliberately investigative methods have a protective purpose. For the research partners the mindfulness practitioner is intentionally in the present and knows the appearances of negative states so as to reduce their influence and also knows valued states such as kindness, compassion and integrity in order to encourage them. There can also be a future-oriented enquiry: “What’s next?” This prospective application of mindfulness attends to an upcoming event and identifies skilful ways of thinking, speaking, and acting when in that place and time. As identified in various stories of the partners, these processes assist in remembering how to act and speak skilfully with others to prevent hurt and regret.

If less intense harmful states appear then it may be possible to simply adopt the settling skills already mentioned. Alternatively, if these experiences are strong and mental stability is not well established, a decision can then be made to take other conscious actions to reduce their effect, refuse them or escape from them through a myriad of methods. For instance, partners initiated meditation-like techniques to grow compassionate responses to painful circumstances, used guided imagination exercises or suggested activities in soothing natural environments. Again, mindfulness can be volunteered towards a specific object, a range of seemingly discreet objects or, more widely, to the flow of all thoughts and emotions and actions. Some partners mentioned how they encouraged client people to nurture skills they already have. They can recollect and retain or bear in mind these previously known experiences about what does and does not produce suffering, and what does and does not produce wellbeing.

If troublesome sensations, mental formations, affective tones, or felt-senses are intrusive, an assiduous mindfulness with acknowledgement and introspection guards against being further disturbed. Research partners spoke about the usefulness of naming experiences under these conditions. This might include “clumping”, simply calling them “memories” or “images” (Frances), or naming the event with more precise language such as “sadness” or “jealousy [or] fear” (John). The aim is to spot the presence of these disturbing states as soon as possible, take remedial action by containing them linguistically through labelling, and then further release their grip on the mind through the nonconceptual settling methods. Partners also noted how putting words to favourable mental states enhanced their occurrence and intensity, for example, “compassion” and “patience” (Yeshey), “great compassion”, “equanimity” and “spaciousness” (Ann), an “open heart” (Arabella), “heart and passion” (Frances) and “kindness” (Arabella and Frances). Deliberately focusing on soothing images from the natural environment such as the sky or a mountain, looking at evocative physical objects such as *thangkas*, or holding in mind precious *Vajrayana* “visualisations” (Ann and Pema) connected partners to other highly desirable mindstates. It seems the overwhelming emphasis in professional texts on managing distressing emotions and thoughts with mindfulness may have had the effect of minimising practices for enhancing qualities that are valued. I believe this reflects the still prevalent tendency in psychotherapy to see pain and suffering as

more worthy of time and attention, the assumption being that if a person speaks about their struggles and an apparent catharsis occurs, then a natural order of healing has taken place. I have speculated on this therapeutic truth claim over many years, finding it an insufficient explanation when faced with actual human beings and the intricacies of their lives. I do not suggest being emotionally expressive about distressing events is unhelpful but rather that personal catharsis as naturally healing is merely one of a number of explanatory guiding discourses for therapeutic encounters. In contrast to methods that encourage cognitive defusion between an imputed observer self and her or his experiences, these applications of mindfulness encourage a mingling of the mindstream with selected views and feelings, dwelling on them with a reflexivity that knows this is happening as it is happening. It is a distinct type of recollection that can potentially stimulate and strengthen a wide range of preferred qualities for an ethical life. These may include fairness, generosity, patience, kind-heartedness, honesty, courage, determination and dignity. Some partners emphasised the importance of noticing already existing beneficial mind states with client people, figuring out what contributed to them being available, identifying the associated skills, and deciding how to story these successes.

As would be clear from the varieties of applications, partners saw mindfulness as a practice used to enhance a spiritual or secular way of life. Some stated formal sitting meditations are necessary, others talked about scanning opportunistically to practice in the midst of their daily obligations and routines. The Australians especially commented on how their understandings of mindfulness gained through dedicated personal practices meant they could attune their therapeutic responses to a client's changing circumstances rather than offer a standardised set of skills. Their commitments to ongoing practice and its expansive effects in professional settings raise serious questions about the possible limitations of a therapist incorporating mindfulness into their professional work with slight or no personal experience.

Moving to another feature of our conversations, there was little reference to the term acceptance, a marked contrast with its predominance in professional texts. While it does not necessarily imply acquiescence to, agreeing with, approving of, or passively going along with unsatisfying or harmful external situations or mental states, Bhutanese colleagues in particular led me to reconsider the lack of precision or

potential confusion in using the term acceptance in professional and popular community definitions of mindfulness in the West. The Bhutanese use of the word acknowledgement indicated to me that a person can note or recognise certain kinds of experiences are happening before deciding whether to simply observe them without proliferating concepts or whether to investigate them. This view also resonates with various comments by the Australian partners, though they did not use the word acknowledgement to describe this process. Mindfulness then is not merely used as a sensory-focused calming skill or to sustain a non-elaborative attention on thoughts and feelings in the present. Acknowledgement recognises a particular experience has arisen and introspection appraises it. These steps are a necessary propaedeutic before any decision on whether to simply mentally observe experiences as they come and go, whether to take actions to guard the mind and body from harm, or whether to generate beneficial mindstates. Partners were also explicit or implied that mindfulness may attend to the present flow of phenomena or the appearances of the remembered past or the predicted future.

Throughout our conversations, they drew extensively on their longstanding immersion in Buddhist and other spiritual traditions. Overall these conversations left me wondering even more about the consequences of decontextualising mindfulness from its religious and cultural settings in Asia where it has particular meanings, significances and purposes and recontextualising it within historically Judeo-Christian nations where secular humanism with its different meanings, significances and purposes is usually the backdrop to therapeutic work. Chapter 2 queried whether the translations of mindfulness across cultures have diminished or erased Buddhist cosmological principles and rich contemplative knowledges of the human mind and promoted a reductionist understanding of mindfulness and meditation in the quest for scientific legitimacy and authority. Even though all partners offered sensitive responses to the issue of whether to mention Buddhist influences, I am left thinking about the consequences of not being more explicit about these histories in Western therapeutic settings.

This provokes a series of deconstructive questions. What is made invisible and marginalised by assertions of scientific definitions and research and what is made visible and advantaged? Whose voices are legitimated and whose have less

credibility if mindfulness is interpreted through the lenses of scientific materialism? Are Western researchers, who claim they are scientifically extracting the essence of mindfulness and leaving behind other cultures' unnecessary views and traditions, occupying a neutral and transcendent acultural place from which to make such claims? If mindfulness practices had been part of Australian Indigenous people's history for thousands of years or were from other religions such as Islam or Christianity, would an erasure of origins be considered acceptable? What are the implications when a secularised mindfulness makes invisible the ethical foundations of Buddhist approaches to mindfulness? I put these questions not to diminish the health benefits people may gain from a minimalist approach to mindfulness and but to raise further contextual and relational predicaments about the Western marginalisation of origins, the ethics of recognition, and the arrogation of cultural, religious and social knowledges.

On another point, as mindfulness acquires professional definitions so the definitions become what mindfulness is supposed to be. This circularity privileges the already published literature that blends certain *Theravada* and *Zen* Buddhist understandings with scientific discourses. The tendency towards reductive and individualistic conceptions of mindfulness in the predominant texts, more accurately described as the United States literature, and its operationalisation through skills-based programs, points to its location within psychologised and technique-driven settings. Problems are principally located within the internal states of people. From this outlook, relentless searches for interiorised problem descriptions and definitions are set off. Although these steps may be practically useful and the applications bring some relief, laments in the literature about not achieving a coherent, valid and generalisable scientific classification of mindfulness seem to treat language as true accounts of these interiorised events. While definitions may provide ways of making sense of human experiences, they should not be confused with absolutely accurate representations of what happens. They can be considered heuristics to produce approximations of experienced events. I propose that definitions are a special linguistic category that do not reveal an unqualified and transparent truth of the topics being studied but are descriptions of relationships among people, the objectives of an enquiry and its parameters.

Under these circumstances there are no once-and-for-all-time dispassionate facts, as conversations exist in a relational field of verbally active meaning-makers influenced by the wider cultural discourses of their communities. An opaqueness of language results and strikes me as problematic when attempting to cordon off any precise definitional features of mindfulness such as present moment awareness, acceptance, openness or surrendering. From this experiential, dialogical, and constructionist view, definitions and practices are instituted from within the social body and are permeated with the discursive resources at hand. Accordingly I prefer the term discursive depictions rather than definitions to counter the tendency to naturalise and reify claims with a correctness or certainty that may decontextualise and disembodify them. Depictions are a “doing”, a linguistic activity in response to situated problems. They cannot be disinterestedly selected and nor are they natural occurrences. There are no wholly objective scientific third-persons ‘out there’ who define mindfulness, nor a group of autonomous first persons ‘in here’ describing history-free happenings, but rather a group of experiencers shaping themselves communally to generate linguistic depictions of mindfulness and its promising modes of application. A third-person or “we” position is constituted through our coordinated dialogical “I” and “you” positions. I cannot be an autonomous person on my own but can only experience a different sense of myself in response to someone or something. To me this view fits with the breadth and depth of the partners’ storied accounts that I have been considering throughout this thesis. Their narratives unfold portrayals of mindfulness from various angles. Shifting from the prevalent mechanistic view of mindfulness in the professional literature to the partners’ experiential and participatory view of life and relationships means that there is no just being mindful: we are mindful within specific relational and contextual arrangements. Such intentional positionings evoke particular ways of knowing, expressing and distributing human experiences.

Taking this into account with the aim of extending conversational possibilities and therapeutic repertoires, it becomes clear that it is necessary to find words to depict and situate mindfulness without reifying constructs, views and methods. Listening to the partners, I have asked myself questions along the lines of: Is this particular depiction more likely to open up possibilities for therapeutic work or close them

down? Does it promote relational and contextual ways of seeing mindfulness? Does this depiction feel close to lived experiences and life-like?

This project has moved me to a conceptual view of mindfulness and the possibility of deploying it in particular contexts with particular ethical purposes. At this time I find it helpful to think of mindfulness as a mental faculty that continuously remembers to place attention on present somatic sensations or mental phenomena within a relational and contextual field of awareness. Drawing from partners' accounts, I think of it as noting a mental event has arisen and as the practice of responding to the event. In other words, what am I mindful of as it appears and how will I respond with particular ethical intentions? This is reflexive and purposeful in that a person not only notices mental perceptions, feelings, and bodily phenomena and so on but also knows they are observing them and responding to them. They watch whatever is arising and disappearing in the space of the mind and the space of the body. It is the opposite of forgetfulness. In all manner of ways, mindfulness assisted partners to remember to sustain this ongoing ethical engagement with their lived experiences, a crucial commitment I consider further in the following chapter.

9

Mindfulness and Becoming Ethical Selves

Sounds arrive simply,

bare of adornment,

signature of a moment.

Time and longings were making you up.

Did you notice?

Resting briefly, and then?

From the outset of this project I was interested in whether mindfulness could alter the ways in which a sense of self can be comprehended and how this could influence the enactment of certain kinds of ethics. This is not new territory for me. Over the decades I recognise a persistent impulse to fathom the mysterious phenomena of being a person. The story from 1972 at the beginning of this thesis is just one of many I could have written. Similarly, the conversational partners had to choose what to tell as they positioned and repositioned their views on prominent life events, their relationships with teachers over many years, and the ways they practiced mindfulness personally and deployed it in their workplace. This does not suggest an actual causality but rather these experiences were interpreted as causal and, accordingly, plotted into a sequence with both settling and unsettling effects on their sense of themselves and their ethical outlooks. Often the professional literature I reviewed states explicitly or implies various methods of mindfulness could reconstruct a life-enhancing sense of self. Yet, there is a lack of deliberation on the ethical implications of mindfulness which struck me as odd given its emphasis in Buddhist mind training.

Looking back and rereading the interviews on self and ethics with counsellors and psychotherapists, I appreciate their generosity in taking up my invitation to speak

knowing the comparatively small amount of time we could spend on these topics. The space given in this thesis matches the brevity of discussion we had at the end of the First Tier interviews and the somewhat greater amount of time given during the Second Tier. This should not be understood as a sign of their lesser importance as there is no one-to-one correspondence between a theme and the stretches of time allocated to it. This applies even more so in this situation as what had already passed by and become, in some fashion, our shared histories was a wide-ranging prelude to, and the reflexive constituents for, what partners told about self and ethics towards the end of our time together.

