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Signature:

_____ _____
David C. Saunders   Date

Self and No-Self in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

By

David Charles Saunders
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
American Religious Cultures

_____
John D. Dunne
Advisor

_____
Sara McClintock
Committee Member

_____
Bobbi Patterson
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D. Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies
_____ Date

Self and No-Self in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

By

David C. Saunders
B.A., Boston College, 2007
M.D., Weill Cornell Medical College, 2014

Advisor: John Dunne, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

Interest in the Buddhist underpinnings, clinical efficacy and neuropsychological mechanisms of mindfulness meditation has increased exponentially in the last three decades. Scholars in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, medicine, psychiatry, religious studies and philosophy, among many others, are increasingly interested in addressing these questions from their respective disciplines. This dissertation seeks to further our understanding of how mindfulness meditation modulates the self and subjectivity, approaching the topic from an inter- and multi-disciplinary perspective that relies, in part, on all of the above lines of inquiry. First, we work toward a novel formulation of the narrative self that will facilitate discussion on how mindfulness interacts with and regulates the self. Second, looking specifically at Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), we defend the claim that mindfulness exerts its beneficial effects by dereifying the narrative self. Next, we consider the ways in which Buddhist notions of no-self, as well as modernity, inform the self/no-self dynamic within primary MBSR texts. In the conclusion, we address the ways in which this study can contribute to future research in the fields of clinical medicine, neuroscience and philosophy.

Keywords: mindfulness, meditation, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Buddhism, self, selfhood, no-self, narrative self, philosophy of mind, simulation

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Kurt Vonnegut once asked his son Mark what he thought life was all about. His response: "We're here to get each other through this thing, whatever it is." For the last several years, my friends and family were helping me get through *this* thing—my dissertation. I am the beneficiary of the love, kindness, support and expertise of nearly countless friends, family members and colleagues, only a few of whom I am able to mention here.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> *We have inherited great wealth,*
> *but we behave as if we are poor.*
> *We have a treasure of enlightenment,*
> *of understanding, of love,*
> *and of joy inside us.*
> *It is time to go back*
> *to receive our inheritance.*
> *Being mindful will help us claim it.*
> *-Thich Nhat Hanh (2013, p. 66)*

1.1 Background

As a steward of the contemporary mindfulness movement, Thich Nhat Hanh's words are held in high esteem within the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) community, and they are frequently quoted in teaching materials. The quote above usefully highlights a number of prominent themes related to mindfulness and selfhood, some of which I aim to address in the dissertation that follows. Among them are themes such as: humans are inherently enlightened, imbued with deep reservoirs of love, kindness and compassion; they are endowed with great spiritual well-being but fail to realize it; the moment to reclaim one's true identity is now; and mindfulness is a method that can help one achieve that reclamation. In this way, Hanh's poem speaks to several tacit assumptions about the self and the goals of mindfulness practice that are implicit in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction source materials.

This dissertation takes a closer look at the role of the self in MBSR. Its two central topics, therefore, are mindfulness meditation and the self. I focus specifically on mindfulness practices in the contemporary West, but draw on Indo-Tibetan and East Asian mindfulness scholarship. Likewise, I approach the self from the dual perspectives

of contemporary Western and Buddhist discourse. Seeking to understand how mindfulness affects a practitioner's experience of the self, I pay particular attention to the narrative self and Buddhist notions of no-self. Altogether, the guiding thesis is that mindfulness modulates the phenomenological experience of the narrative self to generate its purported beneficial effects, such as decreased stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms and related psychological disorders.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is an eight week course that consists of weekly classes, homework assignments, daily meditation at home and a day-long silent retreat. As the juggernaut of all mindfulness practices in the West—the most thoroughly studied, most often cited and most popular—MBSR will be taken as representative of all Western mindfulness practices within this dissertation. Its founder and the de facto poster child of the mindfulness movement, Jon Kabat-Zinn, will therefore feature prominently in this dissertation. Developed in 1982 by Kabat-Zinn, MBSR was initially taught to those suffering from chronic pain, but is now taught in a panoply of clinical and non-clinical settings. During weekly two-hour meetings, an MBSR instructor teaches various contemplative practices, including yoga, seated meditation and walking meditation, and participants are expected to meditate on their own every day. In the last three decades, MBSR and similar mindfulness-based meditation practices like Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (and many more) have become increasingly popular in the United States, with increasing levels of interest in both the popular, clinical and scholarly arenas. The diverse settings in which the study and practice of mindfulness has become manifest can trace its origins, in part, to popular mid-to-late twentieth century Buddhist figures—

such as the above quoted Thich Naht Hanh, but also the Dalai Lama and Chögyam Trungpa, among others—all of whom influenced Jon Kabat-Zinn. But today, the multitude of mindfulness practitioners and scholars now comes from a broad number of academic, professional and cultural contexts. Clinicians are developing novel mindfulness-based treatments to address a variety of mental and physical disorders; scientists continue to investigate the neuropsychological underpinnings of various meditative practices, employing both experienced meditators to elucidate functions of the mind and brain and novices to study how quickly mindfulness can produce positive effects; and popular American culture appears to have embraced mindfulness as somewhat mainstream, at least to the extent that mindfulness meditation was profiled on the cover of *Time* magazine in 2014. The issue depicted a beautiful, blissful and serene woman with her eyes closed in meditative repose, alongside the words "The Mindful Revolution: finding peace in a stressed-out, digitally dependent culture may just be a matter of thinking differently."

While claims about a so-called 'mindfulness revolution' may be debatable, that a burgeoning cadre of scholars and clinicians is increasingly interested in investigating how mindfulness produces its effects is unequivocal. From scholars of religion to neuroscientists, clinical psychologists and contemplative practitioners, a wide array of experts has attempted (with varying degrees of success) to describe the cognitive mechanisms underlying mindfulness practices. These mechanisms, as they are called, amount to empirical, hypothetical or theoretical explanations for how mindfulness meditation exerts its purported transformative effects—clinical, psychological or physical. But within this growing body of literature, little has been written about how

mindfulness meditation impinges on, interacts with, transforms, or otherwise affects the self—in any number of ways a self can possibly be defined. A primary impetus for this project represents an attempt to address this gap.

Very briefly, the dissertation consists of three main parts. In the first chapter, I take a well-known way of defining the self—the *narrative self*, as described by Dennett, Ricoeur and others—and 'thicken' it, by arguing that the narrative self can be more accurately described as having three dimensions: narrative content, narrative phenomenology, and narrative universe. In the second chapter, I employ the thickened narrative self heuristic to propose a mechanism by which mindfulness exerts its effects, that is, by modulation of the thickened narrative self. Third, given the Buddhist underpinnings of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, I bring Buddhist notions of no-self into the conversation, studying the ways in which Nondual Buddhist understandings of the self/no-self dynamic inform the same dynamic in the setting of contemporary mindfulness. In the conclusion, I offer some clinical considerations of the study from my perspective as a medical doctor.

1.2 Methodology and Intended Audience

This work is both inter- and multi-disciplinary. The former because my methodological approach does not stem from any single field, nor do I address a prescribed set of scholars from one particular discipline. Interdisciplinary methodology, of course, is neither novel, nor particularly problematic. But it is noteworthy in this case because the success of the project is predicated on being able to present a study on mindfulness and selfhood to disciplines that at first glance may not be interested in or related to either mindfulness meditation or the self. The methodology takes root in the

liminal spaces between disciplines, and the challenge is to connect with related fields, in this case the academic study of religion, psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, history and medicine. That is to say that this is also a multi-disciplinary study because in my attempts to reach those fields, I employ their various methods at times as well. For example, I first introduce the thickened narrative self within phenomenological discourse, but subsequently use Buddhist historical and cognitive psychological methods to connect with different disciplines and interlocutors in chapters two and three. The study is therefore inter-disciplinary because I do not have a single *home* methodological tradition, and it is multi-disciplinary because I use a number of methodologies to reach related fields.

If the dissertation had a home discipline, however, it would be the academic study of religion. Within that general field, this dissertation takes Buddhist studies as its main perspective, most notably the academic work on Indo-Tibetan and Zen traditions. While discussing Buddhist understandings of mindfulness and self, for example, I will frequently cite Zen and Tibetan passages as source material for MBSR literature. This may all go without saying, of course, because the topics themselves are signature Buddhist subjects. In any case, although mindfulness and self frequently manifest as secular phenomena in MBSR in the contemporary setting, I use the tools of religious studies to understand how Buddhist historical discourse on mindfulness and selfhood inform their contemporary manifestation within the mindfulness literature.

Within the academic study of Buddhism, the dissertation could be classified as a work on Buddhist modernism, with the recent works of David McMahan and Jeff Wilson serving as prime exemplars in the discipline. McMahan, for one, defines Buddhist

modernism as "forms of Buddhism that have emerged out of an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity" (D. L. McMahan, 2008, p. 6). Key elements of the new Buddhism that emerged in its encounter with modernity include demythologization, allowing Buddhism to be understood as more "scientific" rather than just belief or dogma; the notion of Buddhism as primarily a philosophy rather than a creed or religion; an insistence on Buddhism's optimism rather than the earlier Western characterizations of Buddhism as pessimistic; an activist component that stresses social engagement and equality; and, most relevant to our case, an emphasis on meditation, not only canonical meditation but also popularized and 'democratized' forms of meditation (D. L. McMahan, 2008, p. 7). This final element of Buddhist modernism—an emphasis on meditation practice—is at the core of this project, as I focus heavily on the *sin qua non* of modern Buddhism meditations, mindfulness. The last section of chapter three, I should note, focuses specifically on the role of modernity in shaping the presentation of Buddhist notions of no-self within MBSR.

Even more specifically, within the field of Buddhist modernism one could sub-classify this as a work of contemplative studies. Although contemplative studies involves other religious (and secular) traditions, Buddhism features as perhaps the most prominent religious orientation in the current study of contemplative practices. As I attempt to come to a more lucid understanding of the Buddhist underpinnings of contemporary mindfulness practices—be they Tibetan, Zen, Burmese or otherwise—scholarship by John Dunne, Rupert Gethin, Anālayo, Bhikkhu Bodhi and Georges Dreyfus are fine examples of the academic approach to contemplative Buddhist studies (and mindfulness, in particular) I hope to emulate.

In truth, of course, the study does not fit squarely within religious studies alone. This may be suggested by the fact that I have credentials that place me half in the world of healthcare and half in religious studies, perhaps a recipe for a methodological quagmire (or even personal identity crisis). But my dual allegiance to the disciplines of medicine and religious studies should not preclude this work from being a study of religion. As an example, consider Williams James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He too was a medical doctor who studied religious phenomena, in his case the phenomenology of religious practitioners and mystical experiences. Like him, I have one foot in the world of medicine, and another in religion. Interdisciplinary studies like his enrich the study of religion and religious practice by shedding light on dimensions of the subject that are obscured if only one perspective is adopted. For instance, an analysis of the efficacy of mindfulness for the treatment of depression can easily neglect the role that the religious underpinnings of the practice play in the transformation of the practitioner. Likewise, a strictly religious studies approach to mindfulness could run the risk of ignoring some of the relevant clinical findings to be gleaned from the data. In this way, the interdisciplinary perspective I bring does not preclude the dissertation from being considered a work of religious studies. Rather, the multiple perspectives in fact enhance the overall enterprise.

To that end, I employ a number of methodologies outside of religious studies, with three being particularly useful. First, a phenomenological-based philosophy of mind will serve as the starting point from which to study the narrative self. Complicating matters somewhat, the self can be approached from a variety of empirical and humanist methodologies. As one phenomenologist states with respect to the study of the self, "the

[narrative self] has found resonance not only in philosophical traditions…but also in a variety of empirical disciplines, such as developmental psychology, neuroscience and psychiatry" (Zahavi, 2005, p. 132). Because the greater part of two chapters will be spent investigating the structure, function and modulation of the narrative self, most of the disciplines noted above by Zahavi will be used or referenced throughout the text as well.

Additionally, while the practices I study have relatively ancient roots, I focus heavily on their contemporary manifestations in America. Therefore, this project could be said to represent a cultural history of one particular American religious practice—in the lineage of Catherine Albanese, Courtney Bender, Anne Harrington and Wendy Cadge. Each of these scholars has studied a particular thread of the American religious landscape that bears resemblance to the mindfulness-practicing American I am interested in studying. Albanese and Bender study "Metaphysicals" (Albanese, 2008; Bender, 2010); Harrington has written on the history of mind-body medicine in America (Harrington, 2008); and Cadge conducted a study on the 'spiritual-but-not-religious' Buddhist in America (Cadge, 2004). These works, too, employ methodologies that inform my work, namely a balance of present day cultural analysis and American cultural history.

Finally, the clinical and empirical sciences play a role in the project as well. From cognitive psychology, clinical psychology and medicine to neuroimaging and cognitive neuroscience, these empirical fields compliment the humanities approach I characterize above. As an MD/PhD with graduate training in both the sciences and humanities, furthermore, I hope that I am uniquely equipped to investigate and discuss these diverse fields, empirical or otherwise.

Given these diverse methodologies, potential interlocutors naturally come from an equally wide range of fields. But despite the broad array of disciplines employed in the dissertation, interested scholars likely stem from a relatively smaller group of individuals interested in two topics: the philosophy of self and the general phenomenon of mindfulness-based practices emerging in America today. Scholars in the religious studies who, for example, are curious as to how and why mindfulness has acquired such cultural cachet may be interested in this work as well. Some may be interested, for instance, in historical questions about how the mindfulness movement fits into a broader American religious narrative; or if the American adoption (or usurpation?) of mindfulness meditation has fundamentally transformed the practice. Scholars from any number of fields may be interested in these questions, but it is safe to say that those *most* interested in this work include individuals interested in selfhood, contemporary mindfulness practices, or both.

1.3 Outline

The goal of the first chapter is to guide the reader from a basic, intuitive understanding of the self to the notion of a *thickened* narrative self. It is comprised of three main sections. The first begins with a discussion of the opaque and indefinite term "self." The intention is to disambiguate my usage of self from the many notions of self the reader may bring to the table. We then review conventional, contemporary understandings of the narrative and embodied selves. The reason I devote considerable space to describing the embodied and narrative selves in detail is that my argument for how mindfulness affects the self (the subject of Chapter Two) relies on the reader having an adequate grasp of the narrative and embodied self literature. Because most of my

readers will not be specialists in the philosophy of self and subjectivity, I therefore devote substantial portions of the chapter to defining the two kinds of self and to reviewing prominent accounts and key features of the narrative and embodied selves. These details will also prove useful as I explain what it means to "thicken" the narrative self, as the version of the self that I wish to engage incorporates certain features of *both* the narrative and embodied selves that each of them fail to account for individually. In the third and final section, I outline the contours of the thickened narrative self, including its three dimensions: narrative phenomenology, narrative content and narrative context. My argument for its utility is briefly that it more accurately reflects the phenomenological experience of the self and the context in which the narrative takes place, and it also provides a heuristic for evaluating how mindfulness affects the self.

The second chapter consists of a proposal for how mindfulness promotes self-regulation. Guiding the chapter is the core argument that mindfulness modulates the thickened narrative self by dereification. To that end, it is composed of four main sections. First, I define mindfulness from the perspective of MBSR. In other words, because mindfulness has no definitive and authoritative referent, I articulate the way I intend to use it. This requires a foray into Buddhist historical considerations, as well as the history and development of MBSR, both of which suggest that Nondual Buddhist traditions played a dominant (if not *the* dominant) role in shaping how mindfulness is presented today.

In the next section of the chapter, I review two recent accounts of how mindfulness is thought to affect self—one by Vago and colleagues, and another by Farb and colleagues. These two approaches to mindfulness and self-regulation are valuable

contributions to the field of contemplative studies, especially as neuroscience is concerned. But ultimately, they leave me unsatisfied. I detail my criticisms for how these scientists define mindfulness, their methodological approaches and the more systematic problem of attempting to measure the self and mindfulness in neuroimaging. In response, I present their arguments as a foil for the Buddhist historical model I subsequently develop.

To that end, I next introduce the notion of simulation in cognitive psychology. Within the setting of cognitive psychology, simulation refers to the neuropsychological mechanisms that allow concept formation to take place. It also happens to be the feature of mental life that mindfulness meditation interrupts, or so I will argue. After discussing the relationship between simulation and dereification, I conclude the chapter by describing precisely how mindfulness dereifies the narratives self.

Next, Chapter Four concerns mindfulness-based practices and certain Buddhist notions of no-self. Specifically, I defend the notion that the self/no-self dynamic observed in Nondual Buddhist traditions informs that very dynamic within MBSR. In reviewing passages from both Nondual Buddhist sources and MBSR, we can see the resemblance in how our true self is presented in opposition to a false sense of self. In both cases, it seems, one's true self is inherently perfect, non-conceptual and interdependent with other beings (and one's surroundings), but hindered by the reification of simulated and dreamlike thoughts that form the narrative self we mistakenly believe to be our truest self.

In the conclusion, I summarize my arguments, offer some limitations of the study and discuss future directions for research. Additionally, I address clinical considerations

that are particularly salient for me as a medical doctor. I argue that this study can be useful for a number of reasons, most notably in advancing clinical and scientific research initiatives that seek to understand how mindfulness affects the self.

Chapter Two: Thickening the Narrative Self

> *Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition…[is] telling stories…about who we are. We do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them. Our tales are spun, but for the most part, we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source.*
>
> —*Daniel Dennett* (1991, p. 418)

2.1 Introduction

The narrative self is the conceptual linchpin of this dissertation.[1] Above, Dennett hints at two key features of most accounts of the narrative self—diachronicity and agency—and his particular version will be discussed in detail below. For now it will suffice to say that his description represents an elegant articulation of the contours of the narrative self and also serves as a useful reference point in discussing versions put forth by his many interlocutors.

The narrative, if you will, of the present chapter follows an arc connecting a broad notion of self on the one hand, and a specific and novel account of the narrative self on the other. I therefore guide the reader from a general, naive notion of the self—confused and conflated, though it is, with accounts of subject, subjectivity, personhood, identity, and so forth—to a nuanced understanding of the narrative self, and finally, to a new

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[1] There is no established convention for capitalization (or not) of "narrative self," "embodied self" other kinds of selves or "self" alone. I have chosen not to capitalize narrative self or any other kind of commonly referred to account of the self (embodied self, core self, autobiographical self). This is due to the fact that not all narratives selves refer to the same thing, nor do embodied or autobiographical selves. And often times, furthermore, one kind of self significantly overlaps with another kind of self, as in the case of the minimal and embodied selves. For these reasons, no capitalizations will be used.

account of a *thickened* narrative self. It is this novel version that will be employed in subsequent chapters throughout my analysis of the role of the self in contemporary mindfulness-based meditation practices.

This chapter offers two contributions to scholarship on the self. First, it is one of the relatively few accounts of the self that, to my knowledge, bring together phenomenological, psychological and psychosocial perspectives. Second, analyzing mindfulness practices through the lens of a novel conception of the narrative self can illuminate how particular meditations effect change in terms of experience, behavior, cognition and emotion in the psychotherapeutic setting.

2.1.1 Objectives

At the outset, I would like to offer a couple of disclaimers and explicitly state my goals for the chapter. Beginning with the former, the reader should be cautioned that this is not an exercise in metaphysics or ontology. The purpose of this essay is not to argue for any ultimate or *true* account of the self. Indeed, I do not find such a task even possible with the methods we currently have for investigating the self. We will address methodology in the next section, but for now, it is enough to say that even our best tools are insufficient for pursuing such an end.[2] In any case, a metaphysical study of the self is not my aim here. Within this chapter, therefore, I articulate one account of the self—not to the exclusion of other versions of the self—that is true in the sense that it is useful and accurate, rather than singularly authoritative and definitive.

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[2] Some scholars, it is true, do not believe such a goal will *ever* be attainable. I, on the other hand, believe that, between the humanities and empirical fields employed in the cognitive sciences, we will eventually come to a relatively more "true" account of the self than we presently have. I hesitate to claim that we will ever come to *one true account*, but suggest that we have a very, very long way to go. This chapter therefore represents my contribution to the pursuit of a *truer* account.

Relatedly, I am not looking to put forth any sort of "necessary and sufficient conditions" for a self to exist, or for an identity to persist in time. As Schectman puts it, those who pursue such an end (she calls them "Personal Identity Theorists") have a goal of "providing a criterion of personal identity over time" (Schectman, 1996, p. 7) or "a specification of the necessary and sufficient conditions for identity." That is, for Schectman, these philosophers "want to tell us what makes someone the same person at…two times," a question that she identifies as "metaphysical" (Schectman, 1996, p. 7). I am not equipped to pursue this end, but as noted above I also view such a goal as futile presently. The futility does not stem from lack of utility—metaphysical investigations of the self indeed contribute to the field—but from the fact that they will not and cannot attain their goal in the immediate future because we lack the empirical data that are necessary to understand the "necessary and sufficient conditions for selfhood." This is not the proper venue, however, for a debate on the relative importance of empirical data for elucidating an accurate description of the self.[3] The relevant point here is that this work employs psychology and phenomenology rather than metaphysics or ontology.

As a point of contrast, Dennett's seminal work on the narrative self is effectively an ontological argument: he believes that the self is purely a fiction, what he dubs the narrative self. From his perspective there is *nothing* to the self but the narrative self. It is a real, immaterial force like gravity, but as physically non-existent as gravity. This non-physical entity is produced by "streams of narrative" whose product is a unified agent that the narratives 'belong' to. He states,

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[3] Indeed, some metaphysically oriented philosophers would say that we do not need empirical data to address the question and that pure philosophical reasoning is perfectly adequate for addressing the subject.

> Like the biological self, this psychological or narrative self is yet another abstraction, not a thing in the brain, but still a remarkably robust and almost tangible attractor of properties, the 'owner of record' of whatever items and features are lying about unclaimed (Dennett, 1991, p. 418).

In other words, the self is created by the narratives that spew forth from the narrative-generating machine. The self resulting from this process is an *abstractum*, a purely abstract object—a "theorist's fiction" (Dennett, 1992, p. 1). Like gravity, which keeps planets in orbit and roots human beings and other terrestrial objects on the earth, the self also has real effects on physical materials. But both are nonetheless physically non-existent, and therefore useful *fictions*. Some of the nuances of Dennett's narrative self will be addressed in the next section but for now it is enough to say that Center of Narrative Gravity is an ontological argument that claims to be an exhaustive account of the self. Though very compelling, Dennett does not account for the phenomenological dimensions of selfhood, and this significantly weakens his argument. For example, he fails to address embodiment, interpersonal relations and cultural components of the self.

In contrast, this dissertation results from a psychological and phenomenological analysis of the narrative self, eschewing metaphysics and ontology. This is done with two goals in mind. First, I was driven by the need to devise an account of the self that could be put into conversation with mindfulness meditation practices. In other words, because I am interested in how mindfulness effects change in those who practice it, I require a theory of the self that could help explain how such changes happen. To some, this could seem tautological. It does not make sense, they may argue, to invent an arbitrary account of the self simply for the purposes of justifying an equally arbitrary explanation of how mindfulness works. I would retort that all theories of the self have implicit or explicit motivations and come from a certain perspective or frame of

reference. To claim to have an objective stance is erroneous at best and chauvinist at worst.

Second, I am guided by the intuition that present accounts of the self, including the narrative self, are incomplete and/or incorrect. In particular, I have yet to come across a theory that links the narrative and embodied selves in a satisfactory manner, although Dan Zahavi has come the closest in my estimation. Cognitive science and related fields (including psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, phenomenology, sociology, etc.) need to continue to develop new theories, experiments and hypotheses about the nature of the self. This is not because the earlier ones have failed, but because the body of work continues to build on itself. It is entirely possible (and even likely) that I will find my own account lacking in a matter of years. But the field needs a theory that connects the narrative and embodied selves in a phenomenologically, psychologically and socio-culturally accurate manner. Consider what one self theorist has to say on the matter:

> The relationship between the body and the narrative self is interactive rather than unidirectional: not only does our body shape our narrative self, but our narrative self also shapes our body. The upshot of this is a better conception of the self as a dynamic interaction between its various aspects (Brandon, 2014).

I offer a new thickened narrative self because many accounts offer compelling descriptions of the narrative self, while others do the same for the embodied self. This is important because although insightful perspectives on the narrative and embodied selves exist, few of them link narrativity to embodiment, two phenomenological aspects of the self that are particularly salient for analysis of mindfulness-based practices. Specifically, countless empirical studies in recent years have shown that cognition affects bodily functions in a very concrete manner. Consider, for example, how the phenomenological

experience of (perceived) stress can affect cortisol secretion and the regulation of inflammatory markers (Preussner, 1999). Or conversely, relatively less stressed states of mind appear to support lower blood pressure, heart and respiratory rates (Lai et al., 2005). The interaction between the narratives we inhabit and the mental and physical experience of stress is crucial for understanding the role of the narrative self in mindfulness-based practices, in which one aim is to decrease stress. Therefore, an adequate description of the self is incomplete for my purposes if it fails to account for certain crucial features of selfhood, including but not limited to embodiment.

2.1.2 Layout

After the introduction, four main sections comprise this chapter. The first (2.2) fleshes out conventional, contemporary notions of the narrative self, acknowledging the similarities and differences among the many accounts offered in contemporary philosophy of mind. I concisely review the ambiguous and ill-defined notion of the self, including a survey of the complicated, often conflicting, sometimes dizzying array of ways in which scholars have attempted to describe, circumscribe and define the self. I next highlight the general features of the narrative self, foregrounding dimensions that *all* accounts share. In other words, while Daniel Dennett's account may occasionally conflict with Marya Schectman's conception of the narrative self, which at times also differs from Dan Zahavi's account, they all nonetheless share certain similarities that are important to tease out as we move on to a discussion of the embodied self, and eventually the thickened narrative self. I then explore in greater detail the particular accounts offered by Dennett, Schectman, Zahavi and Thomas Menary. Each has written extensively on the subject and each offers a unique way of defining it. I highlight these

theorists in particular for the simple reason that my proposed account of the narrative self shares elements with the accounts of each of these authors, and appreciating their accounts will assist the reader in understanding my own. I conclude by discussing a notable adversary of the proponents of the narrative self, Galen Strawson, who usefully highlights some of its pitfalls.

The second (2.3) two is devoted to a discussion of the embodied or minimal self, two names that refer to essentially the same thing. I begin by highlighting the features of the embodied self that most individual accounts share in common, for example, its momentariness. Next, I investigate the idiosyncrasies of several notions of the embodied self, including those put forth by Zahavi, Antonio Damasio, Lynne Baker and Paul Ricoeur. Next (2.4), I discuss the relationship between the narrative and embodied self. Scholars disagree on how they relate: are they simultaneously co-occurring or sequential? Is the embodied self a prerequisite for the narrative self, or can the latter exist without the former? How does the diachronicity of the narrative self relate to the synchronicity of the embodied self? These questions and more will be addressed..

The final section (2.5) is devoted to outlining a novel, three-dimensional, *thickened* account of the narrative self. The three dimensions of the narrative self I propose are the narrative universe, narrative content and narrative phenomenology. At this point, the earlier review of some of the better-known accounts of the embodied and narrative selves will serve the reader well. My formulation incorporates some features put forth by the aforementioned authors and rejects others, ultimately synthesizing a new approach to the narrative self. This will set the stage for the following chapter, an

analysis of how mindfulness meditation modulates this *thickened* narrative self in the context of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

2.2 The Narrative Self

> *A man is always a teller of stories, he lived surrounded by*
> *his own stories and those of other people, he sees*
> *everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and*
> *he tries to live his life as if her were recounting it.*
>   *-Jean Paul Sartre (1938)*

2.2.1 The Narrative Self: One Among Many Selves

As Gallagher and Zahavi point out, when it comes to studying the self, the "first step is to recognize that there is no widespread philosophical consensus about what exactly it means to be a self" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). And as Strawson points out, "The notion of the self as we have it is much too boggy and unclear for us to answer questions like, 'Do selves exist?' and [Eric] Olson thinks we should top speaking of selves altogether" (Strawson, 1997, citing Olson, 2000). As unclear and vague as the notion of the self is, why is a brief review of the panoply of inconsistent and often incompatible definitions of self important to address? First, conversation between scholars and scientists studying the self is difficult (at best), and at times impossible, with such varied approaches to what constitutes the self. The vast array of kinds of selves present in the literature should alert the reader that my account will be completely dismissed by some as non-sense (for any number of conceivable reasons), accepted by others as viable, and everything in between. Importantly, I do not intend to eliminate disagreement by coming to a definitive conclusion about the self. Rather, I seek to develop a heuristic account that is more helpful for understanding mindfulness. Because I only offer one novel *kind* of

self—a thickened narrative self—rather than a novel self at large or even a definitive account of the narrative self, my conclusions are significantly less grandiose. I do not make claims, as mentioned above, as to what the self *truly* is, so it is naturally less universal. But what I lose in terms of universality, I gain in specificity, as the new account of the narrative self, though it is but one kind of self, is a better tool for my specific end: investigating mindfulness meditation and self-regulation.

It is useful to briefly enumerate some of the most well known articulations of what constitutes the self, at least from the perspective of contemporary philosophy of mind. In 1890, medical doctor *cum* philosopher William James first divided the self into the Me and the I, stating in his seminal volume *Principles of Psychology*, "I shall therefore treat successively of A) the self as known, or the *me*, the 'empirical ego' as it is sometimes called; and of B) the self as knower, or the I, the 'pure ego' of certain authors" (W. James, 1890, p. 174). His basis for separating out these two aspects of the self is the fact that it is partly knower and partly known, or alternatively, partly subject and partly object. He is careful not to argue that the I and the Me are separate entities, stating "I call these 'discriminated aspects,' and not separate things, because the identity of I with Me, even in the very act of their discrimination, is perhaps the most ineradicable dictum of commonsense" (W. James, 1890, p. 174). Emphasizing the identity of the I and the Me, he is perhaps keen to avoid the problems inherent in dualist notions of identity, such as the mind-body divide of Cartesian selfhood. From there, he subsequently separated out three distinct aspects of the Me: the Material, the Social and the Spiritual. The Material Me is constituted by the body, but also clothes, immediate family and home; the Social Me, on the other hand, is the recognition one gets from their family, friends and

acquaintances. James famously states, "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (W. James, 1890, p. 177). Finally, the Spiritual Me is the entire assortment of one's state of consciousness, "psychic faculties and dispositions" (W. James, 1890, p. 178).

James' division of the self into multiple aspects is important for several reasons. As Gallagher states, "Ever since William James categorized different senses of the self at the end of the 19th century, philosophers and psychologists have refined and expanded the possible variations of this concept" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 14). In this same vein, the thickened narrative self I offer below also separates out several components of the self. But others have also asserted the existence of a plurality of selves, offering anywhere from two to twenty-two kinds or aspects of the self. Dan Zahavi, who will be discussed in greater detail below, argues for two aspects, the minimal and the narrative. Strawson, on the other hand, puts forth a veritable taxonomy of selves, arguing for a number of different cognitive, contextualized, embodied, fictional, narrative and neural selves (Strawson, 1999; Zahavi, 2010).

Meanwhile, it is not only philosophers who are interested in investigating the various aspects of the self. Scientists and experimental psychologists have investigated the self in recent years as well. These include cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, both of whom have employed the scientific method to attempt to elucidate the structure(s) of selfhood. Neisser claims that there are five aspects to the self—the ecological, interpersonal, extended, private and conceptual (Neisser, 1997), and Damasio more recently describes three—the core, the autobiographical and the reflective (Damasio, 2010).

The contributions of Damasio and Neisser raise the further question of how best to study the self, a question that bears on methodology. In this regard, Gallagher's introduction to the edited volume *Oxford Handbook on the Self* is worth quoting at length, as it indicates the diversity of methodologies and gives the general impression that the self occasionally behaves like a moving target within scholarship on the self:

> [The volume] includes essays by leading representatives from areas such as analytic philosophy of mind, phenomenology, pragmatism, Buddhist studies, psychology and psychiatry, neuroscience, feminism, and postmodernism. These various analyses do not necessarily have the same target. Some critically focus on the notion of self as it has been constructed in social and cultural arrangements; others conceive of the self in terms of psychological continuity; others as a bodily manifestation. Some of the authors explore how certain aspects of self are constituted in brain processes, narratives, or actions; others explore how some aspects of self come apart in anomalous experiences, experiments, or pathologies (Gallagher, 2011, p. 2).

While the *Oxford Handbook* offers essays in a great diversity of fields, some feel that the silos of each discipline need to be broken down and a more interdisciplinary approach be adopted. Gallagher notes elsewhere that, historically, there has been an ebb and flow to the study of the self, swaying back and forth between science and philosophy, stating that a central issue is "whether the self is something spiritual (an immaterial substance), and therefore beyond any natural scientific analysis, or something that can be explained naturalistically" (Gallagher, 2011, p. 3) Debates on this very subject continue to this day. Nevertheless, studies on the self in a diverse number of fields continue, with some calling for greater integration among scholars. Tobias Schlicht and colleagues, for example, argue that "bringing together scientists from philosophy, psychology, and the neurosciences…can invaluably enrich not only this debate…but also other related debates in the currently flourishing 'mind sciences'" (Schlicht et al., 2009).

It seems that there is no consensus on what a self is, or how to study it. That is not to say that researchers have given up. As the above indicates, although the self has proven to be an opaque and mysterious entity, researchers nevertheless have employed a number of diverse fields in an attempt to elucidate its boundaries, contents and contours. My analysis, however, starts with phenomenology. More specifically, the starting point for how I understand narrativity and embodiment comes from the *experience* of self, particularly in the setting of mindfulness practices. I take meditation instructions, patient reports and my own personal experiences of meditation as the first data points for analyzing the self. Given this methodology, the following section will attempt to make clear the kind of self I will be discussing for the remainder of the dissertation.

2.2.2 Narrative Proper

Any notion of the narrative self is incomplete without (at least) a simple understanding of narrative proper. Proponents of the narrative self, most notably Ricoeur, devote significant time explicating the structure of narratives.[4] Such a detailed account is not useful in the present context, but discussing a few key features of narrative certainly is. Unfortunately, like the self, there is no definitive account of what a narrative is. As Paul Hazel states, "Due to the interdisciplinary nature of Narrative Studies there is no definitive theory, no paradigmatic definition of what a narrative actually is" (Hazel, 2007, p. 1). Nonetheless, I briefly offer three key components of narrative.

Hazel states that one of the most important aspects of narratives is the fact that they are inherently subjective. In other words, narratives have a *point of view* and

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[4] See *Time and Narrative, Volumes I-III* (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988) and *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur, 1992)

involve the selection and sequencing of events, perceptions, thoughts, and so forth, from

one particular perspective. These may be subconscious processes, especially on the level

of the narrative self, but they occur nonetheless. As Hazel argues, "a narrative is a *re-presentation* of reality from a particular perspective" (Hazel, 2007, p. 1).

Another prominent aspect of narrative is that the meaning of any given event

cannot be understood without reference to a broader, temporally extended context. As

Schectman states, "Perhaps the most salient feature of narrative form in general is that the

individual incidents and episodes in a narrative take their meaning from the broader

context of the story in which they occur" (Schectman, 1996, p. 96). Indeed, narratives

consist of a number of particulars such as physical occurrences, mental events,

happenings involving characters, and so forth. [5] But they come together as a narrative to

become more than the sum of their parts. Meaning is generated in their interplay, what

we simply call plot. Jerome Bruner adds that "these constituents do not, as it were, have

a life or meaning of their own. Their meaning is given by their place in the overall

configuration of the sequence as a whole – its plot or *fabula"* (Bruner, 1991, pp. 43–44) .

To say that a person's life takes the form of narrative, therefore, is to say that "no single

time-slice is fully intelligible – or even definable – outside the context of the life in which

it occurs" (Schectman, 1996, p. 97). Importantly, the narrative is not always wholly

intelligible,[6] but must in some sense be interpretable.

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[5] Curiously, at least one scholar argues on the basis of case studies in patients with severe neurological impairments that episodic or factual semantic knowledge about oneself is not, in fact, necessary to maintain some sense of diachronic identity, or coherent narrative (Klein, 2012). This is beyond the scope of the paper, but interesting nonetheless.

[6] Different narrative theorists, including Schectman, have varying standards of intelligibility. In other words, self-narratives have to reach a certain level of intelligibility for a being to achieve or constitute personhood. This has led some to criticize her view sharply, including Strawson, who claims that his personal life story has no intelligible narrative, so he would not be considered a person in Schectman's

Finally, although this aspect of narrative is implied in the above, I should state it explicitly as well: narratives are diachronic, or temporally extended. As Lamarque states, for something to be a narrative "at least two events must be depicted in a narrative and there must be some more or less loose, albeit non-logical relation between the events. Crucially there is a temporal dimension to the narrative" (Lamarque, 2004, p. 394). The salient point here is that all narratives have temporal extension. To theorist Richard Menary, this is all that is required for something to count as narrative, as he states, "[A] narrative in this exceptionally minimal sense requires just a sequence of events that are somehow related" (Menary, 2008, p. 64)

In sum, three key features of narrative itself are 1) that narratives *must* come from a point of view, or in other words, narratives are inherently subjective; 2) meaning within the narrative is generated by virtue of the constellation of independent events, facts, and occurrences, not the individual things themselves; 3) narratives are diachronic. These characteristics of narrative hold true with respect to the narrative self as well.

2.2.3 Key Features of the Narrative Self

Given a few key aspects of narrative proper, what are the salient qualities of the narrative self? Naturally, narrative views of the self all connect some kind of self with some version of narrative. However, the link between self and narrative is highly variable. Perhaps it is best to begin with one particular definition of the narrative self. Gallagher states that it is a "more or less coherent self (or self-image) that is constituted with a past and a future in the various stories that we and others tell about ourselves"

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view (Strawson, 2004). This will be addressed further below, where we consider criticisms of the narrative view.

(Gallagher, 2000, p. 15). Two prominent features of the narrative self are already apparent in this definition: whatever else it may consist of, the narrative self has *temporal* and *social* dimensions (unlike some other kinds of selves, which we discuss below). Additionally, the narrative self is almost always *constructed* in some way. In other words, one creates (and is created by) the narrative. Finally, although there is some disagreement on this issue within the literature, one is either the *author*, *actor* or both. One can safely state that, virtually all accounts of the narrative self include *both temporal and social dimensions*, require that narratives are *constructed*, and implicate the given self partially as agentive *author* and partially as passive *actor*, in one combination or another. We will address each of these in turn.

Another way of conveying the temporal aspect of the narrative self is to say that it is *diachronic* (Zahavi, 2007, p. 179). By diachronic, it is meant that the narrative self exists across time. Ricoeur has argued, in fact, that it is impossible to discuss selfhood or personal identity absent from the temporal dimension of being (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 138). For Ricoeur, however, human time is unique, in that it bridges the gap between phenomenological and cosmological time. Human time takes place in the form of stories, a "narrated time structured and articulated by the symbolic mediations of narratives" (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 439; Zahavi, 2005, p. 106). The narrative self relies on the coherence of a narrative or story that links birth to life and death (MacIntyre, 1985). For Ricoeur, in fact, a self ceases to be a self if it is solely aware of itself in the atemporal, first-person perspective. Temporality is a necessary feature of narrative selfhood. In this way, narrative "is not merely a way of gaining insight into the nature of an already existing self. On the contrary, the self is the product of a narratively structured life" (Zahavi,

2005, p. 107). However, not all narrative theorists hold such a hardline position. Some, such as Zahavi, Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologically oriented philosophers, merely believe that temporality is required for narrative selfhood, but not selfhood in general.[7]

Central to Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity is his distinction between identity as sameness (*mêmeté*) and identity as selfhood (*ipséité*). Identity as sameness is based on the root of *idem*, (Latin for "same"). This aspect of the narrative self is what allows one to be identified as the same thing at $time_x$ and $time_{x+1}$. It resists change and can be re-identified over time. As Zahavi states, *mêmeté* or *idem*-identity is an unchangeable substance, or substrate, that remains the same over time" (Zahavi, 2005, p. 108). *Ipséité*, or *ipse*-identity (*ipse* is Latin for "self"), on the other hand, is atemporal and synchronic. Questions regarding *mêmeté* can be answered from the third-person perspective, whereas *ipséité* is purely a first-person phenomenon. These two forms of identity exist in opposition to each other, and are united by virtue of the narrative self. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur states, "It is within the framework of narrative theory that the concrete dialectic of selfhood (*ipséité*) and sameness (*mêmeté*) …attains its fullest development" (PAGE NUMBER). *Ipséité* will be addressed below in the section on embodiment, but for now it is enough to say that Ricoeur's version of the narrative self brings together a diachronic aspect of identity (*mêmeté*) with its synchronic counterpart (*ipséité*).

Regarding the inherently social aspect of the narrative self, Zahavi succinctly points out that "one cannot be a (narrative) self on one's own, but only together with others" (Zahavi, 2005, p. 106). One's own self-narrative, as Gallagher states, "is always

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[7] Zahavi distinguishes between two narrative views. One that requires another kind of self (such as a minimal or embodied self), and another that does not. (Zahavi, 2005, 2007).

entangled in the narratives of others" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 20). Socialization of the

narrative self occurs because a narrative cannot form in a vacuum. Although I suppose

that theoretically, a narrative could be generated in isolation, functionally speaking,

narratives are inherently social phenomena. As Bruner points out, self-narratives are not

made up from scratch. They depend on conventional genres and become public things

guided by cultural models (Bruner, 1991). The story of a single individual life is

interwoven not only with the narratives of others, but it is also part of a larger socio-

historical context. Very simply: if one's narrative identity consists partially of being a

brother, then another sentient being, your brother, is required. If one identifies as a

citizen of the United States, other citizens are required, as are the structures that came

together to construct the United States. As Zahavi argues,

> To think of oneself as a citizen, an academic, a European, as hot tempered,
> handsome, clever, weak willed, amblyopic, anorectic, or anemic is to think of
> oneself by means of concepts that are embedded within diverse theoretical
> frameworks, be they of a sociological, biological, psychological, or religious
> experience (Zahavi, 2005, p. 110).

In other words, one cannot express – via narrative or otherwise – the salient

features of one's narrative self independent of concepts derived from cultural and

historical traditions, both of which are social entities. But not only the *expression* of

narratives is a social act. The *generation* of narratives is social as well, for one comes to

know themselves through participating in any number of communities, such as families,

geographic regions, professional groups, and so on.

In addition to having social and temporal dimensions, the narrative self is also

always *constructed*. In other words, the narrative self "is the product of conceiving and

organizing one's life in a certain way" (Zahavi, 2005, p. 105). Ricoeur argues that the

narrative self, simply put, is the answer to the question 'Who am I?' He argues that we answer this question by telling a certain story, including particular facts and events of our life that is deemed to be of special significant in one way or another, arranged in some sequence, all woven together (conscious and unconsciously) to become the fabric of our being (Ricoeur, 1985). The self is *created* by the very act of narration. There is no pre-existing self that the narration helps one to gain insight into. The narration itself amounts to the self. Importantly, it is constantly under revision, always incomplete and open-ended.

Related to the constructed nature of the narrative self, a final key aspect of the narrative self is the author/actor dialectic. Many narrative theorists disagree on the degree to which selves create narratives—in other words, the degree to which selves act as *authors* of their own narratives—as opposed to living out narratives that have been constructed for them—that is, the degree to which selves are *actors* in a story constructed for them. Some of the important differences with respect to the actor/author dichotomy among leading theorists will be discussed below but for now, it is enough to know that such a dichotomy exists. MacIntyre expresses this tension deftly, stating:

> We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy do we live the story we please. In life, as both Aristotle and Engels noted, we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 213).

Another way of saying this is that self-narratives are multiple-authored. If we are to assume that all narratives have a beginning, middle and end, it is evident that the beginning of each of our stories was authored by two other sentient beings (at the very least). The middle, too, is authored partially by others, as is the end. Even in the case of

suicide, where one's story comes to an end,[8] the desire to end one's own life often stems from profoundly social causes. I began this chapter with a quote from Dennett, who famously stated that "Our tales are spun, but for the most part, we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source" (Dennett, 1991, p. 418) Here Dennett elegantly articulates the actor/author tension. We are the products of our narrative selfhood because we are living out an invented narrative.[9] However, he also concedes that we are partial authors as well. This is conveyed in the above quote when he states that our tales "for the most part" spun, *but not completely*, indicating we are partial authors and not solely actors in our narratives. We will address Dennett's take on the narrative self in greater detail below.

In sum, we began this section by discussing two prominent features of narrative proper that are implicated in the narrative self. First, all narratives are subjective, or from a given point-of-view. Second, meaning is generated by putting a given event, fact or element into a broader temporally extended context. Thereafter, we addressed four aspects of the narrative self that are common to virtually all accounts, despite the fact that there are a plethora of varying approaches to the narrative self. In short, all conceptions of the narrative self are 1) temporally extended; 2) social; 3) constructed; and 4) partially actor, partially author. Having considered what is common to most notions of the narrative self, we now look in greater detail at three particular accounts of the narrative self to get a sense of the diversity of approaches within the literature.

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[8] This example raises the intriguing possibility of narrative selves existing post-mortem. Although I have not come across a discussion of this topic in the literature, it is certainly not out of the question, I would argue, that the narrative self may outlive the physical self.