Making and Unmaking Selves

Australian partners recast mindfulness from a sensory-focused stress reduction technique and emotional balancing skill into a method for knowing a self which takes up these techniques and skills. John said his familiar sense of himself was quiescent during mindfulness meditation. It was a way to “drop my self” and experience “very cleansing” states where kindness and compassion appear as “part of our intrinsic nature...inner nature”. An alert and calm awareness is fluid and transient, a “becoming in the moment”. Eventually he offered the common distinction in *Mahayana* Buddhist teachings between the “conventional self” of everyday life and the “ultimate self, Buddha-nature”. In Jeff’s words, mindfulness enabled access to a subjective realness where a person will “be themselves” and when with others will “be who we are”. Aligning with these views, Elise said there was a “realisation coming more and more and more that it’s just totally about being who you are in that moment”. For her, mindfulness practices will “take off the dross” to reveal a deeper consciousness, a profound “isness” that is “just automatically there”.

It is worth pausing to consider the language of these Australian partners. They describe the self as “who we are”, our “intrinsic nature”, an “isness”, “who you are” and a presence that is “automatically there”. These features appeared to champion the idea of a permanent essence or larger Self which would be revealed or recovered following the requisite training within certain spiritual, meditative and religious

traditions. Commonly, it is believed that once this self is attained, it will be generous and compassionate. Similarly, in the professional literature on mindfulness, ancient practices and modern sciences are called upon to verify the reality of this inherent goodness, provide skills to discover it and offer assurances, implied or otherwise, that doing so will lead to clarity about constructive directions in life and relationships. However, on closer reading, the partners' claims seem both comparable with this literature and quite different. At one place in her interview Elise said that if mindfulness was going well then the person became "perfectly present" so that "the self actually dissolves" and "boundaries start to not just expand but [are] dissolved". Going on, she portrayed her experiences as "just a feeling of things flowing" where ultimately what she called "the Self or the Being or the whatever doesn't end here or here", emphasising her last point by poking her fingers twice into the air between us. It is "permeating everything" as a "more expansive quality of mind".

For Frances, the practice of mindfulness was "a beginning place", "a kind of little route" to the "phenomena of what life is truly about, all of nature and everything", a way to access the "channel of life flow". Arabella added, there was "nothing about self that feels substantial". It "is and isn't at the same time".

Arabella And then I think I can't articulate it,
 it all sounds wanky.
 But when I get glimpses of it I know it.
 And then I can't.
 What I feel more confident about are qualities like kindness,
 and knowing that in the body and knowing that in the mind.
 And whether that's attached to a self or
 whether that's not attached to a self,
 it becomes less important to me.
 And I guess just that fluidity...

These remarks by the Australian partners made it clear that the construction they speak of as "self" cannot be permanent if characterised as "dissolved", "flowing", "life flow", and "expansive", all of which denote variability and insubstantiality

instead of steadiness and solidness. While Arabella's "glimpses" of this elusive awareness in meditation stirred her commitment to keep practicing, it was the experiential sureness of its effects that are reachable: "kindness" being one, "fluidity" another. When she used the word "self" in her therapeutic work, Arabella was "rejigging and massaging it a bit in my own mind" to span the gaps between its usual meanings for client people and her empirical knowledges, hard-won through many hours of private and group meditations. As she put it wryly, "most people don't want to come and see a clinical psychologist and they start going all weird on them" by talking about a self that doesn't and does exist.

John sided with Arabella when he said, it is "silly" to meet with client people and tell them "there's no self", because they'll "look at you askance and say "really?" ", implying that even to hint at such an idea could lead to the therapeutic work being compromised. And, like Arabella, he attempted to hold the complementarity and unity of self with the Buddhist notion of nonself, referring once again to "that example I gave you when I played the guitar" when "there was no John there", and so "no room for self" or "ego". He reiterated that before our interview he "didn't have [this] framework [of nonself] to understand" what happened, but now he relished this reinterpretation as it revitalised the incident. Not only intellectually, but also in a poignant felt-sense way. Appraising this as "pretty mind blowing", John suggested that his prior "me" back then, the one who played his memory-guitar, was altered through this enlargement of meaning and, by extension, so was the present "I" who spoke the new rendition in front of the group. The two selves encircled and reciprocated to constitute each other's evolution. Soon however, perhaps to foreclose attempts at any dry academic probes I might launch, John signalled the conclusion of this conversational segment to me by deciding concepts can only fail when trying to describe nonself as it "can't be analysed". Fitting in with this line of thought, Frances recalled how she has "reinvented myself a number of times in life", wondering about the "memories and experiences" of those other identities, and declaring that any "self who has those memories is going to die". Already she had "almost forgotten all the memories that belonged to that one who was then" and can "hardly recognise that one with who I now am". This led her to tell us she chose to use the word self "very loosely actually", calling it a "mystery". Later she appreciated Arabella's distinction between "collecting and solidifying [a self] versus

the arising and falling of these versions of self or parts of self”. It gave Frances a “way of languaging” experiences she previously didn’t have “words for”.

Although Bhutanese partners believed that mindfulness would contribute to clarity when making decisions about their lives, none stated they would “become themselves” through the methods described. This may be because this English expression was unfamiliar or it could be that this notion didn’t occur to them. Consistent with my stance throughout this project, I take everyday dialogue as a close-up performance of assumptive worldviews which have constitutive possibilities for identity. Keeping this in mind, it seemed plausible that the Bhutanese partners did not speak about being in touch with a true self as this was too interiorised, subjectified or reified from their cultural location. Instead they opted for the contextualising of self, equating the term nonself as interdependence and emptiness, two *Mahayana* views. Dendup referred to Sogyal Rinpoche’s assertion that “when we realise that we are interdependent [selves] we realise the emptiness [of a personal self]” though it is crucial to know, he said, that emptiness is not a “void, nothingness”. Listening in, Tashi agreed that “one of the most important aspects of Buddhism is talking about emptiness” and that “understanding emptiness is to understand interdependence”. He explained that “interdependence is like the waves and the ocean. The wave is not separate from the ocean; they are together”. There is no self divided from nonself. Counsellors given training with “some understanding of emptiness would definitely help” as this concept would alert them to the likely “causes and conditions of why a problem would occur”, that is, its *karmic* trajectory. Tashi then followed with a brief content outline of the Samtse Postgraduate Diploma in Guidance and Counselling describing it as a “mix of Western ideas as well as Eastern ideas” that included the topic of “egolessness”.

Tashi In Buddhism there is no ego [an intrinsic distinct person].
 In the West there is ego.
 The Western theories say what the ego is,
 about trying to reduce the ego or whatever.
 Buddhism says why work on reducing the ego when there is no ego.
 So egolessness and impermanence, all of these things
 we have included in our counselling program course.

This formal tertiary course aimed to place “Western [counselling] theories” that are informed by humanistic philosophies with their taken-for-granted innate singular self alongside Bhutanese Buddhist views that posit such an intrinsic self cannot be found and, indeed, has never existed. The retreat component of the Diploma covered these topics as well as the “six psychological states” or realms of existence in the *Mahayana* path. Illustrated on the Wheel of Life *thangkas* seen in Bhutanese temples and home shrines, these realms show the *karmic* sufferings and pleasures of sentient beings through innumerable lives, and the path to liberation. Tashi said that he didn’t understand initially why they were being instructed to take this pedagogical route and he was unsure how the College might teach these very different philosophical and cosmological views in an accessible, practical and combined manner. His “fear” was that “putting them together would be difficult”. Nonetheless, guided by Naropa University, he and his colleagues are gradually developing educational approaches to prove “that they can go together and we must [bring them together]”. Unfortunately, due to time constraints I did not have the opportunity to find out precisely how this aim is being carried forward into school counselling.

Watching this interview Yeshey said she was supportive of these general directions but also cautious as there may be confusion around “certain theories that contradict” such as “psychodynamic theories [that] are very self-centred [individualistic]” and Buddhist teachings on a self which arises and passes away dependent on causes and conditions, that is *karma*. This “danger” could be lessened, she believed, through astute choices, a “good combination [of] knowledge and techniques so that [the students] can pick up which is friendly, which goes together”, indicating that eventually students themselves will make informed decisions based on their skilful understandings and circumstances.

In these comments, the Bhutanese partners not only highlighted the difficult conundrums in their work but spoke to their hopes for engaging with diverse counselling approaches. Their framing of nonself as the equivalent of interdependence reminded me of Arabella’s initial interview when she spoke about her longstanding family connections with Thailand, another Buddhist culture where decision-making is also embedded in a lived experience of resolute interrelatedness. “Everything serves the relationship” she said. And even though she is fluent in the

Thai language and has visited numerous times she finds these culturally embedded arrangements difficult to follow and, on occasions, perplexing. Hearing this, Elise wondered whether taking relationships “into consideration” when making decisions would apply equally to Australians as “we” change our minds and the story “according to the relationships that we have with those people”. Arabella agreed with Elise’s remark and didn’t want to make a “huge generalisation” but she also believed “it’s a bit more secondary to us [people recruited into Western traditions of individualism]” compared to her Thai husband. For him the “relational stuff is the ground” and “permeates the whole way he makes decisions”. She has observed her Thai family members doing the “single individual thing” and yet “it’s really, really sort of secondary somehow to the primacy of the relationship”.

During the Second Tier of interviews in Australia, after reading the *Bhutanese Impressions* on interdependence, emptiness and nonself, Arabella picked up on this aspect again by contrasting it with our first interview. Back then, she said, “I was talking [only] about me but I felt like they were talking about them and somebody [else]”, concluding that the place from where she spoke was more distinct, a boundedness that cast her experiences as possessed by, or belonging to her, compared to what could be called the more porous self of the Bhutanese. Frances too believed the Bhutanese partners were “speaking from a different place, that is, a larger place” and “always taking into account family or how this affects others” and, going further, even “the whole of Buddhism”. Her past teaching of Bhutanese students informed these comments and led her to conclude “you can feel that they have a consciousness to do with the village, to do with the other, that we no longer carry like that”. These comments gathered force and agreement, lingering softly in the group’s unusual silence. Her tone evoked the loss of an innocent human desire for belonging to larger worlds bursting with coded implicative meanings. Contrasting her own struggles with what she saw as the Bhutanese partners’ easier access to these dimensions of human life, Frances revealed “I don’t do that” except “out of a lot of effort”. These Australian commentaries on the Bhutanese Second Tier interviews can be read as a contrast between cultures that tend to believe in an inherent and autonomous individual who has a strong sense of personal agency, and those that locate personal activities within thoroughly interlinked groups of people.

Let me hasten to add these are not sharp dualisms even though such distinctions have been spread throughout this thesis. The partners' narratives revealed the ways they shifted between various standpoints as they told about decisive moments, contingencies, and associations with teachers in the preceding chapters. In narrating episodes from their lives, they took up the vantage point of a present "I", a reflexive and recognisable knower who relies on the traces of recall and the perception of narrative time to report on a "me", the person they think they were back then. This past-self, described in retrospective comparison to the present narrative self, was placed into a created history of relational mindfulness through a collage of storylines stitched together to create the overall trajectory of an implicit continuous "someone" to whom the events happened. This dialogic subjectivity required the summoning and organising of their remembered past selves with other people, locations, objects and so on, either tacitly or overtly, in the service of narrating self-stories into a presumed future. This was not without its challenges.

As already mentioned at different places in this thesis, partners drew on recollection and imagination to give voice to interiorised actual people they had met or people they had not met physically but who have profoundly influenced their understandings of mindfulness. They also voiced their local communities, national identities and sociocultural discourses including the religious and spiritual worldviews that infused their lives. It is worth restating that these were accompanied by a mix of gestures and affective tones. Contributing to the intricacy of these identity projects were their encounters with different societies and cultures through the internet, television, international travel, literature and visiting professional colleagues, to name a few sources. From these contacts partners were continually faced with the predicaments of transmuting their lived experiences into tales that could be told. In doing so, they were performing multivoiced selves who were in an unceasing somatic, affective, cognitive and conative movement towards or away from the kind of person they desired to be or perhaps that others wanted them to be or cultures impelled them to take on. In identifying with like-minded views, or moving away from, or challenging those that are dissimilar, they navigated many subject positions, some flowing smoothly together and others dense with resistance. They neither occupied see-through redescriptions of living events nor were their versions of events simply made-up out of nothing.

Negotiating these intersections, there cannot be a non-evaluative or neutral research partner found anywhere. Nor do partners provide any transparent access to their interior worlds. Neither am I a non-evaluative researcher. All our activities reflexively shaped a certain tellability and intelligibility about mindfulness and in doing so we organised multiple self-forming and other-forming narratives. These states of fluidity and interdependence coalesce around crisscrossing and infinite modes of activities, with selves-in-formation or self-formations having resonance across narrative studies, Buddhist teachings and Foucauldian inquiry though I do not suggest these sit tidily together.

And if I take seriously the views of various partners regarding emptiness, impermanence and nonself, then there is no eternal context or culture and there is no eternal self to whom these forming conditions are happening. Storied self-formations appear due to the interdependence of phenomena. As well, according to the Buddhist canon, emptiness is not an essence either which is why certain meditations are dedicated to realising the emptiness of emptiness, undermining any tendency to its reification.

Contextual Ethico-politics and Performative Mindfulness

Lest these explorations float into abstractness, I mentioned to the partners my interest in how an interdependent self may, more or less, take ethically accountable actions in social worlds. I was surprised when Frances and Elise expressed wariness with this direction, Frances stating she was “very uncomfortable” as “it instantly connects up with shame for me and unworthiness”.

Frances Alongside of that having to be impeccable.
 So it's this swing backwards and forwards,
 around “How can you be impeccable
 'cause you don't know everything”.
 So you can't know the consequences of what you say or do always.
 And then you're going to be caught out
 as a shameful being who's made an error.

Attempting to navigate the dichotomy between “impeccable” and “shameful”, Frances spoke about times when “errors become unbearable”. Her remarks reminded me of hearing these kinds of concerns from client people on many occasions in my therapy room and, as in that setting, I wanted to allow for, and appreciate, this struggle. However, unlike therapy, where I may seek consent to pursue this further, I simply acknowledged her conclusion that certain ways of viewing ethics “hooks up that whole part”, as she put it, of assessment and negative verdicts. I can see my limited acknowledgement to her as a choice not to follow a therapeutic path, my decision in that moment committing me once again to this formalised research endeavour.

Her comments prompted me to reassure the Australians that I did not plan to pursue a moralistic agenda and I mentioned again why I saw the topic as significant for our project. I believe this assisted in clarifying my intentions at the time. Here, I want to expand on why I took this line of enquiry. They are manifold. A few will suffice. First, considerable professional therapeutic literature rests on mostly unspoken assumptions that mindfulness, as described by its main proponents, will immediately or eventually produce desirable ethical decisions and activities in the social world. These assertions are typically couched in the ethics of generosity, kindness, and compassion. Much less so, there are connections made between mindfulness, social justice and human rights. But the view that mindfulness or its practice in association with other skills will surely lead to these outcomes has been contested in a small number of recent therapeutic texts. Bare attention mindfulness is seen as elementary and its supposedly ethical impartiality is, I believe, questionable. Discourses on Buddha-nature can lead to forms of perennialism with proclamations that there is a transcendent spiritual dimension of existence which, when accessed, gives superior knowledges regarding human life. Under this view it is certainly possible to naturalise thoughts, feelings and activities in social worlds and for critical thinking to be muted.

Second, in Buddhist texts when mindfulness is given as the seventh part of the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation from suffering, and as the first of the seven factors of awakening, these numerical categorisations champion a wider pedagogical aim. Mindfulness should be combined with a number of other methods which contribute

to a valued human life. Given this unambiguous teaching, it is peculiar that only slight consideration has been paid to the ethical dimensions of mindfulness in secular therapeutic literature. Third, whether an inherent sovereign self is an immanent or transcendent entity which is beneath or above the obviousness of everyday life, or whether the experience of a continuous self is a neural illusion, or whether multiple selves exist in one person as linguistic social creations drawn from nonself constituents, or whether we construct other ideas about self, the world the person lives in compels and calls for responses which are, inescapably, some kind of ethics in action. Lastly, if a mindful social self is not a unitary being or an interpretation-free entity but it shifts in response to an interdependent relationality, as this project suggests, then my narrative research method with its references to positioning and relations of power obliges me to pursue the ethics of this imputed self's actions. For all these reasons, and others related to the centrality of ethics in professional practice, I chose to pursue this topic and deliberately ask questions at the end of the primary interviews as I believed our preceding conversations would provide stories to reflect upon.

Returning to the partners' storylines, Ann described her purposes when working with patients as "harmlessness...creating the space between us [and] respect...permission giving", the latter being especially relevant.

Ann If you're mindful
 and if you're present,
 and your intention is to assist that person,
 and you articulate that to them,
 seek their permission for that.
 Even in the most difficult of spaces with nasogastric tubes
 and whatever,
 and you seek permission to be there even.
 And to engage and assist them with something.
 Then that's part of the ethical process for me.
 You know, that you are seeking their permission.

With the notion of consent at the forefront, Ann again revealed her sensitivity to the hospital setting in which her professional work occurs. Seeking permission has become an ongoing courtesy and act of kind-heartedness towards suffering patients, where she takes nothing for granted. Consent may be given or not; it may change later or not. Likewise Frances said the professional “relational world”, where she was “entering the mind of the other really”, required practitioners to “take into account both people [present]” and is “what ethics is about”. Arabella declared plainly “it’s very foreground for me” and Jeff stated that bringing ethics and mindfulness meditation together was “really, really important, really valuable”. For him, if mindfulness was practiced then “hopefully you’re seeing things clearly” and there was “non-harming and presence”, the “hopefully” perhaps being a caveat on a guarantee. He also believed this mindful “presence is ethical” because it made it possible for people “to be themselves as they are and as they need to be in that moment”, reinforcing his preceding remarks. Jeff was convinced that “knowing the moment that you are in, feeling it and knowing it is a deeply ethical process” for a person as they know what they are “doing”, their “intentional state” and “where it’s going”. Mentioning the Buddhist tripartite, an ideally combined “morality, concentration, wisdom”, Jeff thought “the more you are aware and open in the moment, the more you act morally”. Mindfulness “allows that innate nature” of “kindness and compassion” to emerge. When people “become more peaceful” they notice the “suffering” in destructive routines of the mind which may come from “half-conscious motivations...past lifetimes if you like...yesterday or from your childhood, whatever”. Noticing these places with mindfulness leads to the person having a choice to be “joyful letting it go” and be “more open and...act more ethically”. In closing, he reiterated that the ethics he was speaking of are “not imposing or creating a sort of moral stance” but merely “liberating a natural state of being”. John agreed with this intrinsic ethicality when he stated “the Buddha didn’t have any ethics, he didn’t need them” as he was “aware, awakened, he was the awakened one”. Referring to his workplace, John said he “would work within ethical guidelines”, which I took to mean secular professional ethics as well as the moral principles and precepts the Buddha *Shakyamuni* invented and promulgated during his lifetime and which form indispensable foundations for monastic and lay life today. Noticing he was “again listening to myself”, a double reflexive, John realised the “difficulty in expressing” what he called these “esoteric” ideas about “the very inner

world” of the mind. To me he was making a reasonable admission that ethics can seem obscure, distant and debatable.

To complicate the Australians’ shared challenges in speaking to this topic, Elise declined the word ethics as it’s “not where I’m coming from and nor is that how I would define it”. Still, for my sake, she said she would “try and put [what I am doing] into some sort of framework of morality or ethics”. After a few moments, she decided the “focus is not on the self” but a “connectedness to people” with “generosity” and “genuine caring” as the “heart [is] opening without...guile”. This way of relating with another person was not forced but “it just happens without even wanting or intending”, so seeming to place her with Jeff and John’s claims of an ethical automaticity when mindfulness was advanced. I appreciated this heartfelt perspective though I experienced a silent unease with such naturalistic claims. As if in response to my unspoken thoughts, Elise shifted course.

Elise But I think what it comes down to is your motivation.
 Your motivation for what you’re saying and what you do.
 So you need to be able to look at that.
 “Where am I coming from in this?
 And how much of this is for me?
 And how much of this is for them?”...
 You know mindfulness practice being aware not just of each thought
 and each sound
 and each touch
 and each sight
 and whatever,
 but also aware of each intention,
 which liking and disliking.
 Breaking it down to that *vedana*, [a Pali word meaning]
 that liking and disliking.
 So coming down to that very basic for or against.

In this excerpt the earlier claim to an innate caring was replaced by a critical reflective approach as Elise moved from mindfulness routines designed to become

“aware” of thoughts and sensations, to investigative methods that require a thorough honesty of “motivation”, and a questioning as to where she is “coming from”. This returned our conversation to the subjective and situated cultural person, it seemed to me.

Arabella had bifurcated meanings as well when she claimed that “mindfulness leads to greater morality” but then wondered if “that’s ‘cause I’m inclined that way to start with”, a legacy of her “old Catholic yearning to be good”. It was the “imperative” of meditation that achieved what she called the “balance” between inner experiences and outer actions. People “can rationalise anything...if you haven’t got some other point of reference”. In this confession she contested, for herself at least, the view that mindfulness alone will make it possible for her to express her cherished values in day-to-day life. Mindfulness must be, she stated, “supported and embedded in morality” with conscious desires to enact “kindness and harmlessness” with others.

Holding these seemingly contradictory viewpoints - an intrinsic goodness which appears naturally contrasted with learned social and cultural responsibilities - was pithily expressed by John as “one [of the dilemmas] I struggle over”. He mentioned the use of mental training like mindfulness to harm others in warfare, such as the “samurai in 13th century Japan” and the “Second World War Buddhist monks” who taught “soldiers how to practice” so they could kill effectively. He told the group he didn’t “like the idea of” these objectives. Continuing, he thought it was possible to untie “the techniques from the morality” and, making his case with the most extreme example, to “murder mindfully”. Trying to resolve these inconsistencies he posed a question, perhaps as much to himself as to the group listening: “Can you have a...mindfulness practice and [be] doing mindfulness counselling without the Buddhist philosophy and the ethical base and so on?”

John believed most of the injunctions to “do no person harm, don’t engage in ill speech or ill conduct” were not exclusive to Buddhist principles, being found in “most” religions and secular approaches to ethics. It was the unique assertion of the Buddhist notions of interdependence and nonself that linked mindfulness to ethics for him. And I assume this intensified his conundrum: how can mindfulness be taught and encouraged as a technique for harming others when the Buddhist view

professes interdependence and inherent goodness. He implied that interdependence does not inevitably incline a person to life-affirming actions. In an attempt at resolution, Jeff said “I don’t think you can murder mindfully”, before immediately clarifying “unless you limit mindfulness to paying attention and being present”. He acknowledged “people who do terrible things are very present” but said that this was “not mindfulness” as it was disconnected from the “Noble Eightfold Path”. If a person was connected to this “rich grounded mindfulness” then it became “intrinsically moral” and the possibility of harm could not arise. So while he was appreciative of developing “very practical pragmatic attention...in the moment” in order to see “clearly and calmly” and promote wellbeing, there was something “missing” and “you lose a lot” in those “narrowly” defined notions of mindfulness in the field. Likewise Ann said “taking it out of Buddhism” expunges the “deep connectedness to the values that underlie it”.

For Tashi in Bhutan, “one can only be moral and one can only be ethical when one is mindful”, the repetition of “only” shoring up his meaning. Yeshey, reflecting on these issues, thought that “embodying” a moral mindfulness meant taking Buddhist values into social worlds. She had “always believed” the Buddhism she was born into “is not a religion” but “a way of living, a way of being” in relationship with humans, other sentient beings and the Earth. Given her commitment to “living the principles” and “values”, I asked whether she noticed any “contradictions” at times, purposefully leaving the question imprecise and open so she might respond in any way she chose. Pausing momentarily, Yeshey said she had seen “senior monks”, people who have been on long retreats and who have practiced for many years, “violate” relationships and sometimes their “virtues are missing”. When this happens she “feel[s] like not believing it”, that is, the teachings on mindfulness and Buddhism generally, an indication that for her a person’s actions and their effects in social worlds are more convincing of decency than religious status claims and their associated moral authority. She didn’t dismiss the possible benefits of a technique-driven mindfulness. However, adopting that approach “does alter a lot of things” because there was a “big loss again, the essence of it, the ethics around it” disappear and “as a Buddhist I think, you are shaken”. This strong conclusion underscored her determination to “investigate to live a better life, [and] to care for others”, principles “very much there in the teaching” and expressed in social services like the drug and

alcohol rehabilitation centres in Bhutan. But, she went on, if the Royal Bhutan Army was to take up mindfulness as a technique then this would be a “very delicate” situation, her voice trailing off into an unsure silence.