[9] This will be addressed in greater detail below, but Dennett sees the brain as the author of the narrative self, and likens it to a narrative machine or robot. The brain, on his view, is not of the self, but rather the generator of then narrative self.

2.2.4 Varieties of the Narrative Self

The following section consists of a concise overview of four prominent accounts of the narrative self. For the most part, each example embraces the key features of the narrative self enumerated above, namely, temporal extension, a social dimension, constructedness and the actor/author dyad. But differences remain that are important to acknowledge to facilitate discussion of the embodied self and my proposal for the thickened narrative self below. The subsequent accounts have both strengths and weaknesses, many of which I address in my own interpretation of the narrative self.

Marya Schectman offers one of the most notable perspectives on the narrative self in her important volume *The Constitution of Selves*. In order to properly address the question of personal identity (that is, what constitutes the self), she argues that one must respond to two questions, namely the reidentification question and the characterization question. She states, "The former is the question of what makes a person at time t_2 the same person as a person at time t_1; the latter the question of which beliefs, values, desires, and other psychological features make someone the person she is" (Schectman, 1996, pp. 1–2) Without rehashing her entire argument, allow me to focus on the second question, the answer to which is the narrative self.

She defends an account of the narrative self that she calls the narrative self-constitution view. In her words, "The narrative self-constitution view says that we constitute ourselves as selves by understanding our lives as narrative in form and living accordingly…. we experience and interpret our present experiences not as isolated moments but as part of an ongoing story" (Schectman, 2011, p. 398). Here we see two key features of the narrative self, namely its temporal nature and constructedness. She

adds later that "it must be acknowledged that persons do not exist in a vacuum. The very concept of personhood is inherently connected (to)…a certain complex web of social institutions and interactions" (Schectman, 1996, p. 95). This passage emphasizes the social dimension of the narrative self. It may be helpful to mention that Schectman believes that not all sentient creatures are persons and that personhood requires "more than rudimentary consciousness" (Schectman, 1996, p. 94); for her, a sentient being that cannot formulate or construct a narrative would not be a person. Regarding the difference between an individual sentient being and a person or narrative self, she states,

> Individuals constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of themselves as persisting subjects who have had experience in the past and will continue to have experience in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs. Some but not all, individuals weave stories of their lives, and it is their doing so which makes them persons. On this view a person's identity (in the sense of the characterization question) is constituted by the content of her self-narrative... (Schectman, 1996, p. 94).

This passage highlights the fact that narrative selves are authors, as it is an active process (they "think of themselves" in narrative terms, and they "weave" stories). Importantly, she has several constraints on what "counts" as a narrative, all of which are beyond the scope of this dissertation,[10] but suffice it to say that sentient beings become persons by virtue of constituting themselves in narrative form.

Although Schectman and Dennett's accounts of the narrative self are similar in many ways, one key difference between the two is that Dennett argues that the narrative self is in fact a *fiction*. Schectman describes Dennett's view as follows: "For Dennett, the self is a fiction, but a useful fiction, like the notion of a center of gravity as it occurs in

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[10] These constraints are: the need for a person to conceive of themselves in the form of a largely linear narrative, the need to be able to articulate their narrative in one way or another, and the need for the narrative to abide by reality in some sense (Schectman, 1996, pp. 95–130). These constraints draw ire from some theorists, including most notably Strawson. His most vociferous criticism is articulated in "Against Narrativity," an article to be discussed briefly below (Strawson, 2004).

physics. There is no such *thing* as a center of narrative gravity" (Schectman, 2011, p. 397). In this way, Dennett makes an important ontological statement: selves do not actually exist in any physical way. In his words,

> What is a self? I will try to answer this question by developing an analogy with something much simpler, something which is nowhere near as puzzling as a self, but has some properties in common with selves. What I have in mind is the center of gravity of an object.

> This is a well-behaved concept in Newtonian physics. But a center of gravity is not an atom or a subatomic particle or any other physical item in the world. It has no mass; it has no color; it has no physical properties at all, except for spatio-temporal location. It is a fine example of what Hans Reichenbach would call an abstractum. It is a purely abstract object. It is, if you like, a theorist's fiction. It is not one of the real things in the universe in addition to the atoms. But it is a fiction that has nicely defined, well delineated and well behaved role within physics (Dennett, 1992, p. 102).

This quote is relatively straightforward: Dennett believes that the self is an abstractum that, although a fiction, serves a very useful purpose. Selves are simply characters in the narratives that brains spin. Dennett sees these narratives as temporally extended, socially embedded and constructed, but another key difference between his narrative self and others' is his account of the author/actor dialectic. He sees brains as narrative-generating machines – brains, in a strictly biological sense, like a computer, are authors of the narratives. The fictional narrative self (the fiction) is the protagonist in the story. From his perspective, the narrative self (and the self in general) is only a passive character in a story, rather than the author of the story. He states "we (unlike professional storytellers) do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them" (Dennett, 1991, p. 418). We often conflate the author with the actor because the "narratives stream forth as if from a single source…their effect on any audience is to encourage them to (try to) posit a unified agent…" (Dennett, 1991, p. 418).

Here, Dennett explicitly states that the idea of selves as *authors* is false. To him, selves are purely actors, protagonists, passive fictions carrying out a script written for them.

The actor/author dialectic raises intriguing questions about ethics, free will and agency. One is left to wonder if Dennett finds us responsible for the actions of the narrative self. Because Dennett believes the self is nothing other than a narrative, it may follow that all selves are not responsible or accountable for anything they say or do. Moreover, if we are all just actors performing the narrative produced by the fictional narrative self, do we have free will? These and other interesting questions are raised by his formulation of the narrative self, the details of which are beyond the scope of this dissertation. But other theorists find ethics to be a central feature of the narrative self.

Alasdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor, for example, all view the narrative self as a means to an ethical life.[11] They arrive at this account by beginning with the understandings that humans are first and foremost agents. *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* terms their accounts (different though they are in several respects) of the narrative self the "hermeneutical narrative view" because they are "self-interpreting beings" (Schectman, 2011, p. 395). So unlike in Dennett's theory, selves here are fundamentally agentive, rather than mere protagonists. Having begun with the understanding that humans are agents, they subsequently reason that agency requires narrative; thus, humans are inherently narrative in nature. Like the others, these

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[11] As Schectman states, "(a)lthough these theorists differ from each other, they also overlap in many significant respects" (Schectman, 2011, p. 395). Because a more nuanced investigation of their view is not necessary in this paper, I will similarly lump their views together as the "hermeneutical view."

narratives are diachronic, social, constructed and belong somewhere on the agent/actor

spectrum. Clearly, they are on the polar opposite side of that spectrum from Dennett.[12]

How do Ricoeur, MacIntyre and Taylor connect the agency of the narrative self to

an ethical valence (that separates their view from interlocutors)? Ricoeur's answer is as

follows:

> How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative (Ricoeur, 1991)?

In other words, narratives are the means to connect agents to ethics. To make a

narrative is to order actions in one way or another, with casual and temporal relations

among and between them. Ricoeur (and the other proponents of the Hermeneutic View)

argues that actions require a *telos* or end. A *telos*, in turn, requires a normative or

evaluative dimension, with the consequence that we live our lies in search for and aiming

toward a good (Schectman, 2011, p. 396). Obviously, this non-reductive account of the

narrative self is in direct opposition to Dennett's, where the self is reduced to a mere

fictional story produced by a biological entity. Taylor, too, resists any reductive,

naturalistic view of the self, and believes that it must be placed within a particular context

and in relation to a certain good. He argues that selfhood and the good "turn out to be

inextricably intertwined themes" (Taylor, 1991, p. 3).

The final account of the narrative self I review in this section comes from the

neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who uses the term autobiographical self. His is the only

account of the ones discussed that stems from scientific, rather than philosophical work

(although the boundary between the two is admittedly nebulous). His account is worth

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[12] Schectman, for what it is worth, sees herself somewhere in between when it comes to agency. See her article in the Oxford Handbook of the Self (Schectman, 2011, p. 398)

mentioning to emphasize the point that the avenues for discussing the narrative self are

many—metaphysics, ontology, phenomenology, psychology and even the empirical

sciences.[13] But regardless of his methodology, Damasio's account of the

autobiographical self is also sufficiently similar to the others' narrative selves to merit

consideration here.

The autobiographical self is like the narrative self in that it embraces the four key

aspects mentioned above. It is has a temporal component in that it is "made of personal

memories;" it includes the "social experiences of which we were a part, or wish we

were;" it takes place in "conscious reflection or nonconscious processing," or is

somewhat active and somewhat passive (in some sense, at least); and it amounts to a

coordination of the interaction of various "objects in our biographies," or in other words,

takes meaning from the context or arrangement of various events and facts (Damasio,

2010, pp. 223–225). Unlike others, however, Damasio offers extensive neuroscientific

basis for the autobiographical self, citing certain brain regions as its neurological bases,

and explaining how it relates to other kinds of self humans have – on his view, the

protoself and the core self (Damasio, 2010, pp. 225–255).[14] Specifically, Damasio argues

that the proto- and core selves *produce* the autobiographical self. I quote him at length:

> I suspect that the brain's strategy for constructing the autobiographical self is as
> follows. First, substantial sets of defining biographical memories must be

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[13] The fact that multiple disciplines, including empirical fields, have been employed to study the narrative self is significant because it underscores the idea that some believe there to be a biological (specifically, neuroscientific) basis of the narrative self. As a result, no field has a monopoly on the study of the narrative self, thereby opening up a multiplicity of investigative approaches, which increases the chances that we may one day come to a clearer understanding of what the narrative self is.

[14] The biological details are not relevant, but I mention his autobiographical self because, although he employs a biologically-based methodology, he comes to similar conclusions as the philosophers. In the end, I suspect that Damasio's approach will be more convincing than the philosophers'. From my perspective, in the next century or so, it will become the case that accounts of the self simply will not stand as authoritative unless they incorporate empirical work.

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grouped together so that each can be readily treated as an individual object. Each such object is allowed to modify the protoself and produce its pulse of core self, with the respective feelings of knowing and consequent object saliency in tow. Second, because the objects in our biographies are so numerous, the brain needs devices capable of coordinating the evocation of memories, delivering them to the protoself for the requisite interaction, and holding the results of the interaction in a coherent pattern connected to the causative objects. …In effect, the complex levels of the autobiographical self—those that, for example, include substantial social aspects—encompass so many biographical objects that they require numerous core self pulses. As a consequence, constructing the autobiographical self demands a neural apparatus capable of obtaining multiple core self pulses, within a brief time window, for a substantial number of components and holding the results together transiently, to boot.

By way of a working hypothesis, then, we can say that constructing the autobiographical self depends on two conjoined mechanisms. The first is subsidiary to the core self mechanism and guarantees that each biographical set of memories is treated as an object and made conscious in a core self pulse. The second accomplishes brain-wide operation of coordination that includes the following steps: (I) certain contents are evoked from memory and displayed as images; (2) the images are allowed to interact in an orderly manner with another system elsewhere in the brain, namely, the protoself; and (3) the results of the interaction are held coherently during a certain window of time (Damasio, 2010, pp. 225–226).

In sum, I have reviewed four prominent accounts of the narrative self: Mary Schectman's narrative self-constitution view; Daniel Dennett's center of narrative gravity; the hermeneutic view of the group Ricoeur, Taylor and MacIntyre; and Damasio's autobiographical self. They each embrace, to one degree or another, the four consistent features of the narrative self I enumerated in the previous section, namely, they are all social, temporal, constructed and some balance of active and passive. These four features are crucial, in that the thickened narrative self I offer also includes them. Additionally, in putting the narrative self into conversation with mindfulness-based practices (which I do in Chapter 3), I propose that meditation alters all four of these dimensions. However, the different narrative self accounts are also different in certain respects. Dennett's sees the narrative self as a fiction, the Hermeneutic View

incorporates an ethical component, Damasio has a biological basis, while Schectman's NSCV is some balance of the CNG and HV. My thickened narrative self shares certain similarities, but also some important differences, with these views, issues that are addressed in the fourth section of the chapter, when I describe my account in detail. Perhaps the most important point to emphasize within this section, however, is that the narrative self is not a univocal term: it has different meanings to different philosophers and scientists in different contexts.

2.2.5 Criticism of the Narrative Self

The notion of the narrative self is not without its critics, and in the interest of understanding and countering some of the most prominent criticisms, I will now turn to some crucial points made by a key adversary of the narrative view, Galen Strawson, in *Against Narrativity*. He argues against two popular claims among those who defend the narrative view of the self. The first he calls the *psychological narrativity thesis*, "a straightforwardly empirical, descriptive thesis about the way ordinary human beings actually experience their lives. This is how we are, it says, this is our nature" (Strawson, 2004). The thrust of his argument against this thesis is that *he* does not experience *his* life in the form of a conventional narrative. Where the narrative thesis requires individuals to experience their daily lives as diachronic, he experiences life as *episodic*. These "styles of being are radically opposed," and his life experience is decidedly episodic. The basis for these two styles, furthermore, is genetics, as he states "I take it that the fundamentals of temporal temperament are genetically determined and that we have to do here with a deep 'individual difference variable'" (Strawson, 2004). (We will return to the topic of temporal disposition in the next section when we discuss the

synchronic nature of the embodied self). The relevant point here, however, is that his

opposition to what he calls the psychological narrativity thesis, then, is based on the plain

fact that his life experience is episodic rather than diachronic, as he states,

> I have absolutely no sense of my life as a narrative with form, or indeed as a
> narrative without form. Absolutely none. Nor do I have any great or special
> interest in my past. Nor do I have a great deal of concern for my future
> (Strawson, 2004).

This blanket disavowal of the diachronic temperament is naturally at odds with

four versions of the narrative self discussed above.

The second aspect of the narrative self that Strawson disagrees with is called the

ethical narrativity thesis, which naturally places him in opposition to the Hermeneutic

Views of Ricoeur, Taylor and MacIntyre. This thesis states "that experiencing or

conceiving of one's life as a narrative is a good thing; a richly narrative outlook is

essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood" (Strawson, 2004). He sees these

accounts as profoundly chauvinist and motivated by their own sense of self-importance,

noting that many ethical accounts "are wrapped up in forms of religious belief that are –

like almost all religious belief – really all about self" (Strawson, 2004). He takes

particular opposition to a passage from Taylor, who writes,

> Because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and hence determine our
> place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, [that] we must
> inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest' [and] must see our
> lives in a story (Taylor, 1991, pp. 51–2).

Although Strawson bases his own opposition to the psychological narrativity

thesis on his own personal experience, he curiously rejects Taylor's statement above

because he suspects that with regard to the ethical Narrativity thesis, he is just "talking

about [himself]." He concedes that "what they are saying is true for them, both

psychologically and ethically" but that does not mean it is true for everyone, or much

less, good for everyone. His own conviction is that "the best lives almost never involve this kind of self-telling, and that we have here yet another deep divider of the human race" (Strawson, 2004).[15] However he may come to oppose the narrative self, Strawson finds its ethical valence to be false, at best, and narcissistic at worst.

Aside from Strawson, others criticize the narrative self in different ways. Whereas his objections stem from the fact that he claims to experience the world episodically rather than narratively, other criticism is more theoretical. For example, Zahavi inquires about the role that false narratives play in the construction of the narrative self. His fundamental question is whether "false" narratives contribute to one's "true" narrative self. He states,

> It is possible to tell different, even incompatible, stories about one and the same life, but not all of them can be true. The fact that our narration can, and does, include fictional components gives rise to at least two questions. First, how do we distinguish true narratives from false narratives? It is obvious that a person's sincere propagation of a specific life story does not guarantee its truth. In fact, in some cases the stability of our self-identity might be inversely proportional to the fixed stories we tell about ourselves. Elaborate storytelling might serve a compensatory function as an attempt to make up for the lack of a coherent self-identity.
>
> The second, more worrying issue: What is a narrative self-understanding an understanding of? What is the question "Who am I?" a question about? Is the self an independently existing entity that makes the questions we ask about it true or false? (Zahavi, 2005, p. 110).

This dense passage deserves more consideration than I can devote to it at this time, but the core points are worth restating. First, to what extent do *false* narratives play a role in the construction of the narrative self? Is the fact that one creates false narratives part of the "true" broader narrative? The problem of a false sense of self may be unique

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[15] Within a footnote, Strawson includes an intriguing list of individuals who, he suspects, live of lived episodic lives rather than diachronic ones. Strawson cannot understand how, just because they do not live diachronically, they would be ethically deficient. Among them, Bob Dylan, Virginia Wolff, Borges, Proust and Emily Dickinson (Strawson, 2004).

to the narrative self because, for example, it is difficult to conceive of a false embodied self (with the exception of extreme psychopathological states, such as Ghost-Limb syndrome, in which a person perceives pain and other sensation from an amputated limb or body part). Second, who or what is constructing the (true or false) narrative in the first place? Dennett holds that our brains are hardwired to use language and once we use language, we naturally tell stories about ourselves and others. Soon enough, those stories become the narratives that constitute the narrative self, but it is ultimately a fiction (in the way that the center of gravity is a fiction, as above). One could conceive of Dennett's account of the narrative self, Zahavi points out, as a version of the no-self doctrine. But others would argue that narrative selves must come from a pre-existing self. If this is the case, what is the *thing* that is producing the narrative? Is it a self as well? If so, what kind? Assuming another thing produces the narrative self—and its not merely a fiction as Dennett holds—a sufficient account of the narrative self would need to offer an explanation for how it is created.

Having considered the narrative self, including some notable criticisms, below we turn to a discussion of the embodied self. Like Strawson, adherents to this view object to certain aspects of the narrative view, but for different reasons. We will see that some find room for the narrative self within their formulation of the Self, while others disregard it altogether.

2.3 The Embodied Self

> *Contrary to what some of the self-skeptics are claiming,*
> *one does not need to conceive of the self as something*
> *standing apart from or above experiences, nor does one*
> *need to conceive of the relation between self and*
> *experience as an external relation of ownership. It is also*

possible to identify this pre-reflective sense of mineness with a minimal, or core, sense of self...Thus, the self is not something that stands opposed to the stream of consciousness, but is, rather, immersed in conscious life; it is an integral part of its structure

*   -Dan Zahavi* (2005, p. 124)

Dan Zahavi is one of the most prolific writers on the embodied or minimal self. I take the embodied self to be equivalent to the experiential, core and minimal selves (the last of which is the term Zahavi prefers), and use them interchangeably. Regardless of the locution, Zahavi views this self to be fundamental. In other words, "nothing that lacks this dimension (of experience) deserves to be called a self" (Zahavi, 2005, p. 106). I take three feature of the embodied self to be essential: it's first personal-givenness, *mineness*, or *ipseity;* embodiment, or the reliance (to one degree or another) of selfhood on the body; and synchronicity, or the present moment unity of experience. In the discussion that follows, we first address these three components of the embodied self. In the two sections that follow, we consider three prominent approaches to the embodied self, those of Zahavi, and the aforementioned Damasio and Strawson; and a few of the postulated configurations of how the embodied self relates to the narrative self.

2.3.1 General Features of the Embodied Self

Just as there were four features of the narrative self common to almost all narrative views, likewise, there are *three* aspects of the embodied self that most accounts share. They are *ipseity*, embodiment and synchronicity. I offer the disclaimer that not *all* accounts of the minimal self address these three features; that said, in performing a review of the literature on the minimal self, it is apparent that most accounts appear to be univocal with respect to these three characteristics.

Beginning with the first: Ricoeur popularized usage of the term *ipseity* –

discussed above in relation to *idem*-identity – but he was not the first philosopher to

employ the term in talking about the self. Michael Henry, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and

Jean-Paul Sartre discussed *ipseity* as well, each in slightly different manners. Invariant,

however, is the idea that *ipseity* is fundamental to consciousness, and therefore, an

essential feature of the self.[16] Given the essential role *ipseity* plays in the experience of

selfhood, what is it, exactly? In looking

> closely at the structure of first-personal givenness of experiences, it is revealed
> that every conscious state, be it a perception, an emotion, a recollection, or an
> abstract belief, has a certain subjective character, a certain phenomenal quality of
> 'what it is like' to live through or undergo that state (Zahavi, 2005, p. 116).

In other words, although the experience of being in the world consists of an

infinite number of intentional states,[17] they invariably possess one consistent feature:

first-personal givenness (except in cases of severe psychopathology). Feeling depressed

is different from getting hit on the face with a baseball bat, which is different from

remembering a first kiss, but each and every experience is constitutive of a first-person

perspective. This invariant dimension of experience is termed *ipseity*. The French

phenomenologists of the 20th century described it in different ways. Sartre famously

stated that self is "something I can fail to articulate, but it is not something I can fail to

be" (Sartre, 2003). The basis for this claim is *ipseity*, as one cannot be anything in this

world without a 'what it is like,' although one can falter in describing it.

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[16] Leave aside, for the moment, the fact that not all theorists who view ipseity as a basic feature of
consciousness also view it is a basic feature of the self. Albahari for instance, argues that the basis of
ipseity – or the first person givenness of experience –depends on what she calls the *witness
consciousness,* which she feels does not meet the necessary requirements of selfhood (Albahari,
2006). Sartre too was hesitant to assert the existence of a self on those grounds. What is relevant,
here, is that Zahavi views consciousness to be constitutive with the embodied or experiential self.

[17] See (Siderits, Thompson, & Zahavi, 2011; Thompson, 2007; Zahavi, 2005) for detailed articulations
of the meaning of 'intentional states.'

Merleau-Ponty argued discussed *ipseity* as well, emphasizing the fact that embodiment was its source – a point we get to in a subsequent section. He described *ipseity* as an "interiority" to existence. *Ipseity* is mineness that all experiences are constituted by (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). As Zahavi says above, regardless of the content of the experience, it can never fail to be *for someone*. To put it differently, there is no experience that is not for someone. One cannot speak of a self, or even consciousness, without relying on *ipseity* (Zahavi, 2007). Michael Henry characterizes the self as "an interior self-affection," as Zahavi points out (Zahavi, 2007, p. 5). Like the others, we see, Henry argues that *ipseity* is the essential dimension of experience that all consciousness must possess, and it is primitive and tacit in character.

In all cases, it is important to note, the phenomenologists in question examine the notion of the self by an investigation into first person experience (Zahavi, 2007). They attempt to describe their being-in-the-world without relying on an explanation that is separate from what is presented to consciousness. Unlike, say, a Cartesian soul or Kantian transcendental ego, which performs the role of self (unifying experience synchronically and diachronically into a coherent whole) by operating 'above' or 'beyond' it (Legrand, 2011, p. 208), the self of which the phenomenologists speak is "not something that stands opposed to the stream of consciousness, but is, rather, immersed in conscious life; it is an integral part of its structure" (Zahavi, 2007, p. 5). This first-person givenness is not something that is incidental to experience of being a self; it is the very basis of selfhood altogether.