Dendup agreed that it was “very important” to combine mindfulness with “any [given] ethics to be followed or any morals to be followed”. But, he said, spiritual masters who have realised emptiness do not have the “mind of a lay or ordinary people like us” and so “whatever they do after that it is with a different intention”, exempting them from principles that might apply to others. When Dendup repeated this common Buddhist perspective to the group, he tacked on honestly, “that’s what they [the teachings] say but I don’t know what it means”. And at another place he remarked he had “seen and read about many masters who were enlightened [but] not necessarily taking this practice into their personal life. They’re arrogant, they are rude. They shout at people, they get angry any time”. Reflecting on this, he confessed to having a “very difficult time understanding this sort of thing”. Seeming to speak on behalf of her two colleagues and herself, Yeshey summarised that “for all of us [mindfulness is] not a technique” but can “tune towards” or “guide” a person to “a moral and ethical life”, an indication that there can be no promise that mindfulness will lead to virtuous or socially responsible actions.

In his interview, shared with Wangji in Samtse, Pema seemed to offer a different view when he stated “this ethical and moral issue will be automatically taken care of” when there is mindfulness. But he qualified this statement by telling me he was being “simplistic”, hinting at situational complexities. Before I asked him to elaborate, he was already speaking about one of the central ethical aspirations from the *Mahayana* path, the desire to cultivate compassion towards oneself, towards people we are attracted to, towards people we experience as unpleasant or even heinous, and towards people we experience as neither particularly agreeable nor disagreeable. But these laudable aims, he said, may turn into “idiot compassion”, another phrase by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. As Pema put it, a person may want to “love all the sentient beings” and may “offer so many butter lamps and whatever income” to their teachers but he could be “forgetting his own family members” and so “the family here suffers”. What was intended to be compassion for all had the unintended consequence of bringing suffering to close people, a not uncommon

result when dedicated spiritual and religious practitioners make much of abstract or universal aspirations and neglect what is often the greater challenge of living with kindness and socially just responsibilities towards family, work colleagues, relatives, friends and people in their neighbourhood. Mindfulness, Pema stated, makes it likely to know “how much to be invested in all those” different relationships and achieve “balance”, suggesting there must be ongoing recognition of cultural beliefs and responsibilities. Extraordinary ambitions to “relieve suffering for all sentient beings” can be placed alongside “your current [daily] obligations”. On one reading this can be seen as the balance between an expansive mindfulness that aspires to direct kindness to all and a narrowed mindfulness focused on nearby people and nonhumans in day-to-day life. On another reading, there is no distinction between these dimensions of living as they are interrelated.

Pema Even simple examples,
 like when you have this mindfulness practice
 being organised and conducted [at the College],
 there will be people who are too much obsessed.
 And sometimes, if something is not organised quite well...
 Of course you are doing a practice there...
 You blame and blame the organiser or the coordinator
 and so what’s the point of practicing mindfulness.
 You are practicing mindfulness here and then.
 You are not able to cope with some of this, loopholes or shortfalls.

Ian Are you thinking about something that happened?

Pema It normally happens
 because there is a large group of people,
 and then the coordination,
 all those logistic arrangements
 becomes a little difficult for one or two people.

In contrast to an intellectual ethics which can seem distant and cool, Pema once more opted to ground the struggle of living mindful ethics with others by recalling a

stressful interpersonal problem. The residential retreats he and Wangji have organised as part of the Postgraduate Diploma have required cooperation from support people and the students. Inevitably, there were snags or “shortfalls”. Some people became “too much obsessed” he said by focusing on what couldn’t be changed. As Pema remarked, it was ironic that students on a mindfulness course - which teaches acceptance of changing conditions with compassion and understanding - were unwilling to adjust to or endure some alterations to the retreat. It could be that he was just expressing his own feelings of frustration at not being appreciated, and that may be fair too. But I think he was saying that mindfulness cannot be an intermittent endeavour. Diligence is required to attend to the ceaseless stream of happenings as they appear to consciousness. To check, I asked him whether the kinds of difficulties he was talking about were “another opportunity” to apply mindfulness.

Pema Yes, that’s what I was trying to say.
 I mean, people should learn to sit without [too much expectation],
 instead of pointing and pointing fingers to others.
 So there is that risk.
 And I think mindfulness practice alone,
 if you’re working on practicing just mindfulness practice,
 forgetting all the rest,
 there is a risk.

In this extract, continuing the theme of tensions in human relationships, Pema agreed with me that this was a chance to do the very thing students were there to learn, not making a distinction between the mindfulness retreat and “all the rest”. Saying this, he seemed to be supporting Wangji’s focus on a secular “ethical way” and “how we should be living all this”, Yeshey’s view that people should notice how they live their life “every day, every moment” and the importance Tashi gave to being a “practicing Buddhist”. Wangji said that for him it is “a blend, it is a form of integration” of both mindful awareness and an ethical life. Questions about purposes and consequences which require people “to take judge” and consider the “moral and ethical practices that you have” were indispensable he said. We must, Wangji claimed, “look at the interests of the other people” and consider the effects of

practice on them in two ways. First, to decide if the practices are “helping them” or if they are “harming them”, and then to consider whether they are “helping me or whether it is harming to me”. In these few words Wangji joined with his Bhutanese colleagues in recontextualising mindfulness back into social and relational spaces, into the inseparability of its personal and interpersonal features.

Perhaps due to their previous deliberations on the topic of ethics and our limited time, partners in Australia and Bhutan gave succinct responses to my enquiries. Frequently, they retained a notion of an intrinsic or basic goodness that can be contacted and expressed consistently by people who have developed mindfulness. For example, Wangji asserted “compassion, generosity, empathy, sympathy” will grow, Jeff “non-harming”, Elise “genuine caring” and Yeshey a “care for others”. These perspectives asserted that once a true or proper mindfulness has been attained then beneficial actions will come naturally and spontaneously. This fits most profoundly with the idea of an innate latent Buddha-nature in the *Mahayana* tradition. Contrariwise, some partners were cautious. Arabella stated it isn’t “enough” to “just be mindful”, John suggested mindful “murder” was possible, Pema thought “forgetting” human responsibilities “is a risk” and Wangji asserted the wellbeing of other people must be taken into account. Partners moved between an ethical inherency and an ethical intentionality, the latter highlighting the importance of social responsiveness and accountability.

Whether ethical actions are intrinsic to mindfulness, whether they are cultivated alongside mindfulness, whether they are both inherent and cultivated or whether they are neither, there can be no escape from intentions when it comes to assertions about a mindful person and the dialogic enactment of ethics. Going further, some partners spoke of the importance of considering not only intentions but the ethics of the effects of these intentions or the ethics of the consequences of actions.

In the Buddhist tradition certain discourses on ethics emphasise generosity and compassion, for instance, and these are covered extensively prior to teaching mindfulness and meditations. It seems in the West, this traditional sequence has been reversed as training centres frequently commence with, and privilege, various exercises based on mindfulness and meditation. Explanations for this change are

usually framed within the twin discourses of science and cultural beliefs. When positive outcomes are reported in scientific studies they are used to bolster objective and rational reasons for commencing with meditation-like methods. At the same time, Buddhist teachings that require a sophisticated engagement with ethics can be viewed as an anachronistic, culturally Asian artefact, and minimised or expunged. What seems unnoticed is that the Western objectivist and rationalist conceptual systems, and not engaging with Buddhist ethics, are positionings too. This is not to suggest that the methods in articles I have cited don't benefit people but relational and cultural views are often not mentioned, not made explicit, or seen as secondary, unworkable or unnecessary. Also, I would contend that deciding to practice mindfulness which includes instructions to be non-judgemental and develop acceptance and kindness means an evaluation has already been made as to the potential benefits. Such instructions can only be made sense of via existing beliefs and values. For instance, with a decision to sit and meditate quietly other potential activities, such as joining a campaign to address social inequities, are not possible at that moment. Despite assertions to the contrary in certain professional and Buddhist literature, my view is that even a supposedly non-evaluative and nonconceptual mindfulness practice rests on these preceding beliefs. Consequently the practice cannot be an ethically neutral act and nor can it have ethically neutral effects.

Being artefacts of linguistic cultural processes, versions of these performed ethics may springboard from hand-me-down customs before they are improvised into embryonic social dramas. These performances of meaning may perturb the attempted reproduction of given moral templates with their well-rehearsed characters and lines that reinforce preordained 'good' and 'right' societal behaviour. Such breaches of the routinised self's repertoire move conversational directions towards ethical potentials that may not have been imagined before. These emerging forms of a storied self do not speak lived experience 'as it is' or represent a solid singular 'reality' but rather illustrate how plural and interrelated realities are made and remade, held onto and let go of, shaped and transformed, and retransformed. Can a Buddhist understanding of this interconnected self subvert the neoliberal propensity to reduce social problems to individual failings and create options to notice and respond to systemic and institutional discourses that contribute to discrimination and prejudice?

What I perceive is that the partners and I have been speaking our interdependent and negotiated selves into the fabric of the interviews all along. I have been making my sense of the partners' interviews which reconstitutes to the forming and reforming of my versions of me. Readers of this text are similarly implicated in these dispersive compositions of a sense of self which is imputed through numerous intersecting discourses. When the subject constitutes the world that constitutes the subject there can only be an enduring liminality to these narrated self-formations. They are places where ambiguity resides and puzzlement is not uncommon. Self cannot be intuitively clear.

Listening to partners' remarks on self and ethics and studying their storied lives about unpredicted occurrences, relationships with teachers, and definitions and methods, I don't submit that merely adopting traditional Buddhist mindfulness and ethics will address contemporary social issues. I also question the view that secular or Buddhist mindfulness will inevitably lead a practitioner to accurately and thoroughly know how to respond with wisdom, whatever that might be, in all contexts. To make an obvious point on social equality. Despite thousands of years of describing and practicing various methods of mindfulness, monastic and lay traditions in Asia and the West are still overwhelmingly patriarchal. Current discourses on mindfulness, as non-judgemental present moment awareness with openheartedness, cannot address the marginalisation of persons based on gender, race, sexualities and religion, to name a few areas. What I do suggest is that multiple narratives of mindfulness highlight how power/knowledge is fluid and diffused through processes of governmentality, the corporatisation and economisation of human life and the micro-moments of daily human actions.

This produces unpredictability and challenges the notion of autonomy or a self-possessed, interiorised and monological agent who pursues mastery through an assumed causality of linear and rational events, a view found implicitly in much of the professional literature. Declining this dominant view, which erases the politics and ethics of practice, I situate the applications of mindfulness in the culturally constructed worlds of the partners and reconceptualise it, in part, as already active in the politicising of their subjectivities through its embeddedness in their social arrangements. The reading of expressive power relations into discursive

constructions of mindfulness renders problematic any assertions that beneficial speech or action will proceed automatically from mindfulness or that a person following secular or spiritual traditions who has attained an advanced level of mindfulness, however that might be conceived, is exempt from relational accountability. Narratives that advocate and deploy mindfulness are never impartial as explicit or implicit positions are always performative and this will have personal, cultural, social, historical and material effects.

The deconstructive work shown in the earlier chapters of this thesis points to this continuous relational and contextual becoming of distributive selves that are produced from discursive and nondiscursive conditions. Not only do these movements and their interpretations make it clear that we cannot not be in relationship in the widest sense, we also cannot not be engaged in the ethical demands that relationships place on people. Shifts in partners' multiple self-formations can be shifts in ethics; the movements of partners' ethics can be movements in self-formations. This relational and contextual becoming stands in some contrast to the notion of a relational being which, to me at least, still carries the traces of singularity and the boundedness of modernity with its solidifying binaries of interiorities and exteriorities. Becoming self-formations emphasises meaning-making activities as people position and reposition in response to emergent phenomena, and the alterity and resemblances of other selves in context. Mindfulness is implicated in these ideological positionings. Becoming ethical requires us to discern and identify with just values and actions, and recall what would contribute to our own and others' wellbeing. Mindfulness can be used to enhance critical faculties necessary to enact this commitment to fair and just relationships. Taking this route, practitioners do not relinquish these faculties in the name of a presumed primordial or nondual wisdom consciousness or an intrinsic ethics of mindfulness but commit to a contextual ethico-politics for the purpose of performing relational responsibilities towards sentient beings and the natural environment.