How is *ipseity* related to the minimal or core self? Very simply, it is an essential feature of the minimal self. It may be helpful to give an example of a self where ipseity

does *not* play a crucial role: namely, in some versions of the narrative self. The narrative self as discussed above, especially Dennett's, does not always rely on first-person givenness. In fact, it frequently depends on third-person perspectives.

Indeed, the *experience* of being a narrative, or living out a story, includes *ipseity* or *mineness,* but the narrative self itself is not an invariant aspect of experience in the way that *ipseity* is. The narrative self, by contrast, is fluid, changing, evolving and fickle. Its very nature is to exist across time, changing to one degree or another throughout. *Ipseity*, therefore, cannot be a part of the narrative self. Of course, the narrative self may *depend* on the *ipseity,* but one may safely say that it is not constitutive of it. In other words, not all instances of *ipseity* are structured like a narrative. For example, there is a mineness to experience in amnesiacs and patients with severe Alzheimer's, but their narrative self is not "online." These individuals have *ipseity* but not narrativity—an embodied but not a narrative self.

For Zahavi and phenomenologists of a similar ilk, central to the most basic sense of self – the minimal, embodied or core self, as we will call it – is this fundamental self-givenness, or *ipseity* (Praetorius, 2009, p. 326) One cannot be a self in the world without it, with the possible exception of certain pathological states, because there will always be a "what it is like" to experience them. If a self does not have this quality of *ipseity*, it is not a self. One may nevertheless wonder what the basis of *ipseity* is according to these theorists. For one possible answer, let us move on to the second feature of the minimal self: *embodiment*.

As Dorothee Legrand states, "For the self to belong to the world, there is no other way than being corporeal" (Legrand, 2011, p. 209). It is not possible, in other words, to

be a *subject* in the world without *also* being bodily. Sartre agrees, stating that my body "is therefore in no way a contingent addition to my soul; on the contrary it is a permanent structure of my being and a permanent condition of possibility for my consciousness as consciousness of the world" (Sartre, 2003, p. 328). Consciousness is not possible without a body, so naturally embodiment is not a "contingent addition" of conscious being in the world – it is essential. Merleau-Ponty spoke of the self as realizing its *ipseity* by virtue of its embodiment in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 467). He states,

> Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system. When I walk round my flat, the various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my own movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 235).

At the risk of belaboring the point here we see, in Merleau-Ponty's example of walking around his flat, the very possibility of the appearance of objects (and any intentional state) is contingent on bodily being in the world.

One way of conceptualizing how embodiment serves as the basis of the minimal self is by considering the threefold taxonomy of perception: *exteroception*, *interoception* and *proprioception*. Exteroception is awareness of outward sensory input, such as perception of light, laugher, the texture of a strawberry, and so forth, while interoception is awareness of internal states such as hunger, thirst and pain. Proprioception, finally, is awareness of one's body in space (J. Bermudez, 2011, p. 158). Information from all three modalities is processed both consciously and non-consciously, but the key point is that they all must be *perceived* through and by a body. One cannot perceive any of the above three except through a body. The information collected from these three modalities of

perception, 'non-conceptual first-person content'—self-specifying information attained in perceptual experience—is central to the process of perception. In other words, when one perceives an object in a given external environment, implicit information about the self that is pre-linguistic and non-conceptual is conveyed (J. L. Bermudez, 1998, quote in Gallagher, 2000, p. 17).[18] One possible conclusion of the phenomenon of non-conceptual first person content (which has been demonstrated in developmental psychology in infants just after birth) is that the vehicle for pre-reflective embodied experience is the minimal self (Gallagher, 2000, p. 17).

The need for a body in order for perception to take place highlights a distinction between the embodied theories of self and the Cartesian, dualist theories of selfhood. The latter kind of self postulates a firm separation between the body and the mind. The latter does not require the former, and therefore must exist on some non-physical, disembodied plane. Cassam describes the Cartesian position as follows:

> Descartes thought that he was distinct from his body and could exist without it. The self that is distinct from its body is, according to Descartes, an immaterial substance. This immaterial self possesses a body and is so intimately conjoined with its body that it forms a union with it…the fact remains that each of us is, strictly speaking, distinct from his or her body (Cassam, 2011, p. 139).

In contrast the view of the minimal self theorists is that no self could possibly exist unless it did so in (at least partially) bodily form. They have a fundamentally different perspective on the relationship between a self and its body. For most minimal self theorists, the body is constitutive of the self. For Descartes (and those who hold transcendentalist, idealist or dualist notions of the self), the body and the self do not have such a relationship and thus are disembodied.

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[18] Neisser calls this the ecological self (Neisser, 1988)..

A final feature of the minimal self is the temporal dimension of *synchronicity*. As noted earlier, the diachronic is extended in time. A synchronic state, on the other hand, occurs in the present moment, temporally unextended. The narrative self requires diachronicity because it must take its meaning and adopt its identity by virtue of its relationship to the past and future selves. In contrast, synchronicity is an invariant, present moment dimension of the minimal self. In the most general sense, the process of combining a number of current experiential states is called synchronic unity. In terms of phenomenology, synchronicity is the quality of unified phenomenological experience, across various perceptual modalities, at a single moment in time. For instance, as I type these words, I do not experience the feeling of my wrists on the keyboard independent from the fan blowing in my face, independent from the tips of my fingers on the keyboard independent from the feeling of the back of my legs on the chair. Rather, it is all unified into one coherent phenomenological experience. This is not to say that different biological and psychological mechanisms are not perceiving and processing the various percepts independently. It is only to say that our *experience* of the diverse array of intentional stimuli at any given moment is not presented as multiple experiences, but rather *one* unified state. As Albahari states, "there appears to be only *one* point of view to which a multitude of experiences are presented, both at a time (synchronically) and over time (diachronically)" (Albahari, 2006, p. 112) This is the essence of synchronicity – the unification of multiple sensory modalities into one experience at any given moment.

We now turn to two well-known perspectives on the minimal self, each slightly different from the others. A useful way to gauge their similarities and differences is by

considering the roles that ipseity, embodiment and synchronicity within the minimal self, a task we carry out in the next section.

2.3.2 Key Accounts of the Embodied Self

In what follows, we look closely at two particular accounts of the embodied, or minimal self, from two traditions. The first is from the phenomenologist Dan Zahavi, who has written extensively on the topic in recent years, arguing for a certain *type* of minimal self that we will characterize below; second we take a look at the view of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. The differences between their conceptions of what constitutes the embodied self – especially along the axes of synchronicity, embodiment and ipseity – can be subtle, and we investigate those details here.

But first, a word on methodological differences between the two: Zahavi employs what might be called a "phenomenological approach," which "claims to describe and analyze lived subjectivity itself;" Merleau-Ponty characterized this same methodology as a "return to the things themselves," (Zahavi, 2003, 2005, p. 76). One scholar described this approach as a search for the given and unmediated features of experience. The goal is to study subjective information that co-occurs with lived experience and precedes knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, as cited in Carr, 1987, p. 32). The essence of the phenomenological approach, in other words, is reflection on one's own first-person, subjective experience in the world. In contrast, Damasio employs an empirical neuroscientific approach,[19] developing an elegant explanatory model for how certain

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[19] That said, some scholars are skeptical about the possibility of unearthing so-called "neural correlates of the self" (where a neural correlate of consciousness is "a neural representational system N such that the content of N directly correlates with the content of consciousness" (Metzinger, 2000, p. 20)), or more generally, the role that neuroscience can play in elucidating the structures of the self (Hünefeldt, 2005; Metzinger, 2000).

structures in the brain can adequately explain various components of the self. His recent

work *Self Comes to Mind* is an attempt to reflect on "the mechanisms behind the

construction of the self." To this end, Damasio states,

> The extraordinary development of general biology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience has capitalized on the neural legacy, produced a wide array of techniques to investigate the brain, and amassed a colossal amount of facts. The evidence, conjectures, and hypotheses presented in this book are grounded on all these developments (Damasio, 2010, p. 13).

Importantly, Damasio does not completely eschew phenomenological or broader

philosophical considerations, but he is decidedly more reliant on empirical biologically

based approaches than are Zahavi and Gallagher, for example.

As in the previous section, the minimal (or experiential, core or embodied) self, as

Zahavi articulates it, starts with the first-person givenness, or ipseity, of subjectivity.

First-person givenness is constitutive of all intentional states, for experiences

> are all characterized by the same fundamental first personal character. They are all characterized by what might be called a dimension of for-me-ness or mineness (Sartre uses the term ipseity–selfhood–from the Latin ipse). It is, however, important to point to the special nature of this mineness. It is not meant to suggest that I own the experiences in a way that is even remotely similar to the way I possess external objects of various sorts (Zahavi, 2011, p. 58).

This is precisely the *ipseity* discussed above that, to Zahavi and other

phenomenologists, is an essential part of being in the world. Another way of articulating

the meaning of *mineness* is to deny that there is any quality or *what* to experiences that is

the same in all cases. Rather, Zahavi is arguing that it is the *how* of experiences that is

invariably *mine*, and characterized by *ipseity*. He states that ipseity "refers to the fact that

the experiences that I am living through are given differently (but not necessarily better)

to me than to anybody else" (Zahavi, 2011, p. 59). In this way *all* experiences, and

consciousness in general, *must* be characterized by *ipseity*.

For Zahavi, the first-person givenness of consciousness is the primary feature of the minimal or core self. He sees this self as a sort of middle ground between two opposing views on what constitutes the self. On the one hand is some version of an unchanging, transcendental soul, not unlike a Cartesian account. This type of self is ontologically distinct and independent from any physical body. At the other end of the spectrum is "nothing to consciousness apart from a manifold of interrelated changing experiences" (Zahavi, 2011, p. 59). His experiential self is neither a separately existing entity like the Cartesian ego, nor is it reducible to a specific thing, event or experience. His experiential self is simply the subjectivity or first-person givenness of experience, "not taken to be something that exists independently of, or in separation from, the experiential flow" (Zahavi, 2011, p. 60). This feature of the self is not a linguistically conditioned entity, nor is it a kind of self-knowledge or unique epistemological construct. It amounts to the fact that all intentional states of existence of a given person are presented to him or her in a way that is unavailable to others.

If the minimal self is first-person givenness itself, one may nevertheless wonder what accounts for the first-person givenness of experience. Here we remember that embodiment is a key feature of the minimal self. Zahavi defends the notion that the *body* serves as the basis for first-person givenness, and therefore, the minimal self.

Given the different methodology Damasio employs, what is his formulation of the minimal self? Simply put, Damasio argues that the self consists of three dimensions or components that work in synergy to create a coherent self: the protoself, core self and autobiographical self. As alluded to above, the latter roughly amounts to the narrative

self. The protoself serves as the basis for the latter two, as he states, "The self is built in

distinct steps grounded on the *protoself*…(based on) the generation of primordial feelings,

the elementary feelings of existence that spring from the protoself" (Damasio, 2010, p.

24, his emphasis). For Damasio, the core self is biologically instantiated in the protoself,

and the generator of conscious experience, or *mineness*. He defines the core self as "the

transient protagonist of consciousness, generated for any object that provokes the core-

consciousness mechanism. Because of the permanent availability of provoking objects, it

is continuously generated and thus appears continuous in time," arguing that the

biological essence of the core self is the representation in a second-order map of the

protoself being modified" (Damasio, 1999, p. 175). With regard to the intentional states

the core self generates, in conjunction with the other aspects of the self, he states, "the

mind's pervasive "aboutness" is rooted in…the brain (representing) the structures and

states of the organism, and in the course of regulating the organism as it is mandated to

do, the brain naturally weaves wordless stories" (Damasio, 1999, p. 189). The

description of the core self is similar to Zahavi's minimal self in that it shares the

characteristics of *ipseity* and embodiment. Like the minimal self, Damasio's core self is

embodied, biologically based (in the protoself, within his heuristic) and generates a

continuously generated of feeling or 'aboutness.'

Indeed, the accounts of Damasio and Zahavi do not accord with perfect fidelity.

Aside from the methodological divergence (Damasio using empirical neuroscience and

biology, Zahavi relying on phenomenology) Damasio struggles to explain *how* a

biological thing produces the *aboutness*. Granted, Damasio alone does not have this

problem, as it is a pervasive issue in the philosophy of mind termed the 'hard problem' –

how physical material can generate mental states. Of course, nor can Zahavi explain how *mineness* is generated, biologically or otherwise. Additionally, Damasio does not discuss in great detail the core self and synchronicity, or how various modalities of perception can come together to create a single experience at any single moment in time. Additionally, whereas Zahavi's core self is all-encompassing in the sense that it is embodied *and* the generator of conscious feeling, Damasio's core self relies in part on the protoself for the for embodiment. *Aboutness,* and thus the core self, is generated by the relationship between 'second order neural mechanisms' and the embodied protoself, as he states "there is at least one other structure which *re-represents* both protoself and object in their temporal relationship and can thus represent what is actually happening to the organism" (Damasio, 1999, p. 177). Given this second-order processing, however, Damasio's account falls prey to an infinite regress, where one level of processing is always required to account for a system that resides 'below' it. The problem is that, if another self or system is always required to process the one below it, this pattern must necessarily continue infinitely, unless there is a kind of self (or system) that is categorically or qualitatively different. In this way, Damasio's account is subject to the criticism of infinite regress, whereas Zahavi's is relatively protected.

In the first section of this chapter, we reviewed some key features and prominent accounts of the narrative self. Thus far in this section, we have done the same with the embodied self. I would next like to take a brief look at how some theorists view the relationship between the embodied and the narrative selves. I do so because the *thickened* narrative self I offer in the last section of this chapter proposes a unique

relationship between the embodied and narrative selves, and a review of the extant

accounts will be useful material for comparison.

2.3.3 Intertwined Selves: the Embodied Self and the Narrative Self

The two conceptions of the self I have focused on up to this point are the narrative

and embodied selves. Of course, there is no consensus as to what exactly these two kinds

of self consist of. Even more opaque, however, is the relationship between these two

types of selves. Important questions persist with respect to how they relate to one

another. Which is primary? Or alternatively, do they occur simultaneously? How does

one affect the other? Are both necessary or can a self be purely narrative or purely

embodied? Does an embodied self come in a narrative form? Does a narrative self

always include embodiment? These questions and more remain outstanding issues, with

very little concordance among the leading theorists. In the following section, we address

some of these accounts so as to highlight a few key questions within the literature.

2.3.3.1 The Disembodied Narrative Self

We begin with a few narrative theorists who spend little time accounting for

embodiment or, in one case, believe the self to be a disembodied fiction. The latter is

Dennett whose account we considered above. Remember, his view is that the self is like

the center of narrative gravity—a convenient fiction. Like the center of gravity of an

object, which is not a physically existing thing in the world, the self is a similarly non-

existent entity. The narrative self is the protagonist in a fictional story, while the physical

brain is the author. He states,

> 'Call me Dan', you hear from my lips, and you oblige, not by calling my lips Dan,
> or my body Dan, but by calling me Dan, the theorists' fiction created by…well,

not by me but by my brain, acting in concert over the years with parents and siblings and friends (Dennett, 1991, p. 429).

From his perspective, the brain is needed to create the self (and so is embodied in some very minimal sense), but the narrative self that results from the brain is nothing remotely physical (Brandon, 2014). In fact, as his center of gravity analogy suggests, the narrative self is non-physical by definition. It follows that for Dennett, a self can exist without a body, for he states, "your current embodiment, though a necessary precondition for your creation, is not necessarily a requirement for your existence to be prolonged indefinitely" (Dennett, 1991, p. 430). He argues that self can exist without a body in the way that a computer program can survive the absence of a computer if it is simply transferred to another computer by a disk, USB drive, etc. In short, the body is only contingently related to the self (Brandon, 2014).

Marya Schectman also views the narrative self as an inherently disembodied entity, but for different reasons. Dennett's self is disembodied because it is a fiction in the first place, whereas Schectman's approach to embodiment accounts for and addresses embodiment in a different fashion. Her narrative self-constitution view (the notion that subjects create narrative selves by thinking of themselves as persisting subjects with a past, present and future) is cast as an answer to the question of psychological continuity, rather than bodily continuity, both of which are possible answers to the general question of how personal identity arises. One sequelae of the psychological identity thesis is that a single personal identity could theoretically inhabit more than body, or perhaps no body at all (Schectman, 1996, p. 130). On the other hand, bodily continuity theorists believe personal identity depends on one and the same body. To articulate it differently, depending on one's approach to the problem of continuity—psychological or bodily—a

person can or cannot have continuity in two different bodies. Schectman sees her

narrative self-Constitution View as mediating between the psychological and bodily

continuity theories. The narrative self-Constitution View,

> explains that persons are, in our experience, associated with only one body and
> holds that it is a deep conceptual fact that in general a person's history involves
> only one body, yet still allows that it is not impossible in particular cases for a
> single person to be associated with more than one human body (Schectman, 1996,
> p. 131, my emphasis).

In other words, she hedges between requiring embodiment for a narrative self and

admitting the possibility of disembodiment. She argues that it is *generally* the case that

narratives are embodied in a single self, but she also allows for the possibility that it is

not required. I interpret this to mean that the narrative self is not *inherently* embodied.

Although her opinion is not the same as Dennett's, where *all* narratives are disembodied,

she nonetheless allows for the possibility of disembodiment.

It may be useful to think of the dis- or non-embodied narrative self as an example

of the "strong narrativity thesis." This is the idea that the narrative self does not, in all

cases, depend on embodiment. Dennett and Schectman's accounts accord with the strong

narrativity thesis. On the other hand, the "weak narrativity thesis," is based on the idea

that *no narrative self could possibly exist without embodiment*. The following section

examines some basic features of weak narrativity theses.

2.3.3.2 The Embodied Narrative Self

Richard Menary, for one, argues, "Our embodied experiences, perceptions and

actions are all prior to the narrative sense of self, indeed our narratives are structured by

the sequence of embodied narratives" (Menary, 2008, p. 75). An embodied narrative

account, to Menary, is based on the idea that the self consists of an embodied

consciousness whose experiences in the world are the fodder available for narration. He states:

> There is a minimal sense of self as a subject of experience and this minimal self is an embodied subject. Our embodied experiences, perceptions and actions are all prior to the narrative sense of self, indeed our narratives are structured by the sequence of embodied experiences (Menary, 2008, p. 75).

Kerby holds a similar idea, arguing that our embodied experiences constitute a "demand for narrative" (Kerby, 1993, p. 42) and Hutto articulates a similar idea, stating that emotional, ecologically embedded experiences are "ripe for narrative" (Hutto, 2007, p. 237). Although the quotes from Hutto and Kerby do not explicitly state it, these theorists all hold that narratives are dependent upon the embodied nature of first-person experience. Zahavi too, argues that any account of the narrative self requires embodiment. His way of articulating this relationship is by way of distinguishing the narrative and the minimal selves, the former of which is ontologically depended on the latter (Zahavi, 2005).

Another example of a well-developed narrativity thesis that *requires* embodiment is put forward by MacKenzie, who brings together the topics of narrative selfhood embodiment" (Mackenzie, 2014). Much like Zahavi and the others, she argues that the construction of "an integrated, if not necessarily explicit, conception of ourselves as embodied agents" is a requirement for the construction of a narrative self (Mackenzie, 2014). She emphasizes, however, that the minimal and narrative selves participate in a reciprocal relationship. Not only does the narrative self depend on the minimal self, but the minimal, embodied being also is affected by the development and existence of the narrative. Here I quote her at length, as she offers a useful, real-world example of how they interact:

So while our self-narratives are responsive to, and incorporate, our lived bodily experience, this experience is not subjectively lived first and then narratively reinterpreted later. Rather our lived bodily experience is always already mediated via narrative self-interpretation. Imagine a young woman who has come to think of herself as clumsy and uncoordinated—perhaps because she was overweight as a child, or because her older brothers excluded her from ball games for 'throwing like a girl,' or because she did not enjoy sports at school. This bodily self-representation infuses her bodily style and lived experience. If she starts going to the gym or joins the rowing team, this same young woman's representation and experience of herself may gradually change over time as she develops strength and new bodily skills (Mackenzie, 2014).

Her point is that the embodied self does not exist independent of the narratives one "tells," with the narrative self developing subsequently. Rather, the two aspects of the self have a dynamic in which any change to one necessarily affects the other, with change being affected bi-directionally. The narrative self does not develop, in other words, on the basis of a static embodied self, but rather dynamically, alongside it.

The question may remain, however: how exactly does an embodied self help craft the narrative self? For many, including Mackenzie, intersubjectivity is a primary force in the development of a narrative self. To her, embodied subjectivity is constituted by intersubjectivity at the outset. She cites recent work in cognitive science and phenomenology on infant imitation and primary intersubjectivity that suggests that the development of a sense of self "is rooted in bodily self-experience and in bodily, affective interaction between infants and caregivers" (Mackenzie, 2014, p. 163, citing Zahavi, 2005). After these earliest intersubjective interactions, subsequent forms of more advanced intersubjectivity develop, such as complex cognition and linguistic capabilities that enmesh us into the social world. "Thus our bodily perspectives are always already mediated by, and responsive to, our relations to others (and) our social situation" (Mackenzie, 2014).

We have now examined some key features of the narrative and embodied selves; reviewed a few prominent accounts from more well known theorists; and considered how the embodied and narrative selves interact with and depend on each other (if at all). We now turn to my proposal for a *thickened* narrative self.

2.4 The Thickened Narrative Self

The literature on the self – be it narrative, embodied or otherwise – presents abundant and varied formulations of the various selves. Although a number of the accounts are compelling, they fail to adequately describe the interplay between the phenomenological, narrative and social dimensions of the self while acknowledging the importance of each individually. What follows is a novel account of the thickened narrative self that attempts to address these lacunae.

2.4.1 Narrative Universe

> *Persons do not exist in a social vacuum. To exist as a*
> *person is to exist socialized into a communal horizon,*
> *where one's bearing to oneself is appropriated from the*
> *others. I become a person through my life with others in*
> *our communal world.*
> *-Dan Zahavi* (2007, p. 8)

Simply put, the narrative universe is the context in which the story and experience of the narrative self takes place. It has rules that govern existence, and control, curtail, determine and allow for events, feelings, thoughts and actions to take place. This is the "communal horizon" of which Zahavi speaks. Because humans exist in ineluctably social worlds—what I term the narrative universe—one cannot distill either one's story or experience from it. Additionally, there are different narrative universes depending on the

story and context of a particular individual. Things that take place in one narrative universe cannot necessarily take place in another. John Dunne uses the example of Star Wars versus Lord of the Rings in discussing divergent narrative universes. This is a useful metaphor that will be employed in subsequent sections on the narrative content and phenomenology. Within this section, however, we explore the contours of the narrative universe.

Events, persons and things can often exist in one universe but simply are not possible in the other. For example, while Luke Skywalker can use a light saber to slay a foe, and Frodo Baggins can possess a ring of power, it would not make sense—and indeed is incoherent—to speak of Luke Skywalker possessing a ring of power or Frodo Baggins wielding a light saber. These situations are beyond the realm of possibility in their respective narrative universes.[20] For one, the technological savvy required to develop a light sabre does not exist in the Middle Earth of the Lord of the Rings (nor does electricity, for that matter—suggesting how far apart the narrative universes are). But nor does the ring and its awesome power—and whatever powerful being or force created it— exist in Star Wars. But it is not just that technology has not developed in these two universes. The narrative universes crafted by J.R.R. Tolkien and George Lucas do not allow for light sabers and rings of power, respectively. In fact, it would be comical (if not intriguing) to an audience familiar with both paradigms if Luke Skywalker began wielding The Ring. Hollywood—and various other media—has exploited this intrigue in various films such as Disney's *Enchanted*, in which the modern-day businessman played

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[20] Let us bracket the somewhat obvious point that two objects, events or individuals can serve similar if not identical semiotic functions within two different universes. I am neither equipped to nor interested in discussing the particulars of this situation. Suffice it to say that I acknowledge this possibility and defer for another time.

by Patrick Dempsey travels back in time to a fictitious land of castles, princesses and magic. The movie is entertaining and silly largely because the plot is impossible (at least with current technology, which does not provide for time machines). This metaphor—as well as the Star Wars versus Lord of the Rings scenario—highlights the importance of the narrative universe to the constitution of the narrative of the self. Although Luke Skywalker and Frodo Baggins have narrative selves in the sense that their lives follow a plot laid out by their authors, the plot is not its *only* constituent. Inseparable from the storyline is their place within their universe. For example, the fact that Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's father is a pivotal piece of information to Luke's narrative self. If Luke existed in any universe that did not include Darth Vader (or any other aspect of their galaxy), he would not be the same person—his narrative self would be inescapably different. In other words, that particular narrative universe is an inseparable part of who Luke is.

Consider another metaphor to be demonstrative of the gulf between some narrative universes. Hypothetically, assume that all the possibilities of a given narrative universe are restricted to the area within a fence. For Frodo, elements of his narrative universe that are within the area of the fence include the existence of Mt. Doom, the fact that his nemesis Gollum formerly possessed the Ring of Power, and the fact that he bears the burden of carrying the ring. Certain other possibilities exist, but do not come to fruition, such as Frodo falling in love with the elven queen Galadriel. These possibilities—both those that come to fruition and those that do not—rest within the narrative universe, constrained by the fence. There are other events, such as Frodo meeting Darth Vader, that are not possible, and would not fit within the Lord of the Rings

narrative universe constrained by fence. This metaphor may be helpful because it demonstrates that there are many possibilities within the narrative universe of Middle Earth that do not occur but, because they are hypothetically within the realm of possibility, they abide within the fence; while other aspects of the narrative universe that could not possibly come to fruition because of the constraints of the narrative universe belong *outside* the fence.

The point is that the area constrained by the fence—the narrative universe—is just as much a part of the narrative self as the plot or story of a person within that narrative universe. To this end, I quote James and Foster at length:

> An understanding of selfhood which does not take into account the 'relational' nature of selfhood as well as the cultural or historical context of the client, will likely alienate clients who do not view their self through the individualized lenses of (North American) psychology. In order to deal with this problem, we adopt an approach to cultural (and cross-cultural) psychology that views the self as a relational narrative. Such a narrative does not imply an unrestricted freedom to construct our self, but understands the limits to selfhood implied in the web of meanings constitutive of our culture and the web of relations from which our self emerges (S. James & Foster, 2003, p. 62).

The authors are speaking in reference to the use of cross-cultural psychotherapy and the need to consider an individual's particular worldview for successful therapy. They argue that a North American psychology is not always relevant or accessible to certain clients, requiring that the therapist understand and adopt their point-of-view for therapy to succeed. But James and Foster's perspective is also useful outside the context of therapy. They emphasize that one does not have an unrestricted freedom to construct the self. I agree that the constraints restricting one's freedom to construct a self are as much a part of the self as the simple plot or story of their life through time.

Certain prominent thinkers in Western cultural history, such as the aforementioned Descartes and Charles Taylor, have popularized a notion of the self that is independent, unhindered by culture and disengaged from the world (S. James & Foster, 2003, p. 63). One paper argues that "each of these historical developments in the Western concept of selfhood contribute to a perspective wherein the individual exists apart from social and historical conditioning" (S. James & Foster, 2003, p. 63, citing Richardson, Rogers, & McCarroll, 1998). Though now is not the time to debate what caused the self to be viewed as an ahistorical individual, unhindered by culture, it is important to note that some current philosophical conceptions of the self continue to fail to account for the inescapable role that culture and history play in one's narrative self.

2.4.2 Narrative Content

Marya Schectman suggests that "the idea that our lives are in some sense story-like runs deep in our everyday thought" (Schectman, 2011, p. 394). Perhaps because of this, the narrative content may be the most intuitive dimension of the three components of the narrative self. This aspect of the narrative self is composed of, for example, the birth, upbringing, place of origin, school, job or succession of jobs, etc., of a particular individual. *What* one does, *where*, *when* and *how*, roughly speaking, amounts to the narrative content.

To continue the Lord of the Rings versus Star Wars metaphor, if the narrative universes for Frodo and Luke Skywalker are Middle Earth and the galaxy, the narrative content is the storyline or plot that Frodo and Luke live through and within. The narrative content, naturally, takes the shape of a narrative with all the characteristics of narrative proper discussed above: a point of view; the generation of meaning by virtue of

the relationship between the plot and the broader context of the story; and a diachronic format with past, present and future. The plot of the *Fellowship of the Rings* is roughly the following. Frodo, as a hobbit, is one of the members of the fellowship brought together on a journey to destroy The Ring. He is the keeper of The Ring and assumes all the privileges and problems associated with that role. This, more or less, is the content, although it is not by any means comprehensive. With respect to diachronicity, his story takes place in time, as he has a past, present and future.[21] Furthermore, one could not make sense of his narrative self outside of the broader context of the place and time he inhabits (at that time in Middle Earth, one bellicose faction of inhabitants are fomenting war and desperately searching for The Ring). This context is inextricably bound to his narrative self, as his narrative would be undeniably different if he lived in a different place and time. And finally, his story comes from a certain point of view – his own. He does not experience the story from the perspective of the wizard Gandalf, the dwarf Gimle or the elf Legolas – only from his own perspective.

In these three ways, Frodo's story takes the form of a narrative that I call the narrative content. It is on equal footing with the narrative universe, as one could not exist without the other. The narrative universe and the narrative content together form two thirds of the Frodo's narrative self. The last dimension takes into consideration the first person perspective—the mineness—of Frodo's experience in the narrative.

One significant aspect of the narrative content is that it distinguishes one character or person from others. No two individuals—barring some multiple galaxy science fiction scenario—could possibly have the same narrative content. As John Christman says,

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[21] One may counter: "Of course he has a past, present and future. How could he not?!" But one need only to consider the synchronic, present moment *minimal self* to see an alternative conception of selfhood that does *not* consider temporal aspects of identity.

"Narrativity is meant to help explain what it means to be a unique, individualized subject

of experiences, as opposed to a dissociated, disconnected series of selves" (Christman,

2004, p. 696). Indeed the narrative universe and experience are unique to the individual

as well, but the narrative content is the most overtly individualized. Many persons

inhabit roughly the same narrative universe—identical twins, for example—so it is

naturally less distinguishing than the content. And the narrative phenomenology,

although highly individualized, does not itself serve to distinguish one person from

another. In fact, the *ipseity* or mineness is what all persons ostensibly share. In this way,

the narrative content serves a prominent role in distinguishing one individual from

another.

Interestingly, Schectman places two restrictions on what can possibly constitute

the narrative self: the articulation constraint and the reality constraint. The former

stipulates that if one fails to articulate the content of their narrative, they cease to be a

narrative self, while the latter requires that one's narrative cohere with reality to some

degree or another. As for the reality constraint, I agree with her that if the narrative

content stems from magical thinking, is impossible or simply untrue, the existence of the

narrative self is somehow compromised. I therefore accept the reality constraint.

However, I reject the articulation constraint because narrative selfhood should not depend

on a capacity—it is not a skill one can acquire or lose. Allow me to explain my positions

by discussing the narrative content from the perspective of Frodo.

With respect to the articulation constraint, Schectman states that her view

does not allow a person's self-narrative to remain entirely subterranean. A further
requirement is that an identity-constituting narrative be capable of local
articulation. This means that the narrator should be able to explain why he does

what he does, believes what he believes, and feels what he feels (Schectman, 1996, p. 114).

I disagree with this constraint because not all states of mind and body allow one to articulate their story. Within Frodo's world, there are certain situations in which he is unable to articulate his story (for example, when he is caught in the web of Shelob, the great spider), but it should not follow that his narrative self ceases during that timeframe. Or when Frodo slips The Ring on his finger and is unable to speak, it would not make sense that his narrative self disappeared. Or in America today, does an Alzheimer's narrative self cease to exist when she is unable to remember her city of birth, upbringing and profession? It cannot be. Her narrative content, though unable to be articulated, continues nonetheless, with inarticulacy part and parcel of the story, all in the context of the narrative universe she inhabits—that of 20th century medicine where she suffers from Alzheimer's, the most common form of a condition presently called dementia.

On the other hand, I agree with the reality constraint. Surely, Frodo could not get Alzheimer's disease, nor could an elderly woman today be caught in Shelob's web. These are beyond the contours of reality within their respective narrative universes. A realistic situation in which the reality constraint comes into full effect is in the case of patients with schizophrenia. A psychotic patient may wholeheartedly believe that they are from a different planet and being pursued by the intergalactic police. However, this does not accord with the present narrative universe, so one must to conclude that his narrative content cannot be, and thus his narrative self ceases to exist in one sense. The particulars aside, the two restraints put forth by are meant to suggest that not just *any* story can count as the narrative content of a narrative self. The story needs to be possible within the narrative universe inhabited by the individual.

2.4.3 Narrative Phenomenology

The narrative phenomenology amounts to the 'what it is like to be' a person in the world. It relies on the body, in that the phenomenological experience of being cannot take place without embodiment. Furthermore, it is pre-reflective, as one does not need to direct one's attention to it for it to exist. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

> I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk around them, but as for my body, I do not observe it itself [in action or in the act of perception]: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be unobservable (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Its pre-reflective quality avoids the infinite regress described here by Merleau-Ponty. If one always needed a second order body to observe oneself, or take one's body as an intentional object, an infinite number of higher order bodies would be required for a self to be known. The pre-reflective quality of narrative phenomenology, however, grants first-person privileged knowledge of one's experience. Indeed, one *can* take one's own thoughts and feelings as intentional objects in a second order manner, but this is not what narrative phenomenology is referring to. And finally, one cannot *fail* to ever have a narrative phenomenology.

This first-person experiential aspect of the narrative self differs from both the narrative content and the narrative context in concrete ways. In contrast to the former—which is the who, what, where, why and how, of a person's story—the narrative phenomenology consists of the *experience* of the particulars of that character's plot. Furthermore, the narrative context places constraints on potential narratives based on the broader socio-cultural, economic, political context in which a narrative takes place and makes content and phenomenology possible; whereas the narrative phenomenology is the first person experience that emerges out of that wider perspective.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, author of the seminal *Phenomenology of Perception*, developed some of the most prominent principles of the phenomenology of self. He emphasized the role that embodiment played in our being in the world or *ipseity*. More specifically, our phenomenological experience depends on a pre-reflective proprioceptive awareness of our bodily action (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, p. 159). This embodied, non-conceptual valence of experience serves as the epicenter of our narrative. When one perceives, the body is simultaneously revealed as an unperceived element of being. He states:

> The bodily mediation most frequently escapes me: when I witness events that interest me, I am scarcely aware of the perceptual breaks which the blinking of the eye-lids imposes on the scene…[T]he body proper and its organs remain the bases or vehicles of my intentions and are not yet grasped as 'physiological realities' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 188).

The observation that our own bodies are simultaneously "revealed" during all intentional states underscores the invariant and embodied aspects of the narrative phenomenology. One cannot fail to have a phenomenological experience of their narrative, but nor can they have one without a body. These points become critical in the context of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, where embodiment plays a pivotal role in the therapeutic process.

One distinguishing feature of the narrative phenomenology is what philosophers call the "immunity to error through misidentification relative to the first person pronoun" (Shoemaker, 1984). It is a critical aspect of the narrative self because it is the one dimension that one can never be *wrong* about. In this way, it constitutes some minimal sense of self all on its own, independent of the other aspects of the thickened narrative self. By way of comparison, one can be wrong about the contents of one's narrative—

this is what Schectman addresses in her "reality constraint." If one indeed misunderstands, misinterprets or misremembers their narrative—and who doesn't?—then the narrative self is affected. One can be wrong about the narrative context in the same way. One can fail to have an understanding of how one's personal narrative is intertwined with and co-dependent on the context or universe in which their story takes place. This is not so, however, with the narrative phenomenology, for one can never be mistaken about who is experiencing one's own narrative self. In other words, when a speaker uses the first person pronoun "I" to refer to oneself, it is not possible to make a mistake about the person to whom they are referring, which Gallagher calls the "immunity principle" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15).

Let us return to the Lord of the Rings and Star Wards analogy for a demonstration of narrative phenomenology. Frodo embarks on the journey to Mordor with the rest of his comrades at the beginning of The Fellowship of the Ring. This marks one part of the narrative content—the fact of their leaving on a journey. However, how do we account for the experience of nervousness, hesitance, excitement, fright, courage, second thoughts and the panoply of emotions and cognitions he experiences in that moment? In the heuristic of the thickened narrative self, these dimensions of his experience are just as much a part of his self as is the context or content. It is his narrative experience or, synonymously, narrative phenomenology. Moreover, this information is subject to the immunity principle in that Frodo cannot be wrong about whose experience he's experiencing. Indeed, he can mistake nervousness for excitement or fright for courage for any number of reasons. If he is poorly educated, he may not know what they mean. Or if he has limited cognitive insight, he may not be able to recognize what he is feeling.

But in any case, no one can argue that those experiences are anyone's but his own. They are *his* narrative phenomenology, embedded in the narrative content that takes place in a specific context or universe.

This dimension of the thickened narrative self shares characteristics with the embodied, or minimal self discussed above, in that it is synchronic, embodied and characterized by *ipseity*. Whereas the context accounts for socio-cultural considerations—including the possibilities, restrictions and constraints associated with a given universe—and the content reflects the intuitive nuts and bolts of a story (the who, what, where, when and why, as Ricoeur would have it (Ricoeur, 1991)), the narrative phenomenological self is not temporally extended because it is synchronic rather than diachronic; it does not take meaning from the broader context; and it does not consist of the particulars of a story. Rather than the content and context which reflect the distinguishing features of one's life, the narrative phenomenology is invariable in the sense that it is not possible to experience one's narrative in any way but through one's own *ipseity*. Indeed, the nuances of the story affect the content of that mineness, but they never change the mineness itself. No matter what it is like to abide in an intentional state (happy, upset, excited, sleepy), the perspective of the what-it-is-like is invariable.

2.4.4 Advantages of the Thickened Account

My account of the narrative self is better than extant configurations of the narrative self because it offers five advantages. First, it accounts for both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of existence. Second, it considers the socio-cultural context of a given narrative. Third, unlike many variations of the narrative self, it does not eschew the phenomenology of *ipseity*. Fourth, it is phenomenologically accurate in that the

possibilities for synchronic and diachronic experience are *always* present, and always take place within the context of narrative. Finally, and crucially, it reflects the fundamentally intertwined nature of narrative plot, embodiment and context, something current accounts fail to do.

The narrative self consists of both synchronic and diachronic dimensions. One can grasp this idea intuitively with simple reflection on the nature of one's own experience. Surely, we can all understand our own lives as narratives after reflecting on how we got to the present day and what we plan to do in the future—this is simple enough. However, the diachronic way of experiencing the world does *not* exhaust the phenomenological possibilities of the human experience. Many instances throughout the day are spent in the present moment, in a synchronic state of mind, in which the embodied narrative experience takes prominence. Consider, for example, the experience of playing a sport with great focus—or performing any activity with a similar degree of focus. The past and future of the narrative content do not occur to an individual focused on a given task, such as hitting a baseball or taking an exam. Indeed, these tasks can be complicated by rumination, perseveration and mentation, all of which may involve considerations of the past and future, but most can agree that single-pointed focus on the task at hand, paying no respect to the past or future, is the best way to perform these complicated activities. The embodied aspect of the narrative self, the narrative phenomenology, accounts for this synchronic dimension of being in the world, while the narrative content and context embrace and reflect the diachronic nature of the narrative self. A narrative self that neglects embodiment emphasizes diachronicity but eschews synchronicity. Such an individual is inconceivable, because they would have to always

exist outside of the present moment, surely an impossible feat. And an embodied self that leaves the narrative self behind is similarly mistaken. After all, how could one survive in the world solely by living in the present moment (unless completely dependent on others, such as in cases of severe amnesia)? Most obviously, how could one obtain food, shelter, and water, tasks that take the form of a narrative and reflect the diachronic nature of experience?

An additional advantage of my account's three-dimensional configuration is that the psychosocial and historical context in which a person is embedded in is considered to be one aspect of the narrative self. Indeed, most theorists agree that the self is somehow intimately related to its cultural-historical context, but none to my knowledge have argued that the context itself also takes the form of a narrative. By formulating the context as one aspect of the narrative self rather than something separate from it, I intend to foreground the fundamentally narrative structure of context, culture and history. Moreover, narrative context is inextricably bound to the narrative content, because it offers the possibilities for what can occur in a given narrative—just think of the absurdity of Luke Skywalker carrying The Ring or George Washington driving a Tesla across the Delaware.

Thirdly, although the narrative experience is synchronic, existing within the present moment without regard to past and future, it nevertheless has a narrative structure as its horizon. There are constraints placed on the possibilities for narrative experience— the *ipseity* of the narrative self—that stem from the fact that the experiences themselves take place in the diachronic paradigm of a narrative.

Fourth, this account is phenomenologically in accordance with the normal, non-pathological experience of virtually all people. One can always adopt the diachronic stance of the narrative content and context or, in contrast, the synchronic stance of the narrative experience—this is the very reason that the three components of the narrative self are distinct in the first place. But all three components are also under the categorical umbrella of narrative, suggesting that all three dimensions of the narrative self must take place within framework of a narrative.

The following objection to this configuration may arise: "How can a single self have both synchronic and diachronic dimensions at the same time?" The simple answer is that the *possibility* of synchronic and diachronic experiences is *always* there, and thus always constitutive of the narrative self. As agents in the world, we can choose to *pay attention* to any aspect of our experience—the synchronicity of the embodied present moment, the diachronicity of the narrative self, or the similarly diachronic psychosocial context. This will be highlighted in the next chapter, where I argue that mindfulness meditation facilitates one's ability to pay attention to each of the three components of the narrative self. But just because one pays attention to the past and present of the narrative content does not mean that our embodied self ceases to exist. Does the fact that Frodo is an embodied being (with a mineness associated with his role as carrier of The Ring) cease to exist when he is stricken with panic, considering the past and future as orcs pursue his trail? I argue not. Likewise, does his narrative content cease to exist when in a synchronic state of mind, paying attention to his embodied first-person experience? Again, I argue not. For these reasons, the context, content and experience of the self all should be considered part of the narrative self, rather than separate entities.

Finally, this account has the advantage of reflecting the inseparability of the three dimensions of the narrative self. To this, the question may arise: why not just have three separate selves –the narrative self, the embodied self, and the psychosocial self? In short, because each of the three aspects of the self take place in the form of a narrative. I argue that because all human experience takes place in time—how can it not? —each aspect of the narrative self must necessarily take the form of a narrative. There is no psychosocial aspect of the self that is *not* in narrative form with respect to one's existence. Likewise, although the narrative experience is synchronic, it never exists outside the context of the broader narrative it inhabits. For this reason, Zahavi's notion of two selves—the narrative self and core self—is false. No narrative self can exist independent of the present moment of the embodied self, for how could one's narrative content take place *across* time but never *in* time? Likewise, the existence of a lone embodied self independent of the narrative self is similarly untenable from a phenomenological perspective. If any of the three components did not take the form of narrative, they could be parsed into distinct entities. But because they all take place within the context of narrative, they all deserve to be called *dimensions of a thickened narrative self*.

2.5 Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has led us from a generic discussion of the inherent difficulties in trying to define a nebulous thing such as the self to a novel, thickened account of the narrative self. Along the way, we considered the key features of narrative proper as an introduction to important features of narrative self. These are temporal extension, social embededdness, constructedness and the self as author or actor (or both).

Finally, we investigated some prominent accounts of the narrative self, such as those put forward by Dennett, Schectman and Taylor.

Next, we considered key aspects of the embodied self: *ipseity*, synchronicity and embodiment. Each version of the minimal self addresses these components in one way or another. We also discussed some well-known perspectives on the embodied self, those of phenomenologist Zahavi and neuroscientist Damasio. Thereafter, we discussed various formulations of the relationship between the narrative and embodied selves.

In the end, I found the extant accounts of the narrative self, embodied self and to be wanting. Accounts of the embodied self failed to account for the narrativity and broader context inherent in even synchronic, embodied experience; theories on the socio-cultural self likewise neglected the place of narrative and embodiment; and narrative selves did not adequately account for the other aspects of the self. For this reason, I formulated a thickened narrative self that included the narrative content, narrative universe (or context) and narrative experience (or phenomenology). That all three dimensions are a seen as one part of the narrative self suggests that they are all inherently narrative in form. This arrangement also reinforces the notion that each part of the thickened narrative self is intimately interrelated.

Altogether, this thickening of the narrative self is crucial for the arguments that follow. The next chapter explores the ways in which mindfulness meditation—specifically in the context of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)—affects modulates, alters and ultimately changes the experience of the various components of the narrative self. We consider several questions with respect to how the narrative self is regulated by MBSR: How does MBSR facilitate awareness of the three dimensions of the

narrative self? How can meditation modulate the experience of the narrative self? How does an incorrect understanding and experience of self lead to more stress or other pathological state? How does the modulation of the narrative self help create less stress in the context of MBSR? These questions and more will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: The Thickened Narrative Self in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, we reviewed some prominent formulations of the narrative self, highlighting features that are consistent across all accounts, and also noting subtle but important differences among them. I subsequently offered my own interpretation of the narrative self, proposing a three dimensional structure consisting of the narrative phenomenology, content and universe. The aim of the chapter was to contribute to the evolving conversation on the constitution of the narrative self—discussions that involve a wide variety of fields, including the empirical disciplines alongside the humanities—as notions of self and subjectivity evolve.