10

Storying a Relational and Contextual Mindfulness

Did you catch the floating worlds?

The windless interiors

of cool temples bright with curling candlelight.

Echoes receded long ago.

Words will carry the longing.

Did you catch the floating words?

Often the beginnings of a long winding journey can only be understood years later, after the questions that compelled it are reinspired or abandoned or forgotten. What seemed obvious may become vague and disarrayed through a thousand confusions till a kind of balance and clarity is restored, perhaps. Across the years I have become a collector of images and voices from the places I have travelled. Now I rest them in this document and invite readers to teeter on the edge of a mysterious condition, the undulations of knowing and unknowing. Edging towards an ending, I arrive where I once imagined and yet it is not the same place, cannot be. I want to resist thinking of this project as concluded, as that would contradict the spirit of spacious engagement I have pursued. While the closing words will remain so, no final answers are sought, just an inclination to change the shape of future questions to know what cannot be known now.

Forward Looking Questions

Prior to reviewing some relevant features of this study, I want to query and briefly respond to thoughts I am left with as a consequence of the conversations with counsellors and psychotherapists. First, was I able to achieve a viable research methodology that respected the diversities of cultural experiences? I believe the

reflexive narrative approach made it possible to carefully explore the particularities of events and their interpretations, a precondition for the creation of diverse knowledges. Given the richly interlaced stories told and the ways in which Australian and Bhutanese partners nuanced mindfulness in various contexts, I would claim we achieved an openness to, and understanding about, each other's lives and communities that did not exist before we joined this project. And yet I wonder whether the construction of a methodology informed by Western philosophies that require people to become so noticeable, to individualise voice and agency, is a cultural fit for Bhutan. Certainly during their interviews, and it may not always have come through in words, the Bhutanese partners in particular often declined to elevate themselves as possessors and speakers of unique knowledges and experiences. This produced a tension between an approach that seeks to privilege narrative distinctiveness and the cultural imperatives of modesty and restraint, where personal acts of meaning are profoundly socialised. Despite my ethical aspirations, I contributed to this predicament on occasions by sliding into decontextualising stories and positioning narrators in both countries as discrete and autonomous actors making their way through the world, my own cultural conditioning exposed. I sought to remain aware of these tendencies and complications by reminding myself of local social arrangements I observed when living in Bhutan, establishing an ongoing critical subjectivity, deploying the relational group design and consulting with my supervisors. Yet these efforts only serve to underscore the need to consider how research approaches that are embedded in Western conceptual assumptions may be undertaken thoughtfully with cultures which have different views on self and relationships.

Second, could it be that I compromised the research design by not giving a penultimate draft of the thesis to the counsellors and psychotherapists for their review? The collaborative design of this project aspired to a non-exploitive and justice-based ethic of care. To enact this commitment, I sent a *Biographic Impression* to each partner interviewed, requesting the person to raise any concerns about my understandings and asking whether there was anything they wanted to add or change. Some took up that offer. Likewise, following the second round of interviews a few people gave me their comments. I also offered partners the opportunity to read the transcripts of the meeting when they were the principal

interviewee, inviting them to clarify any remarks. No one took this up which I assumed meant that they were content with the conversation, had other important matters to address or did not have time. Perhaps all of these, and more. Given these circumstances, I decided not to send a draft of the entire thesis, mainly because I did not want partners to experience an obligation to respond. There was another reason. I encountered a common researcher's predicament: a surfeit of possible directions and themes when studying the details of the interviews. Like others, I was impelled to select what ended up in this document and how much to emphasise certain aspects, my choices guided by a range of factors, not the least of which were the pragmatic considerations of the length of the thesis and its timely completion. While all of these played into my ultimate decision, I am left somewhat uneasy given my preferred ethical postures. I am not suggesting this problem would be easily resolved by merely sending a penultimate draft to the partners. But I do think, if there had been time, I would have preferred to make them an offer, being clear that I did not expect a reply and there would be limits as to what I might be able to incorporate or change. The more I think about it the more complex it appears, highlighting the need for future consideration and the possibility of guidelines that would be transparent from the outset of a project.

Third, might a more extensive analysis of the differences between *Theravada* and *Mahayana* views and practices have enriched the interpretation of partners' interviews? At various places I have commented on certain distinguishing features of these two schools of Buddhism, especially concerning the student and teacher relationship and the ways in which practitioners are taught to intentionally shape their thoughts and actions. I did not pursue these directions further for a number of reasons, the most important being the partners did not give them significant and explicit attention, even though I was open to this course. I surmise this occurred, in part, because they used our limited time together to ensure their committed pathways were understood by me and the outsider witnesses. And it is conceivable that none were familiar enough with both schools to offer comparative observations of their intricate systems of teachings and social arrangements. Nonetheless, some differences and similarities did surface through our conversations which suggest other pathways for research to understand the ways in which mindfulness is conceived by practitioners in counselling and psychotherapy.

Positioning the Project

Professional literature in the West has tended to adopt mechanistic metaphors when developing systems of measurement in psychological and brain-based biological sciences to explain mindfulness, a scientific pragmatism emerging from the Western Enlightenment that posits empirical realities can be known objectively and rationally. The guiding principles or conditions for knowing are determinism, efficiency, precision, and the repetition of actions, the aim being to replicate outcomes. The primary philosophical stance is control and mastery over the objects under scrutiny. This includes psychological mastery over an inherent self which, through various forms of possessive individualism, becomes socially praiseworthy. Such explanatory schemas situate a locus of control with this internal essence so, inadvertently or not, reifying the idea of an autonomous being. With this belief in place, descriptions of mental mechanisms and computations attempt to establish causality and identify the essences of conditions and factors. Texts that subscribe to these views posit there are discoverable facts which can be tabled, analysed, and quantified. Manualised, measurable and outcomes-focused techniques are the ambitious endpoints.

Mindfulness, including formal meditation and its results, is regularly reported as an individual developmental and hierarchical stage-like process, the extent and quality of which will be accurately plotted eventually. Usually it is conceptualised as a natural mental state, a psychological process, a technique or series of techniques, and a set of learnable skills which can be cultivated for human physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual growth. Research has often been with people who are described as having a medical or psychological diagnosis. Almost invariably reports state that once achieved, and more or less stabilised, mindfulness brings discernible positive behavioural change, emotional regulation, memory improvements, cognitive control and attentional balance. In my reading, the vast majority of articles and books across professional disciplines lean strongly towards these views.

While scientific power/legitimacy is conferred on these studies, confusions remain. Most rely substantially on a limited number of high-status psychological approaches,

resulting in a discursive circularity and insularity of expert knowledges. As I have made clear, there is debate in the professional literature over the lack of viable operational definitions and valid measuring instruments. Research outcomes based on participants' subjective self-reports sit restlessly in an objectivist world. It is plausible that the positive effects in groups designed to address mental health problems are attained through a range of factors including sharing an issue of concern with others and the expectations conveyed in labelling the program as scientifically-validated.

The overwhelming tendency is to frame mindfulness in the language of acceptance, non-judgement, nonconceptuality, present moment awareness and kindness. Although the term construct is used when proposing such characterisations of mindfulness there remains the unspoken tendency to assume that language is neutrally representing mental activities, in contrast to a stance on language where words are not innocent echoes of an inherent reality but interpretive actions that establish the objects to which they refer. Inquiries into an object create responses and associated storylines relative to the context of these discursive constructions. Questions framed in reductive biological or psychological languages will produce reductive biological or psychological answers as if what is being measured pre-exists the system of observation. Thus, although a reductive science provides a legitimising frame for counsellors and psychotherapists and may ease uncertainties with a comforting appeal to consistency and authority, this compulsion can have the unfortunate effect of erasing the interdependence of phenomena and observers. It can decontextualise social and cultural influences.

Some practitioners within Buddhist and professional contexts see the selective appropriation of mindfulness and its commodification as a secular skills-based program as understandable in consumerist cultures, and as very limited for enhancing social and spiritual wellness. They point to current ways of working that ignore the political aspects of human suffering and which may inadvertently support unjust neoliberal economic and social systems. They have been critical of Western writers who draw from Buddhism to secularise techniques and erase ethical reasons for cultivating mindfulness. And they speak out against a supposedly impartial and acultural scientific materialism which flattens the diversity of interpretations of

mindfulness and its applications as found in sacred ancient and contemporary Buddhist texts (Bodhi, 2011; Dawson & Turnbull, 2006; Hickey, 2010a; Purser, 2015; Safran, 2014; Stanley, 2013a, 2013b).

My personal and professional interests in spiritualities and Buddhist mindfulness, and my close ties with Bhutan, led me to speculate on the issues raised by these critiques for counsellors and psychotherapists in Australia and Bhutan. In pursuing this project I turned to previous research and specific therapeutic approaches that recognise people's storied knowledges of their lives and relationships are highly shaped by social and cultural beliefs and values (Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1999; Percy, 2006; M. White, 1995a). In admittedly partial ways, I consulted van Lagenhove and Harré's (1999) discursive positioning, Foucault's assertions on power/knowledge (1988) and Denzin's ideas about the performative potentials of narrative research (2001, 2003). From these explorations, a reflexive and dialogic narrative method was adopted as a heuristic metaphor, primarily to explore the personal and professional life stories of counsellors and psychotherapists who identified as mindfulness practitioners. I will not restate my grounds for choosing this approach but will focus on the salient features of the principal interviews with the five Bhutanese and six Australians.

Four segments were designed to cast the conversational partners as present witnesses to each other's and their own retrodictive storymaking, the intention being to create frequent opportunities for them to step into reflective spaces and review the flow of dialogues as they emerged. They were encouraged to move in and out of being central protagonists, thoughtful listeners, and responsive commentators on what was expressed, occupying different positionings vis-à-vis each other. For the Second Tier of interviews I created another version of outsider witnessing to accommodate the changed circumstances of Bhutanese partners' lives. In both of these arrangements, considerable efforts were put by partners into revising their words as they spoke, sometimes pausing in hesitant silences before continuing, in order to ensure a resonant similitude between their lived experiences and their storied portrayals. Partners did not give a straightforward mirroring of what happened. A narrative intelligibility was required to translate sensory phenomena into social communications of the corporeal, dialogical and textual kind.

They not only regularly and passionately implicated others who had played a part in developing their understandings and skills about mindfulness and therapy, they connected other group members to their accounts. Once revealed and put into circulation, the stories could not be possessed. Each unfurled in unpredictable and distinctive ways. Recursive meaning-making was at work. What became evident was that interviews with one person were not with an independent individual and those with groups of respondents were not community encounters. All interviews were both individual and communal simultaneously, though different interviewing strategies turned up different potentials for storying events.

In moving across a number of interview sites, further opportunities ensued to support or revise and reauthorise knowledges, highlighting the fleeting, incomplete and unrepeatable temporal features of our efforts. This experience-based scaffolding of the conversations invited partners into generative cultural knowledges. They produced a range of assertions, understandings and conclusions, albeit often tentative, about mindfulness and its practices. Perhaps this is somewhat analogous to improvisational theatre where people enact a version of past lived experiences within the parameters of a nominated scene. Audiences respond from their own worlds of experience and meaning to which the actors then reply and so forth. Inviting research participants to enter the theatre of memory and imagination as central actors and audiences made it possible for a certain perception of oneself to be recognised and considered and reconsidered throughout our live performances, and afterwards. As this time-stretched design continued, we expressed ourselves to each other and to ourselves, created dialogues and were created by dialogues from the particulars of our coordinated efforts, a phonological looping that opened up and extended perspectives. Accounts took on a polyvocal and poly-gestured texture, the play of a storied sense of self being established through meaning-making at the intersection of the corporeal and the sociocultural.

At times, such perspectival knowing was not merely reframing an episode or a period of time but rather a performative relocation of the teller into new landscapes of action and identity. Partners saw lived experiences from other vantage points and made new claims to knowledges. When I started this project, I conceived of the interviews only as social-relational performances but it soon became plausible to see

all activities associated with this research as performative including the reading of transcripts and the writing of this document. Going down this design route was time consuming but it enriched conversations within each group and in dialogues between the Australians and Bhutanese.

After each interview I fashioned a *Biographic Impression*, gathering together the stories of the central protagonist in a global and succinct way, attending especially to events that expressed their observations, values, attitudes and identity claims. Once completed these were shared with the research partners. I then fragmented the transcripts into central themes. This, paradoxically, often unified the partners in shared beliefs and ethics. It also led to identifying differences and similarities in the ways they understood mindfulness within their cultural contexts. Partners commented positively on the design and process of this life course approach to research. For instance, Arabella said “hearing people’s reflections, [is] like looking at yourself in a mirror” [so you can know what you know]; Ann was “grateful...to do [the research] in this manner because there are so many other ways to do this that are tighter...this process is very, very juicy...very alive”; Elise thought the approach led to asking “questions that I mightn’t have asked myself”; and Yeshey experienced it as “non-threatening and respectful”. Dendup’s words captured my hope for the design

Witnessing the talk and later coming back to the talk. I think that is wonderful because the ones who are listening have heard what we [the speaker] were not aware of. When they raise that, it gives us a different meaning to what we were doing [to reflect on].

Such remarks speak to my aspirations to subvert a hierarchical, one-way researcher-subject method. They offer some confirmation of a solidarity of enquiry and feelings of belonging.

Placing Mindfulness in Cultural Life and Relationships

During the interviews partners gave compelling and sensitive interpretations of prominent events associated with mindfulness that have shaped their lives. Pema and Tashi, as well as Frances, John and Jeff, offered storylines that can be parsed as progressive and smoothed, though looking carefully they are nevertheless challenging in being unexpected and considerable efforts were made to figure out what was happening. Other partners gave what can be called resolutions through deviations or disruptions. Dendup's initial disappointment of not being able to acquire material goods when he went on retreat in Thailand was positively altered through friendships forged on an arduous and eventually joyful meditation retreat. Yeshey's agitation, which can be read as a form of conscious ethical protest, grew when she placed her negative actions towards her work colleagues alongside her preferred ways of being perceived. Separated in time and space, Wangji and Ann told comparable tales about their *vipassana* retreats, both commenting on the intense struggle that ensued when they were asked to keep a close watch on the waxing and waning of impermanent phenomena in the body and mind. Arabella dispensed with Catholic nun and veterinarian as potential sources of identity and Elise contrasted the inert blandness of a consumer-clutching Australia with the potential transformations of a sacred journey in Asia. In all their stories, unpredictability usurped certainty as they responded with a readiness to enter uncharted territories. These resemblances and differences in the events chosen and the associated life trajectories created by partners were embedded in wider social circumstances. For the Bhutanese, the decisions being made by government officials regarding the appropriate ways to expand counselling services were an ever-present backdrop within which their stories were told. Under these conditions, the notion of personal choice was entwined with national imperatives. The Bhutanese partners drew on what was close to hand, blending ancient traditions and novel forms of mind training, their accounts a performance of collective agency in response to nationwide social problems. The Australians' situation was vastly different. Social and economic conditions, including the opportunity for various kinds of workplace leave arrangements, having the financial resources to travel, and being able to access Buddhist teachers from different countries and schools, shaped the possibilities for exploring alternative,

often Asian-centred, beliefs and spiritual paths. These options are inextricably linked to the fiscal and social developments in Australia after the Second World War, the commitment to a multicultural society and, more recently, the pervasiveness of electronic communications.

Research partners spoke movingly, and with admiration and gratitude, about the vitalising effects of their teachers. For the Bhutanese, at the centre of Buddhist mind training is the authentic *lama* or *Rinpoche*. To be in the physical presence of an authorised teacher or to sit before the images of revered past masters, or to recall them in memory with respectful submission, bestows immeasurable blessings for this life and later rebirths. Such actions by the partners amplified their identification with Bhutanese Buddhism, joined them together in shared beliefs and values, supported the foundational doctrine of ancient living lineages within a larger purposeful cosmology, and strengthened communal and national ties, all leading to a potent felt-sense of belonging in an everyday and transcendent sense. I came to understand that an authentic storied self for these partners was a cipher for these ubiquitous allegiances that have been historically woven into the fabric of Bhutanese life. Until recently, lay people in Bhutan have been proscribed from participating in mind training and forms of meditation except when sanctioned by religious institutions and their designated figures. More diverse views have led to a mix of spiritual and secular purposes for mindfulness.

Given their cultural setting, Australian partners did not make collective and national links to the practice of mindfulness. Even though they were all attracted to philosophies and ideals from within ancient wisdoms, they were not so unified when talking about their connections to teachers from Buddhism, or other religions and spiritual traditions, seeming to be variously committed, somewhat unsure, reserved and highly appreciative. Their mindfulness journeys were partly possible due to the kind of personal freedom that is prized in the modern West. Paradoxically, this made it possible for them to choose to belong to a minority who have committed themselves to perspectives about life and the world that are unusual and disruptive of the common material aspirations people hold in their own society. Throughout their explorations, partners in both countries were impelled to revise or invent discursive truths that blended their home-grown understandings with unfamiliar, and perhaps

untried, cultural sensibilities. Consequently, though all partners traversed similar thematic landscapes, their choices accentuate how mindfulness, while frequently framed as an internal mind training, arises within the details of their cultural histories and the uniqueness of a human life.

These divergent knowledge-making places are generative of similarities, uniqueness and novelty, as I have tried to show in this project. Authenticities can be thought of as the name given to the partners' sense of coherence when negotiating an internal felt-sense of personal integrity with their exterior expressions of their life, and the storying of their experiences with physically present people and interiorised others. In these ways, experiences and knowledges of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy are inseparable from embodied storied lives and the broader discourses of cultural meaning-making which professional practitioners must take into account. Stories can become elaborated and located in time and place giving a richer and more multifaceted sense of mindfulness than can be attained through scientific literature.

Partners took hold of two authorities: the discourses of mindfulness that bolster its professional status and the discourses of legitimacy for first-person experience. Perhaps because they have all been trained in professional academic presentations and thought an initial succinct characterisation in formal research interviews proved credibility or knowledge, or because the words resonated with their lived experiences, partners gave well-known professional and Buddhist languages to describe mindfulness. Besides these, they also personalised words to uniquely rename apparently equivalent experiences, putting accents on affective tones of kindness and joy. In doing so, they shifted mindfulness from a non-evaluative observation of passing mental activities to active cognitions and feelings, a value-laden engagement with phenomena.

In Chapter 8 I stated that a definition can be considered a linguistic category that does not uncover the facts of the object being studied or the thing in itself but is a description of a relationship between people and the designated objects. This view sees definitions as equivocal semantics that have real effects on people's lives, if "real" is taken to mean any phenomenon that produces a perceptible mental or

physiological consequence. To describe mindfulness as being present, nonconceptual, non-evaluative and involving acceptance can only be made sense of, and seen as potentially beneficial, within a community of meaning-makers. The person who seeks mindful awareness is not a receptacle for received wisdoms with the aim of duplicating those wisdoms in some transparent manner but is an active agent, a negotiator of mindfulness within the social body. This permits mindfulness approaches that are responsive to imprecise changing conditions. It invites storylines that are always exposed to unpredictable futures with unknown consequences.

As the interviews folded back upon each other, we stepped into our multivoiced selves, becoming together who we think we might be becoming. We straddled numerous bifurcating tensions such as intrinsic/constituted, individual interiority/social exteriority, bounded/porous, the known past me/the predicted future me, authentic/false, body/mind, spiritual/secular, local/global, self/other, self/nonself, East/West, Bhutanese/Australian, secular/Buddhist, *Theravada/Mahayana*, tradition/modern and researcher/researched. Though the slash between the words may seem to indicate these are distinct binaries, they interdependently arise as nondual transitional states, mediated sites of contestation and conciliation. Indeed, on a number of occasions when partners revealed their histories, they altered the meanings of events as they spoke them. This changed their memories and, in turn, recomposed their sense of themselves both in the present and the past. The recognition of this narrative sense of self as situated, dialogical, plural and performative is in contrast with the notion of an invariant core being who, once realised, will be unswervingly constant regardless of conditions and contexts. If the experienced continuity of an everyday storied personhood is interdependently conditioned and has no inherent essence then the follow-on, intellectually understood to begin with, is that the appearance of a self is constantly in draft form. The notion of a separate “we” and “other” dissolves. A realisation of nondual selflessness, a knowing that “I” and “others” are continuously in relationship to all that exists and that “we” are co-produced, may bring a heartfelt everyday commitment to the personal and social wellbeing of the linguistic designations “others” and “oneself”. This becoming person can be connected to the Buddhist belief that the appearance of self is constituted through the continuous interrelationships of the five aggregates or composites (*khandhas* / *skandhas* | *phungpo*) which can be described as physical

sensations, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and discriminative consciousness. Neither is there a separate self who is relating to a context, nor is there a pure self-in-context, nor a pure self-as-context. Selves and contexts are constituted co-emergently. Persons live in worlds of experience and worlds live in persons.

The research partners emphasised the importance of committing to an everyday mindfulness to enhance therapeutic flexibility. Mindfulness was linked to remembering, or not forgetting, to be present with benevolent intentions. Partners gave various ways to apply mindfulness for different therapeutic purposes such as settling the body and mind and enacting life-enhancing values and actions, the latter highlighting the contribution of mindfulness to critical thinking. This took mindfulness beyond present moment awareness to its ethical purposes. Applications were underpinned by aspirations for a non-possessive spaciousness that attends closely to the sufferings and predicaments of others and oneself with an enduring compassionate heart.

Through their narratives it became vividly clear that mindfulness went far beyond stress reduction or lessening depression and towards an experiential and participatory view of life and relationships where people co-construct their knowledges. While it offers no guarantee of enacting an ethical self, mindfulness does give methods to finely train perception and wise understanding. It can contribute to making visible the relational and contextual settings of people's lives so that an ethical engagement with others and the natural environment is more likely. Mindfulness can assist in detecting movements away from or towards the relational responsibilities of fairness, care, respect, generosity, compassion, social justice, dignity and so forth. It plays a part in a person choosing to remember what they want to remember. This critical role of mindfulness was evident during the interviews when partners ethically composed their lives by leaning towards plotlines with explicit or implicit life-affirming stances and refusing to neatly separate the personal, psychological, social and cultural. The term self-formations was adopted to describe these provisional and plural movements of intentional ethical purposes. Though they intend its meaning variously, I think both Foucault and Buddhist practitioners would agree that self and ethics are reciprocally implicative and that storied self-formations are provisional

designations requiring continuous ethical commitments. Producing a plausible and ethical self-formation consists not only in identifying cultural agreements and resonances but oppositions and refusals too. An embodied mindfulness is inescapably involved in choosing these self-forming activities, in the politics of remembering and action. Thus, depictions and applications of mindfulness in research and direct practice can be ethicised for the alleviation of suffering in its innumerable forms, including for the purpose of deconstructing and addressing any negative or oppressive effects arising from cultural, social and religious arrangements of power.

I came to see the partners' performatives as an engagement with myriad discursive and nondiscursive experiences, their unique lives expressing both idiosyncratic and common human struggles, a synthesis of the poetic, the pragmatic and the philosophical. Their tenacious hopefulness was inspirational when they spoke to the therapeutic potentials of mindfulness in day-to-day personal and professional life. Storying their lives and appreciating the effects of sociocultural discourses offered richer ways of understanding the appearance of mindfulness as relational and contextual, as reliant on notions of interdependence and nonself.

Following this research study, I propose that counsellors and psychotherapists take greater account of people's narrated histories, their meaning-making resources, the particulars of their cultures and social contexts, the ethics of relationality, and the ways in which all of these are shaped by power relations within contested discourses. I am arguing for dialogical spaces where professional practitioners may further explore and understand the sociocultural and political lenses through which an asserted mindfulness is experienced. My hope is this project may encourage these conversations and produce varied ways of knowledge-making and deploying mindfulness including through Buddhist contemplative traditions, embodied subjectivities, modernist sciences and sociocultural discourses on justice, human rights and responsibilities, and the dignity of peoples. Mindfulness does not speak for itself. A continuous discursive generosity and an openhearted willingness is required to engage in imaginative endeavours that welcome the uncertainties, incongruities and intricacies of human life, to contribute to a multiplicity of relational forms, and to move beyond what is known.