At the same time, scholars from an equally diverse array of fields—including philosophy, Buddhist studies, anthropology, medicine, neuroscience and psychology— are investigating mindfulness meditation from their own unique perspectives as the literature grows at an exponential rate (Black, 2014; Davidson, 2010; Dunne, 2011b; Gethin, 2011; Goyal et al., 2014; Hickey, 2008; Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Engaged in the tasks of evaluating efficacy in the clinical setting, elucidating mechanisms by which mindfulness exerts its effects, and exploring the religious underpinnings of the practice (to name just a few), scholars continue to ask new questions in an attempt to understand mindfulness from scientific, clinical, religious and cultural standpoints.

My intention in the present chapter is to put these two lines of inquiry—that is, inquiry into the narrative self and inquiry into mindfulness—into conversation. Below I explain why this is a fruitful exercise and for whom. For now, it is enough to say that the chapter's guiding question asks how the narrative self is affected by mindfulness meditation. Naturally, this question implicates both the admittedly vague constructs of mindfulness and the narrative self. Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted way of defining either of them. Mindfulness is employed in an impossibly vast number of settings, including countless clinical interventions and various religious practices, as both a mental state that can be cultivated and trait that some individuals have and others do not. This is further complicated, as the previous chapter discusses, by the fact that the narrative self is much the same: there is no universally accepted way of defining it. How can one put mindfulness and the narrative self into conversation if it is troublesome enough simply defining them? Yet this chapter represents an attempt to do just that. Having stipulated an operational definition of the narrative self in Chapter Two, my tack within the first part of the present chapter will be to articulate an account of the version of mindfulness taught within MBSR (and its sister interventions, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy). I use a number of Buddhist sources to defend the notion that such a version of mindfulness has robust historical underpinnings throughout Buddhist history, in contradistinction to those who question the degree to which MBSR mindfulness is truly "Buddhist" (however they may define Buddhism). Having done so, I then offer a theory for how thus-defined mindfulness promotes regulation of the narrative self.

In this introductory section, I state my objectives, discuss methodology and outline the trajectory of my argument. But first, a word on why discussing the narrative

self within the context of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a valid, interesting and fruitful exercise. To begin, considerable research is devoted to understanding how mindfulness exerts its beneficial various effects. Leaving aside the question of efficacy—whether or not mindfulness is beneficial in some sense—scholars of all types are interested in the psychological and neuroscientific mechanisms by which mindfulness alters the trajectory and experience of psychopathology, including depression, subclinical-stress, chronic pain, anxiety, substance abuse, and so forth, as well as how mindfulness changes cognitive and affective functioning in general (Brewer et al., 2011; Chiesa, 2012; Goyal et al., 2014; Roemer, Orsillo, & Salters-Pedneault, 2008; Segal, Williams, Teasdale, & Kabat-Zinn, 2012). Researchers variously postulate that mindfulness induces changes in perception (Black, 2014), working memory (Amishi P Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong, & Gelfand, 2010; Mrazek, Franklin, Phillips, Baird, & Schooler, 2013; van Vugt & Jha, 2011; J. M. G. Williams, 2010), endocrine function (Creswell, Pacilio, Lindsay, & Brown, 2014; Davidson et al., 2003; Rosenkranz et al., 2013); attention (A. P. Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007); and the broader category of executive functioning (Roeser & Eccles, 2015; Siegel, 2007; Tang et al., 2010), among other indices. Indeed, it may be the case that many if not all of these are veritable "targets" of mindfulness practice in one way or another. Relevant for our purposes is the potential (if not nebulous) "target" of the self, in its panoply of forms: narrative, experiential, core, phenomenological, extended, biological, and more. In fact, one group of neuroscientists recently proposed a sweeping theory for how mindfulness affects various "modes" of self, incorporating empirical neuroscientific and psychological studies (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). In short, elucidating the so-called "mechanism(s) of

mindfulness" has been a recent aim for researchers in the field, and some have focused on how mindfulness affects the self as one possible mechanism.

This chapter aims to contribute to the burgeoning field of mindfulness and contemplative studies by putting my novel notion of the thickened narrative self into conversation with a historically informed account of mindfulness practices, relying on Nondual traditions in particular (which will be defined below).

3.1.1 Objectives

There are four primary goals for the chapter. First, defining mindfulness is a necessary task on the path to exploring how it affects the narrative self. As such, I explore the various ways in which one can define mindfulness, arguing that mindfulness can have a diverse plurality of referents and that the notion of a single authentic definition of mindfulness is spurious. Particularly helpful is the scholarship of Dunne and Rupert Gethin, who employ Buddhist sources to astutely describe how and why mindfulness can refer to many different things, depending on a host of factors, including but not limited to the historical and political context and particular Buddhist tradition. We discard the rhetoric of authenticity that can occasionally frame discussions of mindfulness, and instead argue that the idea of one true mindfulness is, quite simply, historically inaccurate. I show why this is the case so that my usage of mindfulness is placed in the broader context of what Dunne calls a "family of mindfulness practices" (Dunne, 2014).

Having established the fluidity of the term mindfulness, I describe in detail the kind of mindfulness employed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in MBSR—the mindfulness modality that I take to be representative of the broader contemporary mindfulness movement as a

whole. By avoiding the use of a broad, universal definition of mindfulness, and by employing a Buddhist historical analysis to defend the Buddhist origins of Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness, my argument for how the self is affected by the kind of mindfulness practiced in MBSR can proceed. This requires a foray into the history and development of Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness, which includes consideration of several "Nondual" Buddhist traditions (to be defined below) that inform it: the late nineteenth-century Buddhist reform movement in Burma; Japanese Zen and Chinese Chan resources; as well as Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā, two traditions within the panoply of Tibetan meditation practices.

Next, I discuss two recent proposals for how mindfulness interacts with the self. Although I find the studies to be a useful contribution to the nascent literature on contemporary mindfulness and self, my primary objective in reviewing these studies is to provide a foil for the arguments I subsequently offer. In other words, I explain how I find their models to be deficient and why my proposal is both more informed from a Buddhist historical perspective and more useful in the context of contemporary mindfulness research.

Next, I devote a section to the notion of simulation in cognitive psychology. In this setting, simulation refers to the neuropsychological mechanism that allows cognition to take place. I describe how it relates to reification, as well as dereification, the latter of which I argue is a key feature in mindfulness affects the self. Thereafter, I briefly discuss the role that dereification plays in mindfulness practices, including how it fits into the aforementioned Phenomenal Neurocognitive Matrix.

Finally, I offer a proposal for how the mindfulness modulates the thickened narrative self in the course of mindfulness practice. I focus on dereification and argue that mindfulness practices act on the narrative self by interrupting the simulation of the component of the narrative self that is the cause of stress. These modulations in the experience of self, I argue, promote the subjective changes that practitioners undergo which, in turn, produce the purported empirical psychological and physical benefits that some studies suggest result from mindfulness interventions.

3.1.2 Methods

Much like the previous chapter, in which I built on contemporary philosophy of mind literature, my analysis of mindfulness-based practices relies on relatively recent work—almost all of which has been published in the past ten years. This is due in part to the rapidly evolving nature of mindfulness scholarship, which likely stems from the fact that mindfulness practices in the West are a relatively recent phenomenon. In any case, I build on theory developed by an assortment of neuroscientists, philosophers, psychologists and religious studies scholars to proffer an argument on mindfulness and self-regulation.

In contrast to the previous chapter—in which I relied solely on contemporary scholarly literature on the self—this chapter relies on MBSR teaching materials, popular books and instruction manuals as primary sources. To my knowledge, few (if any) studies have examined these materials as a veritable body of literature through which one can gain insight into the role of the self in mindfulness practices. One may observe that brief sound bites from such resources can often be found in the introductions to scientific

papers. But this study takes these materials to be appropriate for scholarly investigation in and of themselves--in other words, as *primary texts*.

Reliance on written MBSR instructions and ancillary teaching materials requires one proviso. The use of textual analysis in the study of meditation should be revisited briefly, as a number of Buddhist scholars have recently voiced concerns about reliance on textual analysis in the study of meditation practice (Dunne, 2014; Gethin, 2011; Sharf, 1995). It is obviously the case that good Buddhist historical scholarship can rely on texts as source materials, but caution should be exercised along the following lines.

What is *prescribed* in the context of meditation practice may very well differ markedly from what the practitioner is actually *experiencing* in meditation. In other words, what a text *says* about a practice does not necessarily always correlate with what practitioners actually do within a practice. Most textual accounts are normative, meaning they do not describe what practitioners are actually doing. Instead they are prescriptive, and present an opinion concerning what practitioners *should* do. This does not mean that Buddhist historical sources are always misleading, of course. There are a host of cogent and lucid accounts of meditative experience, in any number of traditions. Rather, one must simply exercise caution when relying solely on texts in the historical study of meditation practice and involve other methodologies such as ethnography and anthropology (Gethin, 2011; Harrington & Dunne, forthcoming).

Ideally, both source texts and ethnographic methods would be taken into consideration in this particular study. One way to achieve this end would be to rely on written instructions for the *prescriptive* aspects of meditation practice and ethnographic, performative and anthropologic methods for the *descriptive, experiential* domain.

However, for various reasons, the latter approach will have to wait.[22] Nevertheless, here we assume that the practice instructions correspond to a practitioner's experience with a satisfactory degree of fidelity. On this basis, we can hypothesize how mindfulness regulates the experience of self. Confirmation or rejection of this theoretical analysis can be carried out once a sufficient phenomenological ethnography is conducted for comparison.

3.2 Mindfulness in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

An entire volume could be written on the history and development of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, including its Buddhist historical underpinnings and contemporary applications. As mindfulness interventions continue to proliferate at an exponential—even breathless—rate, such a project seems necessary, in fact. While several tome-like textbooks on the application of mindfulness in psychotherapy have been published in recent years (Baer, 2014; Didonna, 2009; Ie, Ngnoumen, & Langer, 2014), historical considerations have not kept up. Granted, several notable works of mindfulness scholarship have appeared in recent years, each touching on various historical aspects of contemporary mindfulness: as examples, we can point to one work that focuses on mindfulness as an American phenomenon (Wilson, 2014a), and another that focuses on mindfulness as it relates to the Burmese reform movement of the late-nineteenth century (Braun, 2013). That said, no comprehensive history of MBSR—or the mindfulness taught therein—has yet been written. Unfortunately, space does not allow

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[22] The 'various reasons' I allude to stem mostly from scarcity of time. As an MD/PhD student, I am unable to spend the requisite months (and even years) to conduct an ethnographic study that would supplement this project so well. The other factor is that I have yet to be trained in proper phenomenological ethnography which, unsurprisingly, is also due largely to time constraints.

for such an endeavor. But this section nonetheless represents an attempt to give a succinct, broad overview of the history and development of mindfulness in MBSR. Working backward in time, I review the seven key features of mindfulness practiced today in MBSR; the historical development of MBSR's version of mindfulness; and finally, its Buddhist underpinnings—which will bring us back as far as the 4th century C.E. I conclude with a useful, recently developed formulation for characterizing the various versions of mindfulness being practiced today, the Family of Mindfulness Practices Heuristic. This will serve to place Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness in relation to other common manifestations of the practice.

3.2.1 Key Features of Mindfulness in MBSR

The simplest way to highlight the most critical aspects of mindfulness is to turn to Kabat-Zinn's most widely cited volume, *Full Catastrophe Living*. Written by the de facto father of the contemporary mindfulness movement, this volume amounts to a sort of Bible, or *locus classicus*, for the mindfulness community. At the outset, Kabat-Zinn describes seven "Attitudinal Foundation(s) of Mindfulness Practice." In addition to being a concise articulation of the indispensible features of mindfulness, these seven features of mindfulness as understood within MBSR also serve as a window into the historical development and Buddhist underpinnings of Kabat-Zinn's approach to the practice. The seven features are:

1 non-judging
2 patience
3 beginner's mind
4 trust
5 non-striving
6 acceptance
7 letting go

Let us address each in turn. Beginning with non-judging, this is appropriately listed first, as it is perhaps the signature of mindfulness, when compared to other forms of contemporary psychotherapy. A stance of non-judging involves two steps. First, one must become aware of the extent to which we unconsciously and consciously categorize likes and dislikes, judging things to be desirable or not. Kabat-Zinn states that, "When we begin practicing paying attention to the activity of our own mind, it is common to discover and to be surprised, even astonished, by the fact that we are constantly generating judgments about experience" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 21). Such judgments render experiences, thoughts, emotions and sensations as either "good," "bad" or "neutral." The practice of mindfulness, he reminds us, is to "recognize this judging quality of mind when it appears and assume a broader perspective by intentionally suspending judgment and assuming a stance of impartiality…" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 23). The goal is to recognize the judgmental stance, simply note it and assume a state of *non-*judgment, non-reactivity and impartiality to all experience has to offer.

Patience is the second critical feature—important enough that he calls it a "form of wisdom" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 23). In this instance, it refers to being patient with oneself in the cultivation of mindfulness and, subsequently, patience in the process of reducing stress. When we see our minds judging ourselves and others all of the time, we do not need to impatiently rush into fixing everything. To illustrate this point, he uses the metaphor of the butterfly: "A child may try to help a butterfly to emerge by breaking open its chrysalis. Usually the butterfly doesn't benefit from this. Any adult knows that the butterfly can only emerge in its own time, that the process cannot be hurried" (Kabat-

Zinn, 1990, p. 23). In other words, in trying to actively fix our judgments, we may actually be impeding progress, much like the child who (with good intent) plucks the butterfly out of the cocoon prematurely. He says that we should "treat ourselves as well as we would treat the butterfly" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 23).

The next foundation of practice is beginner's mind. Perhaps more than any of the seven features of mindfulness, this has an explicitly Buddhist sentiment and provenance. In fact, one of the most popular books on Buddhism in the West is *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind,* by twentieth-century Zen monk Shunryu Suzuki. In the preface to the volume, Suzuki states that, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's mind there are few" (S. Suzuki, 1970, p. 21). This is the basis of the following quote from Kabat-Zinn:

> Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we 'know' prevent us from seeing things as they really are. We tend to take the ordinary for granted and fail to grasp the extraordinariness of the ordinary. To see the richness of the present moment, we need to cultivate what has been called 'beginner's mind,' a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 24).

The essence of this teaching is that "experts" approach life with preconceived notions of good and bad, desirable and undesirable, painful and pleasant. Being an "expert" prevents us from seeing the wonder and beauty of the present moment, a feature of experience that is not shielded from the beginner's mind. To cultivate mindfulness is therefore to transition from expert's mind to beginner's mind, unveiling features of experience that were previously unnoticed or even unavailable.

Next is the notion of trust, namely, trust in oneself and one's feelings.[23] What Kabat-Zinn means in this instance is that practitioners must "trust their own basic wisdom and goodness."[24] The goal is to trust one's own intuitions, emotions and sensations rather than what a particular teacher or certain text says. Such a perspective is critical to mindfulness, because "venerating a teacher as a model of perfect wisdom" is "completely contrary to the spirit of meditation, which emphasizes being your own person and understanding what it means to be yourself" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 25). Trusting in one's own perspective, even if that leads to "mistakes" (as Kabat-Zinn puts it), is more important than getting it "right" by following a "wiser or more advanced person." As I see it, this suggests that Kabat-Zinn means to foreground the importance of becoming more "fully oneself," and the way to accomplish this is by trusting in one's intuitions, thoughts and feelings. So heavily emphasized is trusting in one's *own* experiences that, in some respects, it would not be misleading if this foundation of mindfulness was described as trust in *oneself*, rather than simply trust.

Next is the notion of non-striving, closely related to both patience and trust. Striving can become a non-trivial obstacle in meditation practice, as a strong desire to achieve some endpoint can preclude one from finding what one is looking for. As Kabat-Zinn says:

> Almost everything we do we do for a purpose, to get something or somewhere. But in meditation this attitude can be a real obstacle. That is because meditation is different from all other human activities. Although it takes a lot of work and energy of a certain kind, ultimately meditation is a non-doing. It has no goal

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[23] On a superficial level, this may seem antithetical to Buddhist notions of no-self and selflessness, but such a reading is decidedly facile. Although critics may argue that "trusting" oneself amounts to bolstering one's self-esteem, which in turn can lead to selfish behavior. This is a simplistic reading of 'trust' and elides the true intent of the no-self doctrine.

[24] This hearkens to the notion of Buddha Nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), which will be discussed in greater detail below.

other than for you to be yourself…. This sounds paradoxical and a little crazy. Yes this paradox and craziness may be pointing you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less and being more (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 26).

As he states, mindfulness certainly involves effort in one sense—a practitioner needs to expend energy, be motivated to set aside time to practice and attend class and so forth. But the kind of effort he finds destructive is the desire and overwhelming commitment to get better now, get enlightened, control pain or become a better person. In short, striving for a particular endpoint or result is counterproductive in mindfulness practice. The goal, in contrast, is to pay attention to whatever arises, "allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is. You do not have to *do* anything with it" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 26, his emphasis). If one is patient and trusting in oneself, furthermore, this makes non-striving all the more effective.

One of the most prominent and well-known features of mindfulness practice is acceptance. To Kabat-Zinn, acceptance means simply accepting facts as facts. "If you have a headache, accept that you have a headache. If you are overweight, why not accept it as a description of your body at this time" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 27)? Failing to accept reality as it is ('I am presently overweight', 'I am in pain') is an impediment to positive change, and is actually a waste of time. The goal of mindfulness practice is to learn to eschew ideas about what we "should" be feeling or thinking, and embrace whatever arises in our phenomenal field. This is not to say that we should, for instance, assume a fatalistic stance and accept negative situations such as domestic abuse or addiction. But rather, we should be honest with ourselves and accept the simple fact that we are being

abused or misusing substances—"acknowledging fact as fact." The difference between these two notions of acceptance is critical and commonly misunderstood.

Letting go, or allowing experience to unfold without clinging to or pushing away particular sensations, emotions or thoughts, is the final foundation of mindfulness practice. In this sense, the opposite of letting go is clinging, which amounts to an attempt to hold onto a (usually, but not exclusively) positive experience. The reason that letting go is important is because trying to hold onto good feelings and pushing away bad ones can often make our experience worse. For example, we may get very sad when a positive experience comes to completion or proves elusive to maintain, or we could feel distraught when something negative happens to us. A close analog to letting go is non-attachment—an important principle of Buddhist practice—with both meant to convey the importance of accepting the entire manifold of experience, rather than pushing away some and clinging to other experiences.

Having considered Kabat-Zinn's account in particular, we now broaden our consideration of mindfulness in the contemporary setting to look at how it is defined in the psychology literature at large. Although the focus of this chapter is on Kabat-Zinn's account, it would be wise to spend time discussing another widely accepted account from the clinical psychologist Bishop and his colleagues. Despite the fact that the field of clinical psychology does not employ a single, standardized definition of mindfulness, it seems that many researchers have come to recognize one in particular as more or less authoritative. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is based largely on the seven principles described in Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living,* in which mindfulness is frequently summed up as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment

and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. xxvii). Bishop et al. (2004) add that this manner of paying attention is directed toward each "feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field," which is then meant to be "acknowledged and accepted as it is" (Bishop et al., 2006). Their "operational definition" of mindfulness relies on a two-component model that bears some similarities and differences to Kabat-Zinn's seven features of mindfulness. The first component concerns the *regulation of attention* that is oriented to the thoughts, feelings and sensations of the present moment. Secondly, the practitioner of mindfulness is to adopt a particular *orientation toward their experience*, characterized by openness, curiosity and acceptance. In sum, the two-component model is based on (1) the self-regulation of attention and (2) orientation to experience.

Because what Bishop means by "self-regulation of attention" and "orientation to experience" is not necessarily transparent, let us consider each of them in slightly greater detail. With respect to self-regulation, Bishop et al. state:

> Mindfulness begins by bringing awareness to current experience – observing and attending to the changing field of thoughts, feelings, and sensations from moment to moment – by regulating the focus of attention (Bishop et al., 2006).

This component of mindfulness asks the practitioner to direct their attention to whatever happens to arise within one's field of awareness. All thoughts and experiences are to be considered a potential object of observation and one is never favored over another. Next, if one notices that one's attention has drifted off to another thought or feeling (rumination or evaluative processing), they are instructed to redirect their attention back to the present moment. Within clinical psychology, the breath typically serves as the "anchor" of one's awareness, a proxy for the present moment. When one

recognizes that they are or have been ruminating, they are asked to bring their attention back to their breath. This is called 'redirecting attention' in Bishop et al.

According to this model, mindfulness practice consists of a sequence of sustained attention on one's breath (1), rumination (2), recognition of rumination (3) and redirection back to the breath (4). This process typically ensues many times over throughout a given mindfulness session. As one becomes more skilled at this practice, evaluative processing and rumination decrease, such that sustained attention on one's breath (or another anchor of choice) *increases* in duration and the amount of time to recognize that one is ruminating or evaluating *decreases*. This aspect of mindfulness is therefore characterized by three skills: sustained attention, attention switching (redirecting) and inhibition of elaborative processing (Bishop et al., 2006). The cultivation of the self-regulation of attention is a distinctly meta-cognitive task (to these researchers, at least) consisting of the monitoring and control of attention. Meta-cognitive, in this setting, means the monitoring one's thoughts, or one's cognition—taking one's own attention as the intentional object.

How is the self-regulation of attention relevant to therapy? According to Dreyfus, "the basic idea is that to free ourselves we need to quiet the mind and disengage it from its compulsive tendencies to conceptualize our experiences in terms of what we like and dislike" (Dreyfus, 2011, p. 43). Rather than getting caught in a tangled web of thoughts, thoughts about those thoughts and evaluation of thoughts, the skill of attention regulation allows one to cut through those ruminative tendencies, and return to the unelaborated present moment. The phenomenological space of the present moment, the clinical psychologists argue, is an opportunity for mental wellness and relief from depression,

anxiety and stress. Again, Bishop cites Jon Kabat-Zinn, this time on how the present

moment is emphasized:

> If we can recognize what we are really doing and what we are really feeling in
> any given moment, we might be able to influence how we are in relationship to
> what is happening right in the very moment or string of moments in which things
> are unfolding…We might even realize the folly of the way in which our desire to
> get it all done generates feeling chronically rushed or overwhelmed (Kabat-Zinn,
> 1990, p. 206).

Bishop et al.'s first component of mindfulness, then, reflects the clinical

observation by Kabat-Zinn and others that such attention to the present moment promotes

well-being.

The second part of mindfulness meditation, according to Bishop and colleagues,

is the cultivation of a particular orientation to the subject of their attention—whatever

that may be—namely: acceptance. In this instance, acceptance can be defined as "being

experientially open to the reality of the present moment" (Roemer & Orsillo, 2009).