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Glossary

The thesis contains a number of non-English language terms from various Buddhist traditions. To assist the reader, a list of brief common translations is given below. Further explanations of these terms can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/glossary.html#b>

<http://www.buddhanet.net/>

<http://www.dharma.org/resources/glossary>

<http://www.lamayeshe.com/glossary>

<http://kadampa.org/reference/glossary-of-buddhist-terms>

Pali (P) Sanskrit (S) Tibetan (T)

Thai (Th) Burmese (B) Dzongkha (D)

Abhidhamma (P) *Abhidharma* (S)

schematic classifications of Buddhist phenomenology and soteriology

Ajahn (Th)

a Thai teacher of Buddhism

anatta (P) *anatman* (S) *bdag med* (T)

not-self, nonself, the absence of an inherent self-nature

anicca (P) *anitya* (S) *mi rtag pa* (T)

impermanence

arahant (P)

a person who has abandoned the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth; enlightened person

asana (S)

yoga postures

Avalokitesvara (S) *Chenrezig* (T)

the embodiment of the compassion of all the Buddhas

bag yoe (T)

carefulness

bhakti (S)

devotional worship, guru devotion

Bodhisatta (P) *Bodhisattva* (S) *byang chub sems dpa'* (T)

a practitioner who wishes to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings

Choeyki (T)

traditional language of Tibet

Dhamma (P) *Dharma* (S)

the Buddha's teachings

Drukpa Kagyu (D, T)

the official national Buddhist religion of Bhutan

dukkha (P) *duhkha* (S) *sdug bsngal* (T)

the unsatisfactoriness of all phenomena

Dzongkha

the national language of Bhutan

Dzongkhag (D)

an administrative and judicial district of Bhutan

gho (D)

traditional clothing for Bhutanese men

gom (T)

Tibetan meditation

Kagyü (T)

a school of Tibetan Buddhism

kamma (P) *karma* (S) *las* (T)

intentional actions of body, speech, and mind that lead to becoming and birth; virtuous actions create wellbeing and negative actions produce suffering

khandhas (P) *skandhas* (S) *phungpo* (T)

the five aggregates of physical sensations, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and discriminative consciousness

kilesas (P) *klesas* (S) *nyon mongs* (T)

afflictive mental states

lama (T)

a spiritual teacher or mentor; respected spiritual adept

Mahayana (S) *theg pa chen po* (T)

a school of Buddhism prevalent in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Tibet, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia,

nibbana (P) *nirvana* (S)

liberation from samsara

Nyingma (T)

a school of Tibetan Buddhism

ngondro (T)

preliminary practices of Tibetan Buddhism

Padmasambhava (S)

Guru Rinpoche, 8th-century Indian Buddhist master; founder of Tibetan Buddhism

pranayama (S)

yoga breathing exercises

Rimé

a nonpartisan Buddhist movement

Rinpoche (T)

an honorific meaning precious one; given to esteemed Buddhist monks

Sakya (T)

a school of Tibetan Buddhism

samadhi (S) *ting nge 'dzin* (T)

concentration; meditative absorption

samatha (P) *shamatha* (S) *shyiné* (T)

a meditative practice with the aim of stabilising the mindstream through single-pointed attention

samma-sati (P) *samyak-smṛti* (S)

skilful or true mindfulness

samsara (S)

the cycle of death and rebirth

sangha (P, S)

the community of monks and nuns

sanyas (S)

renunciation from conventional life

sati (P) *smṛti* (S) *dran pa* (T)

mindfulness

sati-sambojjhanga (P) *sapta-bodhyanga* (S)

the seven factors of awakening: mindfulness, investigation, enthusiasm, rapture or joy, poise, concentration, and equanimity

sunnata (P) *sunyata/shunyata* (S) *stong nyid* (T)

all conditioned phenomena is empty of existing inherently or independently from its own side

Sayadaw (B)

a teacher of Buddhism in Myanmar

Shakyamuni (S)

the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who taught in India 2,500 years ago

she zhin (T)

vigilance

tantric (S)

the esoteric path of Buddhism where practitioners visualise their body, speech and mental actions as those of a Buddha

Tara (S) *Dolma* (T)

the female Buddha

thangka (T)

typically a painted or embroidered scroll depicting Buddhist deities and mandalas

Theravada (P)

one of the early schools of Buddhism; prevalent in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand

Tipitaka (P)

the Pali Canon

Tsechus (D)

annual Drukpa festivals held throughout Bhutan to honour Guru *Padmasambhava Rinpoche*

Vajrayana (S)

the tantric vehicle or path of Buddhism

vassa (P) *varsah* (S)

the 3 month annual retreat observed by Theravada nuns and monks during the monsoon season in Asia

vedana (P)

feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain

vipassana (P) *vipasyana* (S) *lhak tong* (T)

a meditative practice with the aim of penetrative insight into physical and mental phenomena in terms of the three characteristics of *anatta*, *anicca* and *dukkha*

wang (T)

empowerment ritual

yang dag pa (T)

authenticity

Zen

a school of Mahayana Buddhism

Appendices

Appendix One

Letter of Invitation and Research Information Individual Interviews: Monastic and lay Dharma teachers

[Name]

[Address]

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Dear [Name]

I invite you to participate in a cross-cultural research project which seeks to explore the connections and differences between therapeutic mindfulness in Bhutan and Australia. The research is being conducted as part of a PhD course at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. It has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number OTSW-09-2011). The following is a summary of the project.

Australia and other Western countries have adopted Buddhist-inspired and secular practices of therapeutic mindfulness to address major personal and social problems such as depression, anxiety, and addictions. The Kingdom of Bhutan is expanding counselling services which will include Western approaches and mindful awareness training drawing on Buddhist traditions. Although apparently similar in purpose, the growth of mindfulness in secular societies compared to its development in a Buddhist culture may be significantly different. The aim of the research is to extend understandings about the concepts and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy.

I would like to have a one hour interview with you to understand the concepts and practices of mindfulness from the Buddhist perspective. I have attached the Interview Questions to give you some idea of the issues we might explore. I will also seek your views on other topics that may arise during the conversation. The interview will be digitally recorded and a transcribed copy will be given to you on request. The results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used and identifiable data will be altered in the final report. Even so, given the small number of interviewees, identification may still be possible and your consent to participate will be given knowing this possibility. I cannot foresee any post-research negative outcomes due to your participation. Electronic records and other interview data will be stored securely for a minimum five years at Curtin University. Access to data will be limited to the researcher, the thesis supervisors, and the thesis committee.

Please complete the attached Consent Form-Individual Interviews if you are willing to participate. You can post it using the reply-paid envelope or scan and email it to me at: ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the project please contact me. If I don't hear from you within the next month I shall contact you to find out whether you wish to be part of the study.

Should you want to make a complaint about this research on ethical grounds you may contact the Principal Investigator or the Co Investigator or the Secretary, Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 61 8 9266 2784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au or write c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845.

The research team for this study is:

Researcher	Ian Percy	ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au
	If phoning from Australia	0422 498 607
	If phoning from Bhutan	61 422 498 607

Principal Investigator Assoc Prof Fran Crawford f.crawford@curtin.edu.au
61 8 9266 3340
Co investigator Dr Angela Fielding a.fielding@curtin.edu.au
61 8 9266 7637

Thank you for considering this request. I hope you will agree to take part in this important study.

Yours sincerely

Ian Percy
BBus(Com) BSW MSW AMHSW
[Date]

Appendix Two

Consent Form – Individual Interviews

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy:
Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

I _____

have read and understood the Letter of Invitation and Research Information to participate in a research project being conducted by Ian Percy through the School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. Any questions I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give my consent to participate in the research project knowing that:

- participation is voluntary;
- I may withdraw my consent to participate at any time without reason, comment or penalty;
- the interview will be recorded and a transcribed copy will be given to me if I request it;
- I will be offered the opportunity to alter, clarify, or delete any part of the interview prior to the submission of the thesis;
- the digital recording and transcript will be held in a secure location by Ian Percy for a minimum period of five years following which they will be destroyed;
- whilst every endeavour will be made by Ian Percy to maintain confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity, there is some risk of identification due to the relatively small number of participants and the subject under consideration;
- the results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

Signed _____

Date _____

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Following receipt of this Consent Form you will be contacted to arrange a time and place for the interview. A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Appendix Three

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Interview Questions

Monastic and lay Dharma teachers

What do you think about when you hear the word ‘mindfulness’?

What is your understanding of mindfulness?

How would you describe the practices of mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition?

Can you help me understand the history of your connection to the practice of mindfulness?

In what ways does mindfulness play a part in your life now?

In what ways does mindfulness play a part in your teaching now?

Can you tell me a story that would help me understand more about how you have used mindfulness, or how you might use it, as a practice?

Are there particular notions of self that you think are part of mindfulness practices?

Are there particular ethics that you think are part of mindfulness practices?

When you think of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia, are there some connections you know about or think might exist?

When you think of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia, are there some differences you know about or think might exist?

Appendix Four

Letter of Invitation and Research Information

Individual Interviews: Senior government and private sector managers

[Name]

[Address]

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Dear [Name]

I invite you to participate in a cross-cultural research project which seeks to explore the connections and differences between therapeutic mindfulness in Bhutan and Australia. The research is being conducted as part of a PhD course at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. It has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number OTSW-09-2011). The following is a summary of the project.

Australia and other Western countries have adopted Buddhist-inspired and secular practices of therapeutic mindfulness to address major personal and social problems such as depression, anxiety, and addictions. The Kingdom of Bhutan is expanding counselling services which will include Western approaches and mindful awareness training drawing on Buddhist traditions. Although apparently similar in purpose, the growth of mindfulness in secular societies compared to its development in a Buddhist culture may be significantly different. The aim of the research is to extend understandings about the concepts and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy.

I would like to have a one hour interview with you to understand your personal and professional experiences of mindfulness. I have attached the Interview Questions to give you some idea of the issues we might explore. I will also seek your views on

other topics that may arise during the conversation. The interview will be digitally recorded and a transcribed copy will be given to you on request. The results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used and identifiable data will be altered in the final report. Even so, given the small number of interviewees, identification may still be possible and your consent to participate will be given knowing this possibility. I cannot foresee any post-research negative outcomes due to your participation. Electronic records and other interview data will be stored securely for a minimum five years at Curtin University. Access to data will be limited to the researcher, the thesis supervisors, and the thesis committee.

Please complete the attached Consent Form-Individual Interviews if you are willing to participate. You can post it using the reply-paid envelope or scan and email it to me at: ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the project please contact me. If I don't hear from you within the next month I shall contact you to find out whether you wish to be part of the study.

Should you want to make a complaint about this research on ethical grounds you may contact the Principal Investigator or the Co Investigator or the Secretary, Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 61 8 9266 2784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au or write c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845.

The research team for this study is:

Researcher	Ian Percy	ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au
	If phoning from Australia	0422 498 607
	If phoning from Bhutan	61 422 498 607
Principal Investigator	Assoc Prof Fran Crawford	f.crawford@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 3340

Co investigator

Dr Angela Fielding

a.fielding@curtin.edu.au

61 8 9266 7637

Thank you for considering this request. I hope you will agree to take part in this important study.

Yours sincerely

Ian Percy

BBus(Com) BSW MSW AMHSW

[Date]

Appendix Five

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Interview Questions

Senior government and private sector managers

What do you think about when you hear the word ‘mindfulness’?

What is your understanding of mindfulness?

How would you describe the practices of mindfulness in your areas of influence?

Can you tell me a story that would help me understand more about how you have used mindfulness, or how you might use it, in your areas of influence?

Can you help me understand the history of your professional connection to the practice of mindfulness?

In what ways does mindfulness play a part in your professional life now?

Can you help me understand the history of your personal connection to the practice of mindfulness?

In what ways does mindfulness practice play a part in your personal life now?

Are there particular notions of self that you think are part of mindfulness practices?

Are there particular ethics that you think are part of mindfulness practices?

For you, is mindfulness connected to the Buddhist tradition, or not?

If yes, can you speak about your understanding of the principles and practices of Buddhist mindfulness?

If no, how is it not connected?

When you think of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia, are there some connections you know about or think might exist?

When you think of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia, are there some differences you know about or think might exist?

Appendix Six

Letter of Invitation and Research Information Group Interviews: Counsellors and psychotherapists Perth

[Name]

[Address]

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy:
Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Dear [Name]

I invite you to participate in a cross-cultural research project which seeks to explore the connections and differences between therapeutic mindfulness in Bhutan and Australia. The research is being conducted as part of a PhD course at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. It has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number OTSW-09-2011). The following is a summary of the project.

Australia and other Western countries have adopted Buddhist-inspired and secular practices of therapeutic mindfulness to address major personal and social problems such as depression, anxiety, and addictions. The Kingdom of Bhutan is expanding counselling services which will include Western approaches and mindful awareness training drawing on Buddhist traditions. Although apparently similar in purpose, the growth of mindfulness in secular societies compared to its development in a Buddhist culture may be significantly different. The aim of the research is to extend understandings about the concepts and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy.

I invite you to join a small group of six people to consider personal and professional experiences of mindfulness concepts and practices. I have attached the Interview Questions to give you some idea of the issues we might explore. I will also seek your views on other topics that may arise during the conversation. The group will be

interactive with one person being interviewed each meeting while other people reflect on the interview. There will be some contact with Bhutanese colleagues through me as I will send them a summary of the Perth interviews and any questions you have about mindfulness or mind training in Bhutan.

Initially there will be six meetings of approximately 2 hours duration each. These will occur during November and December 2011. I will then meet with the research groups in Bhutan in February 2012. The Perth group will meet again in the middle of 2012 for just three more meetings, in part to respond to Bhutanese queries about mindfulness in Australia. The final meetings in Bhutan will take place in October 2012. All interviews will be digitally recorded and a transcribed copy of your interview will be given to you on request. The results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

I appreciate that participation in this study will require a considerable amount of your time and cooperation. Taking part is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used and identifiable data will be altered in the final report. Even so, given the small number of interviewees, identification may still be possible and your consent to participate will be given knowing this possibility. I cannot foresee any post-research negative outcomes due to your participation. Electronic records and other interview data will be stored securely for a minimum five years at Curtin University. Access to data will be limited to the researcher, the thesis supervisors, and the thesis committee.

Please complete the attached Consent Form-Individual Interviews if you are willing to participate. You can post it using the reply-paid envelope or scan and email it to me at: ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the project please contact me. If I don't hear from you soon I shall contact you to find out whether you wish to be part of the study.

Should you want to make a complaint about this research on ethical grounds you may contact the Principal Investigator or the Co Investigator or the Secretary, Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 61 8 9266 2784 or

hrec@curtin.edu.au or write c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845.

The research team for this study is:

Researcher	Ian Percy	ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au
	If phoning from Australia	0422 498 607
	If phoning from Bhutan	61 422 498 607

Principal Investigator	Assoc Prof Fran Crawford	f.crawford@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 3340

Co investigator	Dr Angela Fielding	a.fielding@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 7637

Thank you for considering this request. I hope you will agree to take part in this important study.

Yours sincerely

Ian Percy
BBus(Com) BSW MSW AMHSW
[Date]

Appendix Seven

Letter of Invitation and Research Information

Group Interviews: Counsellors and psychotherapists Thimphu, Bhutan

[Name]

[Address]

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Dear [Name]

I invite you to participate in a cross-cultural research project which seeks to explore the connections and differences between therapeutic mindfulness in Bhutan and Australia. The research is being conducted as part of a PhD course at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. It has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number OTSW-09-2011). The following is a summary of the project.

Australia and other Western countries have adopted Buddhist-inspired and secular practices of therapeutic mindfulness to address major personal and social problems such as depression, anxiety, and addictions. The Kingdom of Bhutan is expanding counselling services which will include Western approaches and mindful awareness training drawing on Buddhist traditions. Although apparently similar in purpose, the growth of mindfulness in secular societies compared to its development in a Buddhist culture may be significantly different. The aim of the research is to extend understandings about the concepts and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy.

I invite you to join a small group of four people to consider personal and professional experiences of mindfulness concepts and practices. I have attached the Interview Questions to give you some idea of the issues we might explore. I will also

seek your views on other topics that may arise during the conversation. The group will be interactive with one person being interviewed each meeting while other people reflect on the interview. There will be some contact with Australian colleagues through me as I will send them a summary of the Bhutanese interviews and any questions you have about mindfulness or mind training in Australia.

Initially there will be four meetings of approximately 2 hours duration each. These will occur in January and February 2012. I will then meet with the research group in Perth during the middle of 2012. The final meetings in Bhutan will take place in October 2012, in part to respond to Australian group members queries about mindfulness in Bhutan. All interviews will be digitally recorded and a transcribed copy of your interview will be given to you on request. The results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

I appreciate that participation in this study will require a considerable amount of time and cooperation. Taking part is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used and identifiable data will be altered in the final report. Even so, given the small number of interviewees, identification may still be possible and your consent to participate will be given knowing this possibility. I cannot foresee any post-research negative outcomes due to your participation. Electronic records and other interview data will be stored securely for a minimum five years at Curtin University. Access to data will be limited to the researcher, the thesis supervisors, and the thesis committee.

Please complete the attached Consent Form-Individual Interviews if you are willing to participate. You can post it using the reply-paid envelope or scan and email it to me at: ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the project please contact me. If I don't hear from you soon I shall contact you to find out whether you wish to be part of the study.

Should you want to make a complaint about this research on ethical grounds you may contact the Principal Investigator or the Co Investigator or the Secretary, Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 61 8 9266 2784 or

hrec@curtin.edu.au or write c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845.

The research team for this study is:

Researcher	Ian Percy	ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au
	If phoning from Australia	0422 498 607
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Principal Investigator	Assoc Prof Fran Crawford	f.crawford@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 3340

Co investigator	Dr Angela Fielding	a.fielding@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 7637

Thank you for considering this request. I hope you will agree to take part in this important study.

Yours sincerely

Ian Percy
BBus(Com) BSW MSW AMHSW
[Date]

Appendix Eight

Letter of Invitation and Research Information

Group Interviews: Counsellors and psychotherapists Samtse, Bhutan

[Name]

[Address]

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Dear [Name]

I invite you to participate in a cross-cultural research project which seeks to explore the connections and differences between therapeutic mindfulness in Bhutan and Australia. The research is being conducted as part of a PhD course at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. It has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number OTSW-09-2011). The following is a summary of the project.

Australia and other Western countries have adopted Buddhist-inspired and secular practices of therapeutic mindfulness to address major personal and social problems such as depression, anxiety, and addictions. The Kingdom of Bhutan is expanding counselling services which will include Western approaches and mindful awareness training drawing on Buddhist traditions. Although apparently similar in purpose, the growth of mindfulness in secular societies compared to its development in a Buddhist culture may be significantly different. The aim of the research is to extend understandings about the concepts and practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy.

I invite you and one other colleague to meet together with me in February 2012 so we can consider personal and professional experiences of mindfulness concepts and practices. I have attached the Interview Questions to give you some idea of the issues

we might explore. I will also seek your views on other topics that may arise during the conversation. There will be two meetings. One person will be interviewed each time with the other person listening and reflecting. There will be some contact with Perth colleagues through me as I will send them a summary of the interviews in Bhutan and any questions you have about mindfulness or mind training in Perth.

I will then meet with the Perth group in the middle of 2012 while the final meetings in Bhutan will take place in October 2012. All interviews will be digitally recorded and a transcribed copy of your interview will be given to you on request. The results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

I appreciate that participation in this study will require a considerable amount of time and cooperation. Taking part is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used and identifiable data will be altered in the final report. Even so, given the small number of interviewees, identification may still be possible and your consent to participate will be given knowing this possibility. I cannot foresee any post-research negative outcomes due to your participation. Electronic records and other interview data will be stored securely for a minimum five years at Curtin University. Access to data will be limited to the researcher, the thesis supervisors, and the thesis committee.

Please complete the attached Consent Form-Individual Interviews if you are willing to participate. You can post it using the reply-paid envelope or scan and email it to me at: ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the project please contact me. If I don't hear from you soon I shall contact you to find out whether you wish to be part of the study.

Should you want to make a complaint about this research on ethical grounds you may contact the Principal Investigator or the Co Investigator or the Secretary, Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 61 8 9266 2784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au or write c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845.

The research team for this study is:

Researcher	Ian Percy	ian.percy@student.curtin.edu.au
	If phoning from Australia	0422 498 607
	If phoning from Bhutan	61 422 498 607

Principal Investigator	Assoc Prof Fran Crawford	f.crawford@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 3340

Co investigator	Dr Angela Fielding	a.fielding@curtin.edu.au
		61 8 9266 7637

Thank you for considering this request. I hope you will agree to take part in this important study.

Yours sincerely

Ian Percy

BBus(Com) BSW MSW AMHSW

[Date]

Appendix Nine

Consent Form – Group Interviews

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy:
Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

I _____

have read and understood the Letter of Invitation and Research Information to participate in a research project being conducted by Ian Percy through the School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. Any questions I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give my consent to participate in the research project knowing that:

- participation is voluntary;
- I may withdraw my consent to participate at any time without reason, comment or penalty;
- all members of the group will respect the confidentiality of all interviews;
- all interviews will be recorded and a transcribed copy of my interview will be given to me if I request it;
- I will be offered the opportunity to alter, clarify, or delete any part of my interview, or my responses to other interviews, prior to the submission of the thesis;
- digital recordings and transcripts will be held in a secure location by Ian Percy for a minimum period of five years following which they will be destroyed;
- whilst every endeavour will be made by Ian Percy to maintain confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity, there is some risk of identification due to the relatively small number of participants and the subject under consideration;
- the results of this study may be published in professional reports and journals.

Signed _____

Date _____

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Following receipt of this Consent Form you will be contacted to arrange a time and place for the interview. A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Appendix Ten

Narratives of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy: Cultural convergences and divergences between Bhutan and Australia

Interview Questions Counsellors and psychotherapists

What do you think about when you hear the word ‘mindfulness’?

What is your understanding of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy?

How would you describe the practices of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy?

In what ways does mindfulness play a part in your professional life now?

Can you tell me a story that would help me understand more about how you have used mindfulness, or how you might use it, as a professional practice?

Can you help me understand the history of your professional connection to the practice of mindfulness?

Can you help me understand the history of your personal connection to the practice of mindfulness?

In what ways does mindfulness practice play a part in your personal life now?

Are there particular notions of self that you think are part of mindfulness practices?

Are there particular ethics that you think are part of mindfulness practices?

For you, is mindfulness connected to the Buddhist tradition, or not?

If yes, can you speak about your understanding of the principles and practices of Buddhist mindfulness?

If no, how is it not connected?

When you think of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia, are there some connections you know about or think might exist?

When you think of mindfulness in counselling and psychotherapy in Bhutan and Australia, are there some differences you know about or think might exist?

What would you most want to convey about your understanding and practise of mindfulness to colleagues in Bhutan/Australia?

What questions about mindfulness or mind training do you have for colleagues in Bhutan/Australia?

Appendix Eleven

Sequence of Interviews

<u>Tier One</u> Perth, Western Australia Six Australians	Four-part group inquiry <ul style="list-style-type: none">• primary conversational partner interviewed• reflections from outsider witnesses and me• primary partner reinterviewed• deconstruction of the previous three parts after each interview
<i>Australian Biographic Impressions</i> sent to Bhutanese research partners -----	
Thimphu, Bhutan Three Bhutanese	Four-part group inquiry <ul style="list-style-type: none">• primary conversational partner interviewed• reflections from outsider witnesses and me• primary partner reinterviewed• deconstruction of the previous three parts after each interview
Phuntsholing, Bhutan Two Bhutanese	
<i>Bhutanese Biographic Impressions</i> sent to Australian research partners	

<u>Tier Two</u> Perth, Western Australia Five Australians	Short version of the four-part group inquiry <ul style="list-style-type: none">• primary conversational partner interviewed• reflections from outsider witnesses and me• primary partner reinterviewed• deconstruction of the previous three parts after completion of all primary interviews
<i>Australian Responses to Biographic Impressions from Bhutan</i> sent to Bhutanese research partners -----	
Bumthang, Bhutan One Bhutanese	Individual interview
Phuntsholing, Bhutan Two Bhutanese	Short version of the four-part group inquiry <ul style="list-style-type: none">• primary conversational partner interviewed• reflections from outsider witness and me• primary partner reinterviewed• deconstruction of the previous three parts after completion of both primary interviews
Thimphu, Bhutan One Bhutanese	Individual interview
Perth, Western Australia One Bhutanese	Individual interview
<i>Bhutanese Responses to Further Impressions from Australia</i> sent to Australian research partners	