Whether one's attention is directed to the breath, past-oriented regrets, future-oriented

plans or otherwise, mindfulness means that one adopts this curious, open and accepting

stance to whatever unfolds. Whereas the first aspect of mindfulness concerns the

regulation of attention toward any given object, this second dimension concerns

cultivation of a particular relationship toward that object, or "a process of relating openly

to experience" (Bishop et al., 2006).

With the cultivation of a novel 'orientation to experience', several outcomes are

expected. First, avoidance behavior—and in particular, repressive coping—should

decrease. Second, curiosity with respect to new and novel experiences should become

more pronounced. And finally, when emotionally stressful situations arise, they should

become less unpleasant and threatening. With the cultivation of this component of

mindfulness, an experience which produces stress and suffering in the absence of

mindfulness will not generate the same levels of stress owing to one's altered orientation

towards the experience.

Key features of these two widely used accounts of mindfulness are therefore as

follows. Attention and acceptance are foregrounded; attention is present-centered; the

process is not goal-driven, aside from following the instruction to accept experience as it

unfolds; and the practitioner is non-reactive. Having considered Kabat-Zinn's particular

account of mindfulness alongside the more generalized contemporary psychological

approach to mindfulness as described by Bishop and colleagues, we now investigate the

recent historical figures and events in the development of mindfulness (stretching back

approximately the last one hundred years) that catalyzed its transformation from an

almost exclusively Buddhist phenomenon into a widespread social and psychological

practice.

3.3.2 History and Development of Mindfulness in MBSR

> *[The idea for MBSR] didn't come out of a vacuum…there*
> *were many years of pondering and meditating and inward*
> *and outward wondering before it arose as a possibility in*
> *my mind.*
> *   -Jon Kabat-Zinn* (2011)

An appropriate place to begin a brief history of mindfulness in MBSR is in late-

nineteenth century Burma, with Buddhist monk Ledi Sayādaw U Ñanadhaja. Known

simply as Ledi, his teachings generated a lineage of followers that traces all the way to

the present day. A number of contemporary Buddhist teachers and luminaries, such as

Jack Kornfield, Daniel Goleman and Sharon Salzberg, all belong in the genealogy of

Ledi and his followers. A number of signature elements of Buddhist modernism, such as meditation by lay persons and an emphasis on 'bare awareness' as a meditative practice, stem from his exploits around the turn of the twentieth century.[25]

Born in 1846, Ledi (1846-1923) would become one of the most well known (and controversial) monks in Burmese history, as well as one of the most prominent figures in the history of Buddhist modernism. As one Ledi scholar notes, today, many Buddhists and non-Buddhists mistakenly assume that all Buddhists have always meditated—lay persons as well as monks and nuns—and, that "meditation is often seen as Buddhism's synecdoche" (Braun, 2013, p. 5). This widespread belief is in large part due to the influence of Ledi and his followers. In addition to the simple fact that laypersons now meditate on a grand scale, the *kind* of meditation they practice is also part of Ledi's legacy. Many of the features of contemporary mindfulness meditation described above— including Kabat-Zinn's "Seven Foundations of Mindfulness Practice" and Bishop's formulation of mindfulness—rely heavily, if not explicitly, on the teachings of Ledi and his disciples Mingun Sayādaw (1870-1955) and Mahāsī Sayādaw (1904-1955). The latter, in particular, developed the technique that is popular today in "insight" or "*vipassanā*" meditation circles, wherein one is instructed to focus on whatever sensory object arises in one's phenomenal field (Sharf, forthcoming). This approach to meditation led to Mahāsī's more radical claim that liberating insight does not require time-consuming, advanced stages of practice that historically involved many years of concentration (*samatha*) practice. In short, Ledi and his followers taught a) that meditation can be performed by the masses and b) they can proceed directly to more

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[25] For a thorough treatment of this subject, I point readers to Braun's excellent volume *The Birth of Insight,* which details Ledi's life and teachings, as well as how they contributed to the development of meditation in the West and Buddhist modernism in general.

'advanced' stages of practice that previously required years of preparation in 'concentration' meditation (Braun, 2013; Sharf, forthcoming). Although informed by Buddhist philosophy and literature—especially the *Abhidharma*—Mahāsī's method was far-reaching in part because one did not need to study these materials, nor renounce the lay life, nor spend an entire lifetime practicing meditation: liberating insight was accessible to laypersons in a relatively short period of time.

We come back full circle to Jon Kabat-Zinn in consideration of one of Mahāsī's most influential students, Nyanaponika Thera (1901-1994). In an article in which he attempts to place contemporary mindfulness in the context of Buddhist thought and practice, Kabat-Zinn states that "Historically, mindfulness has been called 'the heart' of Buddhist meditation," (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145), a reference to Nyanaponika Thera's seminal book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. A German-born Theravāda Buddhist monk, Nyanaponika Thera was taught by Mahāsī Sayādaw and became a popular figure in the *vipassanā* or insight meditation movement. He coined the phrase 'bare-attention,' a popular locution for the kind of mindfulness practiced in the contemporary setting. Allow me to quote Nyanaponika Thera at length:

> Bare Attention is the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception. It is called 'bare', because it attends just to the bare facts of a perception as presented either through the five physical senses or through the mind which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense. When attending to that six fold sense impression, attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by deed, speech or by mental comment which may be one of self-reference (like, dislike, etc.), judgment or reflection. If during the time, short or long, given to the practice of Bare Attention, any such comments arise in one's mind, they themselves are made objects of Bare Attention, and are neither repudiated nor pursued, but are dismissed, after a brief mental note has been made of them (Thera, 1954, pp. 17–18).

In Nyanaponika Thera's writings, it is possible to discern virtually all seven of Kabat-Zinn's seven features of mindfulness. Within this passage alone, five of the seven are readily apparent. Above, Nyanaponika Thera states that one should avoid reacting with judgment to thoughts (non-judging); avoid pursuing likes or dislikes (patience and non-striving); simply attend without reaction to whatever arises in one's consciousness (acceptance); and dismiss any commentary that appear during meditation (Letting go). Clearly, there is a strong correlation between the presentations of mindfulness by Kabat-Zinn and Nyanaponika Thera.

That is not to say, however, that late-nineteenth century Burmese Buddhism was the only influence on Kabat-Zinn, as he draws from a panoply of Buddhist traditions:

> Mindfulness is the fundamental attentional stance underlying all streams of Buddhist meditative practice: the Theravāda tradition of the countries of Southeast Asia (Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam); the Mahayana (Zen) schools of Vietnam, China, Japan, and Korea; and the Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism found in Tibet itself, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Ladakh, and now large parts of India in the Tibetan community in exile (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 146).

Although he views mindfulness as "the heart of Buddhist meditation," Kabat-Zinn clearly approaches mindfulness from the perspective of other Buddhist traditions, not only that of Nyanaponika Thera. For one, he has stated on several occasions that one of his main influences was the Korean Zen master Seung Sahn, who would eventually become his primary teacher (Hickey, 2008, p. 128). In particular, Kabat-Zinn took away lessons on the teacher-student dialectic from Seung Sahn, incorporating elements of his teaching style into MBSR, especially the use of koans and koan-based "'Dharma-combat' exchanges between teacher and student" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 289). These principles of teaching would inform the subsequent development of MBSR.

Additionally, before writing *Full Catastrophe Living*, we know that Kabat-Zinn read *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, by Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-)—the popular Vietnamese Zen monk and activist who has become one of the most influential Buddhists of the last one hundred years, perhaps rivaled only by Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. For those familiar with *The Miracle of Mindfulness,* this may come as no surprise, as both espouse a similar notion of mindfulness. The following quote by Nhat Hanh could easily have been written by Kabat-Zinn:

> During meditation, various feelings and thoughts may arise…. When a feeling or thought arises, your intention should not be to chase it away, even if by continuing to concentrate on the breath the feeling or thought passes naturally from the mind. The intention isn't to chase it away, hate it, worry about it, or be frightened by it. So what exactly should you be doing concerning such thoughts and feelings? Simply acknowledge their presence (Hanh, 1975, p. 38).

Again, we see an emphasis on some of the trademark elements of Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness: Non-Judging and Acceptance. Nhat Hanh would go on to write the preface to Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living*, a hearkening of the mutual affection that Thich Nhat Hanh and Kabat-Zinn would come to have for one another: "This very readable and practical book will be helpful in many ways. I believe many people will profit from it…This book's invitation for each one of us to wake up and savor every moment we are given to live has never been more needed than it is today" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. xxiii).[26]

Still other Buddhist traditions would play a role in Kabat-Zinn's formulation of mindfulness, as popular modern Tibetan Buddhist teachers The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (1935-) and Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987), as well as Zen teacher D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966), helped lay the groundwork for MBSR as well, each in their own unique ways. For one, D.T. Suzuki promoted a perennialist message around the turn of

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[26] This quote is actually a combination of Nhat Hanh's two separate prefaces to the two editions of *Full Catastrophe Living* (1989/2013).

the twentieth century that disembedded Buddhist teachings (including meditation instruction) from any institutional context, such that all religions and even secular philosophies could relate (D. L. McMahan, 2008, p. 186). Additionally, Trungpa and the Dalai Lama traditionally minimized doctrinal commitment, stripping meditation practice of conventional ritual and doctrine. The "privatization, deinstitutionalization and detraditionalization" (as McMahan puts it) exemplified by Suzuki, Trungpa and Gyatso set the stage for Kabat-Zinn's MBSR to flourish as the twenty-first century approached (D. L. McMahan, 2008, p. 187).[27]

While the Buddhist influences were paramount, however, Kabat-Zinn also looked to sources outside of Buddhism. Kabat-Zinn acknowledges at the outset of *Full Catastrophe* that several Hindu figures influenced him, including the teachings of J Krishnamurti and Ramana Maharishi (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 289). And as Dunne and Harrington point out, one important clinician at Harvard—who didn't even study or practice mindfulness—would play a seminal role in its popularization: Herbert Benson. Benson himself has an interesting history that unfortunately is beyond the scope of this discussion. But in any case, he contributed to Kabat-Zinn's eventual popularity by conducting research on another contemplative practice, Transcendental Meditation (TM), from a clinical and "scientific" perspective. Teaming up with University of California in Los Angeles graduate student Robert Keith Wallace and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of India, Benson would publish *The Relaxation Response* (1975), a volume that would prove pivotal in the medicalization of meditation, a turn that was crucial for Kabat-Zinn's MBSR. In the studies that produced *The Relaxation Response*, they found evidence that

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[27] Indeed, it would be an intriguing intellectual exercise to speculate how the influence of such diverse forms of Buddhist practice benefited the development of MBSR in America, but for now it is enough to say that Kabat-Zinn drew on an impressive array of Buddhist traditions.

TM altered visceral and autonomic functioning. Their conclusion, according to

Harrington and Dunne, was that meditation was "simply a natural and universal

technology for creating certain clinically desirable physiological effects" (Harrington &

Dunne, forthcoming). The idea that certain mental activity could produce salutary

physiological results was critical to the fundamental framing of meditation as something

that could promote health and well-being—an important development in the history of

meditation in America, and one that set the stage for Kabat-Zinn's MBSR only four years

after the publication of *The Relaxation Response*.

Kabat-Zinn's inspiration for MBSR occurred during an epiphanic moment during

a two-week *vipassanā* retreat at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS). Fittingly, IMS

was started by Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Daniel Goleman in 1975, all of

whom were taught by various prominent figures in the Burmese lineage of Ledi Sayādaw,

as well as the Thai Forest monks Achan Chah and Achan Sumedho. The Buddhist

teachers of the IMS founders serve as yet another reminder of the existence of a well-

trodden genealogic path between Ledi Sayādaw and MBSR. Of his fit of inspiration,

Kabat-Zinn states:

> I saw in a flash not only a model that could be put in place, but also the long-term
> implications of what might happen if the basic idea was sound and could be
> implemented in one test environment—namely that it would spark new fields of
> scientific and clinical investigation, and would spread to hospitals and medical
> centers and clinics across the country and around the world, and provide right
> livelihood for thousands of practitioners…

> It struck me in that fleeting moment that afternoon at the Insight Meditation
> Society that it would be a worthy work to simply share the essence of meditation
> and yoga practices as I had been learning and practicing them at that point for 13
> years, with those who would never come to a place like IMS or a Zen Center
> (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 287).

Moved to action by this 'vision,' as he calls it, he soon thereafter designed an eight-week program for chronic pain patients for the purposes of managing medical conditions that conventional medicine was not able to cure. Kabat-Zinn's 1979 IMS retreat, then, served as a pivotal step in the development of mindfulness in America. For shortly thereafter, he first taught *The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program* at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the program that would eventually become Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

In the thirty-five years since its inception, MBSR and related therapies have been the subject of more than 3,000 studies (Black, 2014). Countless iterations of mindfulness-based interventions have been developed, from mindfulness for trivial and more promiscuous ends such as "Mind-Blowing Sex," to mindfulness for more serious matters, such as anorexia, obesity, smoking cessation and suicidality (Harrington & Dunne, forthcoming). Leaving these applications of mindfulness aside, having considered some key Buddhist (and non-Buddhist) figures in the development of MBSR within this section, we now turn to the doctrinal Buddhist underpinnings that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction draws on, including *how* mindfulness came to be defined in the way that Kabat-Zinn presents it.

3.2.3 Buddhist Underpinnings of Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness

> *Yet, when we consider Buddhism in its various traditions in India, in China and in Tibet…the question may ever arise as to whether the name 'Buddhism' denotes one single entity rather than a classification embracing…a very large number of strands held together by family resemblances.*
> *-David Seyfort Ruegg* (1989, p. 3)

The task of defining mindfulness from a Buddhist historical perspective is complicated by the simple fact that Buddhism is not a singular phenomenon. The monolith that Buddhism may appear to be (to some, especially Westerners) is in fact composed of multiple *Buddhisms* that are rooted in different cultural, geographic and temporal contexts. To this effect, Dunne states that "[s]ome scholars have even suggested that, in contemporary academic contexts, it is highly misleading to use the single term 'Buddhism' for these diverse manifestations in cultures as divergent as India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Nepal, Tibet, Korea, China, Japan, North America and so on" (Dunne, 2014). Given the fact that *Buddhisms* may be more appropriate than *Buddhism* as a description of the plurality of various religious and cultural traditions—each of which claims adherence to one degree or another to their particular interpretations of the teachings of the Buddha—it is sensible to suggest there are multiple types of *mindfulness* rather than a single *mindfulness*. But to complicate matters further, some Buddhist traditions and individual teachers will at times insist that, in the final analysis, Buddhism *is* indeed singular and monolithic (Dunne, 2011b).

In light of this provision, perhaps it is unsurprising that the various Buddhist traditions have at one time or another espoused different and at times competing accounts of mindfulness, four of which Dunne highlights in a recent article. Each of these four may be prominent in one account, minimized in another, or altogether absent. Mindfulness may mean: 1) memory, as in memory connected to the idea of who one is as a practitioner and one's broader goals (soteriological, medical, etc.); 2) a certain quality or facet of mind that Buddhist *Abhidharma* theorists argue is present in every mental moment (though there is debate on whether it is only present in virtuous mind-states or

non-virtuous as well); 3) 'heedfulness,' or an awareness of one's personal bodily, emotional and mental states; and finally, 4) an aspect highlighted particularly in the Mahāmudrā tradition, Nondual awareness, a kind of paying attention to no object in particular (Dunne, 2014). Here we see an incredible diversity of meaning, application, interpretation and translation as it pertains to the single term mindfulness. The four aspects of mindfulness put forth by one scholar should give pause to those who offer reductive or simplistic translations within mindfulness.

Given the argument that the notion of a single account of mindfulness is spurious, how do scholars account for the diversity of influences on contemporary mindfulness practices? Dunne proposed one solution in a recent paper, arguing that modern practices should be viewed from the perspective of a "family of practices heuristic" (Dunne, 2014) as opposed to viewing one type of mindfulness as authoritative (Bodhi, 2011; Dunne, 2014; Gethin, 2011). The family of practices formulation accomplishes at least three things. First, it provides a countervailing (and more accurate) historical view in mindfulness scholarship against the idea that there is only *one* authentic Buddhist kind of mindfulness. Second, it supports a less sectarian Buddhist historical account of the roots of mindfulness. Finally, it provides a method for evaluating how contemporary approaches to mindfulness "align or misalign" with Buddhist styles of practice. To these ends, Dunne distinguishes between 'Classical' and 'Nondual ' accounts of mindfulness. I wish to emphasize that these are etic categories, and do not refer to any specific Buddhist traditions or lineages, but rather to "general trends that apply across a broad range of practices and traditions" that can usefully distinguish the two (Dunne, 2014). Here we outline these two families of mindfulness practices, starting with the Classical account.

A relatively facile understanding of mindfulness straightforwardly cites the Pali word *sati* (Skt. *smṛti*) as the technical term equivalent to 'mindfulness.' This term was translated by early Buddhist scholars—most notably T. W. Rhys Davids of the Pali Text Society—as, *inter alia*, "memory, remembrance, recollection, reminiscence [and] calling to mind" (Gethin, 2011, p. 264), with two key texts being *The Mahāparanibbāna Sutta* (1881) and, later the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (1910). In fact, it has been more than a century since *sati* was first translated (with some degree of uncertainty) as "mindfulness" by Rhys Davids but to this day this translation is still widely used. That said, scholars continue to revise and reinterpret this rendering (Bodhi, 2011, p. 23).

Given the translation of *sati* as mindfulness, how is it used, what are its characteristics, and according to whom? Let us start with Dunne's Classic account of mindfulness. Today, Theravāda lineages and contemporary practice styles such as *vipassanā* hold that the *Abhidharma* has the most precise and 'original' account of mindfulness (Anālayo, 2003; Bodhi, 2011; Dunne, 2014; Gethin, 2011). And Tibetan Buddhist literature as well, including *lojong* ("mind training") and *śamatha* ("calm abiding"), still relies heavily on *Abhidharma* (Wallace, 2006). From this perspective, mindfulness refers to the act of remembering and keeping in mind, or to that which is kept in mind. One seminal text for mindfulness scholars in the *Abhidharma* tradition is the non-canonical Pali text *Visuddhimagga*, composed by the Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa in the 5th century CE. In this text, the primary characteristic of mindfulness is "not wobbling," and its function is "not to forget,"—a common articulation from many sources within the *Abhidharma* tradition, not just the *Visuddhimagga* (Buddhaghoṣa, 1976). Within the *Abhidharmic* paradigm that informs the Classical account, therefore,

we see the fundamental importance of a certain kind of memory. Importantly, it is not just *any* kind of memory, but memory as it relates to a remembering one's commitment to the broad ethical framework supporting and framing one's practice. In other words, it is memory in the sense of remembering vows, ethical and unethical behavior, and a general sense of the commitments one makes as a Buddhist practitioner. Dunne reiterates this point by stating:

> The overall picture of practice on this Classical model…involves a broad ethical context for both formal training in meditation and also for informal contexts when practitioners go about their daily activities in a heedful fashion. Understood in this fashion, the Classical style can thus be interpreted as involving the regulation of behavior as one of its main features. The heedful practitioner develops the capacity to avoid unethical vocal and physical activities (Dunne, 2014).

Classical styles of mindfulness practice ask a practitioner to keep in mind certain ethical principles as part of the broader goal of eliminating the causes of suffering, one of which is unethical behavior. Part of being mindful, in other words, is recognizing when one is cultivating a negative mental state before one commits an unethical act.[28] This requires awareness of an ethical framework, where a given act is either "wholesome" or "unwholesome," to be "adopted" (*upādeya*) or "abandoned" (*heya*) (Dunne, 2014).[29]

According to the Classical account, therefore, we see a need for both memory and ethics in mindfulness practice. To review, memory is related to ethics because it is the duty of the person meditating to *remember* a number of things, just some of which are the instructions of the practice, one's vows and, more generally the broader *ethical* framework one inhabits. In this way, memory and ethics go hand in hand. Another piece of the puzzle—and a key aspect of the Classical accounts—is judgment, or evaluation.

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[28] In this context, 'acts' can variously refer to cognition, speech or behavior, not just physical action.
[29] For details on what one should 'adopt' or 'abandon,' and the ethical framework that frames those decisions, see Dunne's paper (2014) on the heuristic approach to mindfulness.

For in *remembering* one's *ethical* commitments, it is incumbent on the practitioner to assess, evaluate or *judge* the extent to which one is acting in accordance with those principles. In this way, judgment, too, is a critical aspect of mindfulness meditation.

One traditional non-canonical text in the *Abhidharma* tradition that underscores the evaluative aspect of *sati* is *The Questions of King Milinda*. Though it does not discuss *sati* as a technical term, the text does portray mindfulness as a decidedly evaluative activity. *The Questions of King Milinda* emphasizes the judgmental aspects of the formal practice of mindfulness, as opposed to the prominent role of non-judgment within the version of mindfulness demonstrated in both contemporary versions (discussed above) and Nondual accounts (discussed below). Along these lines, one contrast between Classical and Nondual traditions of mindfulness is that judgment of what is ethical or unethical, wholesome or unwholesome plays a very prominent role. When King Milinda asks the monk Nāgasena what the nature of mindfulness is, he states: "When mindfulness arises, one calls to mind the *dharmas* which participate in what is wholesome and unwholesome, blamable and blameless, inferior and sublime, dark and light" (Mendis, 1993). In short, one is to evaluate or judge one's states of mind according to the axes acknowledged above. It is not enough—as in some contemporary and Nondual accounts—to simply acknowledge that one is having a thought, be it wholesome or unwholesome. One must *judge* and *evaluate*, with the assistance of *memory* of one's vows and one's *ethical* commitments, whether or not the given object of attention is wholesome or not.

To summarize the main features of the Classical account of mindfulness: first, it looks primarily to the *Abhidharma* for authority when it comes to mindfulness. Second,

it implicates ethics, including the broad soteriological framework that structures what is to be abandoned or adopted on the path; it invokes memory, of one's vows and the details of the ethical framework that are their basis; and it involves judgment, whether or not one's thoughts and deeds align or misalign with the above ethical paradigm.

But of course the story does not end there, as the above *Abhidharma* accounts of mindfulness do not exhaust the number of possible Buddhist perspectives. The Nondual versions of mindfulness within the family of practices heuristic is the counterpart to the Classical account. Dunne concedes that the Nondual approach to mindfulness may "lie outside the usual Buddhist mainstream" (Dunne, 2011b, p. 71). With that said, these accounts are particularly relevant for the present discussion because the evidence suggests that contemporary mindfulness practices bear the greatest similarity to the Nondual traditions. Because my focus is precisely on contemporary mindfulness, we will spend the rest of the section describing Nondual accounts, despite the fact that there is much more that can be said about Classical versions of mindfulness.

In the way that Buddhist traditions themselves vary depending on time, place and context, the exact meaning of mindfulness can vary depending on precisely the same axes of ethics, judgment and memory. For in contrast to the *Abhidharmic* traditions mentioned above, the Nondual mindfulness practices can appear quite different from— and at times conflict with—the traditional *Abhidharmic* accounts (Dunne, 2014). The Nondual traditions emerged in India before spreading to East and Central Asia, with some of the later styles consciously eschewing *Abhidharma* considerations. Each of these lineages, so to speak, developed alternative meditation manuals, first person accounts of meditative practice and the like. These traditions provide the namesake for

Dunne's Nondual classification, as practitioners were categorically instructed to attempt to cultivate phenomenal states where subject-object duality is suspended (Dunne, 2014).

What are the characteristics of Dunne's Nondual styles of practice and how do they differ from the *Abhidharma*-based Classical approach? A good place to begin is with the notion of *tathāgatagarbha*. Although subject to a significant range of translations and interpretations, *tathāgatagarbha* could reasonably be translated as 'containing a *tathāgata'*, or 'containing a Buddha.' Because the Sanskrit word *garbha* also can mean 'womb,' 'seed,' 'embryo,' or more generally, 'the innermost part of something,' the expression has also come to mean that all beings have a *tathāgata*, or Buddha, within them as their essential nature. *Tathāgatagarbha* is also widely known today as Buddha Nature, as it is rendered in Chinese, a locution I will also use on occasion (Ruegg, 1989; P. Williams, 2009, pp. 104–106)

Depending on the Buddhist tradition, a number of different texts are cited as authoritative when it comes to *tathāgatagarbha,* including the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, *Laṅkavātāra Sūtra* and the *Ratnagotravibhāga Sūtra*, among several others.[30] It is stated in one particular translation of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra:*

> all the living beings, though they are among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, have the Buddha's wisdom, Buddha's Eye, Buddha's Body sitting firmly in the form of meditation…they are possessed of the Matrix of the Tathāgata [i.e., *tathāgatagarbha*], endowed with virtues, always pure, and hence not different from me (Takasaki, 1958)

A prominent feature of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is that ordinary sentient beings possess the qualities of Buddhahood innately. As stated in the passage above, normal sentient beings such as you and I are in one way no different from the Buddha.

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[30] See pages 105-115 in Williams (2009) for an excellent discussion of the most important sources in the *tathāgatagarbha* literature, including who views which source as authoritative.

After all, we too are endowed with Buddha Nature, possessing all the characteristics and qualities of the Buddha.

However, as suggested by the some translations of *garbha*—it can mean *inter alia* seed embryo, or womb—the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* implies that ordinary beings possess the *potential* to be Buddhas, as a seed possesses the potential to be a tree.[31] Unfortunately, this metaphor may raise more questions than it answers. Indeed, the metaphor of the seed is simplistic in that it does not apply to all adherents to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. It is the case, in fact, that scholars through the centuries have developed answers to these questions in highly nuanced and incredibly sophisticated ways, all of which are beyond the scope of this account. The relevant (if not reductive) point here is that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine teaches that we are all essentially enlightened beings, and that ordinary persons have the potential to become a Buddha.

Relevant for our purposes, the metaphor of the seed raises the following important questions: *How* and *when* can I become a Buddha? Another way of phrasing this question: If the seed is an *ordinary* mind and the tree is the *enlightened* mind of the Buddha, what is the relationship between the seed and the tree—the ordinary and the enlightened mind? The answer, it turns out, may depend on the difference between the 'Sudden' and 'Gradual' paths of Buddhist practice, which will require a brief explication. The 'Sudden' (Tib. *cig car ba*) and 'Gradual' (Tib. *rim bzhin pa*) paths can also be

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[31] In reality, the metaphor of the seed does not always hold, as some Mahayana traditions actually hold that all beings are actually Buddhas, not potential Buddhas. It is said that Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō Zen lineage, rejected the notion that Buddha-nature is a seed, as it is already a flower. As Williams says, "The tension between innate, intrinsic enlightenment and becoming enlightened is a tension at the root of the Tathāgatagarbha tradition, different resolutions of which are central to subsequent doctrinal elaboration" (P. Williams, 2009, p. 105). The details and nuances of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine are extraordinarily abstruse, if not incredibly interesting. See Williams (2009) for details.

construed for the purposes of simplification as 'Innateist' and 'Constructivist'—terms that will be used interchangeably here. In this context, let "path" refer to the figurative route taken between an ordinary sentient being's mind and that of the Buddha. The Innateist would hold that attaining Buddhahood amounts to eliminating the obscurations and defilements that plague the mind of an ordinary person and which thus prevent our innate Buddhahood from emerging. In contrast, the Constructivist holds that particular qualities need to be acquired and constructed *alongside* the elimination of obscurations (Ruegg, 1989; van Schaik, 2004; P. Williams, 2009). To bring the conversation back to the distinction between Nondual and Classical approaches to mindfulness, the former traditions *tend* toward Innateism, while the latter lean toward Constructivism (J. Dunne, 2011).

This formulation of the difference between Constructivists and Innateist accounts—and by extension, Classical and Nondual accounts of mindfulness—raises the question of *what obscurations* one needs to eliminate. Indeed, answering this question could fill a number of volumes, but the concise answer for our present purposes is that Nondual traditions hold that one thing in particular prevents an ordinary being from attaining Buddhahood: subject-object duality, or alternatively the notion that "I" is somehow separate from everything else "out there." One relevant implication of such a position is that *all* cognitions are deluded because *all* cognitions are by definition structured by subject-object duality. Such is the essence of all Nondual traditions: conceptuality is conducive to suffering. For example, to practitioners of Mahāmudrā—a well known Nondual Buddhist tradition—suffering ultimately results from the structuring

of experience by subject-object duality, which of course is also argued to be the basis for all conceptual thought (Harrington & Dunne, forthcoming; Higgins, 2008; Mathes, 2008).

How, one may ask, is it the case that all cognitions are structured by subject-object duality? Or to ask the inverse question, how is subject-object duality the basis for all conceptual thought? For an answer, we turn to *apoha*, a theory of concept formation developed by the Buddhist epistemological tradition that originated in the first half of the first millennium C.E. As the *apoha* theory goes, any conceptual formation necessarily invokes subject-object duality in the following manner:[32]

> concepts are always tied to a sense of oneself as a goal-oriented agent acting in the world. And for this reason, when one uses concepts, one is necessarily operating through [a] dualistic self/world or subject/object structure (Dunne, 2014).

It is stated here why all concepts are undergirded by the fundamental sense of subject-object duality: in one word, agency. Concepts by definition are goal-oriented (at least within this particular philosophical tradition). Goal-orientation, in turn, requires an agent that is *acting* towards said goal. Being an agent in the world requires a sense of "I" acting "out there" in the world, a clear example of subject-object duality. In short, concepts require goal-orientation; goal-orientation requires agency; agency requires agent; and agent implies subject-object duality. In reality, I have glossed over the details, intriguing as they are. But for our purposes, the simple fact is that the *apoha* theory—which is an important source for Nondual traditions—deems all conceptual formation as structured by subject-object duality. The fact that this is the case is more important, in this instance, than *how* it is the case.

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[32] This is in reference to the *apoha* theory of concept formation, which stems from Indian philosophers in the first millennium. See Dunne, 2004; Dunne, 2015b; Siderits, 2015 for more.

What does the *apoha* theory have to do with the difference between Innateist and Constructivist accounts? In short, Innateists view all concept formation—including basic structures such as subject, object, space and time—as fundamentally deluded. Indeed, concepts in general, and subject-object duality in particular, are the very source of the delusion. To reveal one's Buddha Nature, or *tathāgatagarbha*, requires the fundamental uprooting of those concepts. One way of accomplishing this is by cultivating *non-conceptual* states. In contrast, Constructivists tend to view the *content* of the cognitions as more important than eliminating cognition altogether. In particular, they believe that the mistaken idea that one has a fixed identity should be actively eliminated, and benevolent qualities such as compassion need to be cultivated. In both cases, the goal is to achieve Buddhahood, but their paths are different in subtle but important ways (Dorje, 2009; Dunne, 2011b).

Allow me to recap what has been stated about Nondual traditions to this point, as we have covered a lot of theoretical ground in a very short space. First, Buddha-Nature, or *tathāgatagarbha*, is central to most Nondual traditions. *Tathāgatagarbha* amounts to the notion that all sentient beings have an enlightened mind as their essential nature, but that this mind is obscured by defilements. One of these defilements—a tremendously fundamental one—is the subject-object duality that structures our ordinary experience in the world. The feeling that there is an "I" that is independent and apart from the world "out there" is deluded in the sense that it is not actually the case that self and world are separate. Of these Nondual traditions, Innateists believe that we have to relieve ourselves of this misconception, while Constructivists believe that we need to cultivate various mind states and virtues to eliminate this delusion. The difference in terms of meditation

is that the cultivation of *non-conceptual* states is of crucial importance in the Innateist traditions, while the active generation of certain cognitive content predominates for Constructivist traditions.

The question remains: how does this thread relate to Nondual mindfulness in comparison to Classical mindfulness? The differences lie in the role that ethics, judgment and memory play in the different mindfulness practices. We consider each in turn.

To begin, Nondual styles of practice explicitly depart from an ethical framework, at least within the context of meditative practice. Again, ethical evaluation requires concepts—good and bad, ethical and unethical, wholesome and unwholesome. Recalling our discussion of the *apoha* theory, concepts such as good and bad require, by definition, subject-object duality. As above, Nondual traditions hold that conceptual formation, *vis-à-vis* the subject-object duality required for concept formation, is itself a cause of suffering. To sum up this line of reasoning: ethics requires concepts, concepts require subject-object duality (at least according to the *apoha* theory); and subject-object duality is the fundamental cause of suffering because reality is not actually structured in such a way. Therefore, ethical deliberation—qua conceptuality—can be a source of delusion and subsequently, suffering. That is not to say that ethics should always be suspended, however. Indeed, ethics is extremely important for beginners outside of formal practice, for in no circumstances would a teacher like to see a novice student acting with deceit, acting with impropriety or committing acts of violence in between meditation sessions (to name a few obvious examples of unethical behavior). And in general they do not dispute that unethical behavior on anyone's part, including the distorted intentions and affiliated

negative mental states, is a cause of suffering. However, it is a more distal cause of suffering than is subject-object duality (Dunne, 2014).

Next, the role of judgment is different in the Classical and Nondual traditions. Because ethics requires judgment, and ethics (like all concepts) can be a cause of suffering in the way described above, one sequelae of Nondual accounts is the notion that judgment should at times be suspended. In the context of meditative practice, Nondual traditions actively cultivate non-judgmental states. In contrast, Classical styles require judgment of what is to be adopted or abandoned within the meditation practice itself, while the Nondual account asks a practitioner to maintain a non-judgmental stance, owing in part to the fact that any judgment whatsoever is by definition conceptual, and therefore conducive to suffering *qua* subject-object duality. This is naturally in direct contrast to the Classical model, where judgment—in the form of considering one's ethical commitments and behavior—plays a prominent role. So here we see that on the basis of both ethics and judgment, the Classical and Nondual families differ. Ethics and judgment/discernment are implicated a great deal in Classic styles of meditation, while Nondual styles ask practitioners to assume non-judgmental states in the absence of any conceptual considerations (Dunne, 2014; Higgins, 2008)

Finally, let us consider memory. As we have seen, memory involves concepts and is therefore structured by subject-object duality. As a result, Nondual traditions hold that memory too is conducive to suffering. Nondual styles of practice therefore explicitly eschew "memory" or "remembering" during formal practice because memory itself depends on conceptual formation, and therefore relies on subject-object duality. For a

lucid explanation of how conceptual formations necessarily depend on memories, consider the following passage:

> Concepts necessarily involve an association of the present mental content with some previous experience. The thought of an 'apple,' for example, always draws on previous experience, such that the phenomenological content presented in the thought is construed as the same kind of thing as the phenomenological content that occurred when we saw something we called an 'apple' yesterday. Concepts thus necessarily draw one out of the present, at least to the extent that the present experience is being associated with past experiences (Dunne, 2014).

In the psychological literature, the notion that concepts involve memory is implicit in the phenomenon of "Mental Time Traveling," which is how we project ourselves into the past or the future, anticipating events that have yet to happen or reliving occurrences that have. In this way, concepts are the basis of memory, specifically, episodic memory (Suddendorf & Corballis, 2007). Within Nondual traditions, the fact that all memories are by definition dependent on concepts—and all concepts require subject-object duality—the act of remembering therefore amounts to an important cause of suffering as well. For the Nondual traditions, therefore, memory of any kind is necessarily conducive to suffering and should be avoided during meditative practice. For this reason, meditation in the Mahāmudrā context is present-centered—antithetical to "remembering" concepts or virtually anything aside from the instruction to remain present-centered—rather than based on remembering one's broader goals, ethical commitments, and so forth. Maintaining one's attention to the present moment allows one to abandon the subject-object duality that is the signature of all concept formation.

To conclude our discussion of the Classical and Nondual traditions of mindfulness practice: certain accounts of mindfulness are rooted in *Abhidharma* whose sources belong to an early formative period of Buddhist history (reviewed in Rapgay &

Bystrisky, 2009), while others stem from more Nondual traditions such as Dzogchen, Mahāmudrā, Chan and Zen (Dunne, 2011; Sharf, forthcoming). They differ primarily, though not exclusively, based on the role of ethics, judgment and memory. Because subject-object duality is seen as the ultimate source of suffering in the Nondual traditions, it naturally follows that the goal of those who practice mindfulness in these communities is to eliminate the causative subject-object structure. Cognitions are conducive to suffering because they reinforce the idea that there is an "I" separate from the rest of the world. Unlike Classical traditions, where ethics, judgment and memory are all critical to the cultivation of mindfulness, they are the source of suffering qua conceptuality because they entail subject-object structure. Nondual mindfulness practice, therefore, aims to cultivate non-conceptual awareness, free of all cognitive content, *including* ethics, judgment and memory.

At various points throughout our discussion of the Buddhist underpinnings of contemporary mindfulness practice, I referenced the fact that contemporary mindfulness practices bear greater similarity to Nondual traditions than Classical accounts. Before moving on to the next section, let us revisit the characteristics of contemporary mindfulness and why they appear to be more similar to the Nondual accounts. Jon Kabat-Zinn's "seven foundations of mindfulness practice," you will recall, are non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go. With just a cursory look at these seven features of Kabat-Zinn's, it is not difficult to surmise that some of his foundations of mindfulness could also be describing Nondual mindfulness practices. Non-judgment and non-striving readily align with Nondual

traditions for the simple reason that both judgment and goal-orientation (which is implied by "striving") are considered obscurations in both practices.

Additionally, "letting go" and "acceptance" fit well into the Nondual schema because both suggest that one does not need to acquire anything or do anything—much like the way in which an Innateist, Nondual practice presupposes that *tathāgatagarbha* simply needs to be revealed, rather than built or created. In this way, contemporary practices look more like Nondual and less like Classical mindfulness practices. After all, for contemporary mindfulness to resemble the Classical version, a practitioner would be asked to *do* something, such as evaluate various aspects of one's performance as a meditator and change course on that basis. As we know, a task like this is explicitly avoided in the contemporary setting, suggesting that the Classical family of mindfulness practices may not fit with modern accounts. Patience and trust are at the very least tangentially related to letting go and acceptance—and therefore fit in nicely to Nondual accounts—for they also imply that one simply needs to trust in oneself, one's basic goodness, rather than anyone or anything else. The section on Trust in *Full Catastrophe Living* states, "In practicing mindfulness, you are practicing being yourself and learning to listen to and trust your own being" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Although subject to some interpretation, one reading would suggest that Kabat-Zinn is asking a practitioner to trust in something that is innate to them and their very essence as a person. This bears similarity to *tathāgatagarbha*.[33]

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[33] Importantly, teachers play a vital role in both Nondual Buddhist traditions and contemporary mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn writes with respect to MBSR that "it is important to be open and receptive to what you can learn from your sources" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 25), which indicates that he is not asking practitioners to wonder off and practice alone.

Altogether, the evidence seems to suggest that most versions of mindfulness practiced today bears more similarity to the family of Nondual practices than the Classical ones. The point is not that contemporary and Nondual mindfulness practices are equivalent, but rather that there exists Buddhist source material that closely resembles various aspects of modern mindfulness practices. For this reason, it would be difficult to claim that contemporary practices are "inauthentic," as some are wont to do (Wallace, 2006; Wallis, 2011).

3.3 Mindfulness and the Self: Current Proposed Mechanisms

Up to this point, we have reviewed varying perspectives on what the term mindfulness may refer to—keeping in mind that it may mean different things in varying contexts. Ultimately we came to the conclusion that the notion of a *family* of mindfulness practices is useful in that it can not only accommodate the plethora of different traditions that have historically influenced the development of mindfulness, but also that it can navigate and conceptualize the myriad contemporary applications of the practice. After considering the characteristics of Nondual and Classical mindfulness practices, we saw that contemporary practices appear to bear greater similarity to Nondual rather than Classical traditions. Again, Nondual and contemporary versions of mindfulness are not equivalent. Rather, they share a number of qualities such that would suggest that the former has informed the latter to a greater extent than have the Classical mindfulness practices.

We next discuss mindfulness in the context of the self, asking how the Nondual versions of mindfulness espoused in MBSR modulates, might regulate and affect the self. In the present section, therefore, I review current understandings of how mindfulness

impacts self-regulation. Researchers and scholars in the fields of neuroscience, cognitive psychology, religion and philosophy have generated proposals as to what exactly mindfulness does to the practitioner's sense of self. First, we focus our attention on two accounts in particular that draw from empirical data to theorize how mindfulness may affect self-regulation. Second, I offer criticism for these models based on a number of factors, most notably the erroneous assumptions they consciously or unconsciously make about the kind of mindfulness that is practiced today.

3.3.1 Current Models

Farb and colleagues recently put forth the first model we examine. Their fundamental claim is that mindfulness meditation dissociates two distinct forms of self-awareness that are habitually integrated: self across time and self in the present moment. Using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), they defend their argument by measuring brain activity in regions associated with each of these forms of self-reference.

They begin with the assertion that "it has long been theorized that there are two temporally distinct forms of self-reference: extended self-reference linking experiences across time, and momentary self-reference centered in the present" (Farb et al., 2007, p. 313). They cite William James' understanding of the self, which incorporates a temporally-extended 'me' alongside a present moment 'I.' This division, we note, is fundamental to their research paradigm (W. James, 1890). As seen earlier, James conceived his model in an attempt to explain the continuity of the person through time despite the fact that consciousness is in a constant state of change. On the one hand, conscious experience is always in flux, for as James says, "no state once gone can recur

and be identical with what it was before" (W. James, 1890). But on the other hand, conscious experience is undeniably continuous, as he famously states:

> Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly…It is nothing jointed; it flows. River and stream are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life (James, 1890, p. 159, his emphasis).

To explain how we experience an apparently seamless stream of consciousness despite the constant state of change, he resorts to two different 'modes' of self: I and Me. The Me takes the structure of a narrative across time, while the I supports moment-to-moment experience of the self, temporally unextended. Subsequently, contemporary thinkers have elaborated on this fundamental distinction. Zahavi's narrative and core selves (Zahavi, 2005), Damasio's autobiographical and core selves (Damasio, 2010) and Neisser's extended and ecological selves (Neisser, 1988) all bear considerable resemblance to James' dual notions of selfhood.

Farb and colleagues employ fMRI studies that appear to suggest distinct "neural bases" that support these two modes of self-reference. For example, they cite a number of brain imaging studies to argue that various cortical midline regions and processes could be characterized as supporting James' Me, or self-reference across time (Craik et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2006; Kelley et al., 2002; Northoff & Bermpohl, 2004). Likewise certain studies seem to suggest, according to Farb, that other distinct brain regions correspond to the present moment I (Craig, 2009; Critchley, Wiens, Rotshtein, Ohman, & Dolan, 2004; Damasio, 1999).

Farb and his colleagues' primary goal was to evaluate whether these disparate brain regions accurately represent these two distinct modes of self-reference. Important

for the present discussion, they employ mindfulness practitioners to test this hypothesis. Their protocol asked meditators to "assume distinct modes of self-focus," either narrative focus (NF) or experiential focus (EF), which is meant to correspond to the above Jamesian distinction between Me and I (Watkins & Teasdale, 2001). Narrative focus "calls for cognitive elaboration of mental events," essentially asking participants to ruminate, judge and think through a question posed in the experimental paradigm. Importantly, NF is thought to be the "default mode" of self-awareness; when a subject is not asked to perform a task, researchers report that the cortical midline regions associated with the NF regions are activated. Experiential focus, on the other hand, is "characterized as engaging present-centered self-reference, sensing what is occurring in one's thoughts, feelings and body state, without purpose or goal, other than noticing how things are from one moment to the next" (Farb et al., 2007, p. 315). Asking the meditators to assume these different "states" at different times, they reasoned, would elucidate the neural underpinnings of these two aspects of self-reference by measuring brain activity with fMRI.

Although the details of the imaging study are beyond the scope of this dissertation, they concluded that subjects had a relative bias towards the NF when not asked to perform any tasks. This is consistent with the notion that NF roughly corresponds to the default mode network, which is characterized by rumination, perseveration and mind-wandering. Interestingly, when asked to direct attention towards EF, analysis shows "relatively restricted reductions in the cortical midline network" which indicates decreased activation of the NF brain state (Farb et al., 2007, p. 319). In other words, the authors claim that as the EF mode is assumed—with practitioners

attempting to phenomenologically experience increased moment-to-moment awareness—decreased activation is seen in brain regions associated with NF. They ultimately conclude that mindfulness training increases one's ability to assume "a non-linguistic-based awareness of the psychological present," (the EF state), as opposed to the default mode of NF (Farb et al., 2007, p. 320).

In a study that shares similar goals with the present project—that is, to elucidate the ways in which mindfulness affects the self—Vago and Silbersweig develop a neurobiological model that attempts to explain how mindfulness promotes self-regulation. They propose that mindfulness develops self-awareness, self-regulation and self-transcendence (S-ART). These skills in turn "modulate self-specifying networks through an integrative fronto-parietal control network" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 1), which, they argue, produces the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation.

Their essential claim relies on the underlying assumption that perceptions, cognitions and emotions related to the self can be biased or distorted, prompting the development of pathological states. Submitting that overt psychopathology may be the end result of these biases, they also state that the biases "exist on a spectrum and may therefore be present without any clear psychopathology" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 2). In any case, their fundamental thesis is that mindfulness reduces such self-related biases through mental training in self-awareness, -regulation and -transcendence. In their terms, self-awareness consists of meta-awareness of the self; self-regulation amounts to the ability to recognize, manage and modulate responses to any given internal or external stimuli; and self-transcendence is the development of "a positive relationship between self and other that transcends self-focused needs and increases pro-social characteristics"

(Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 2). Together, they call these three dimensions of mindfulness practice "S-ART".

They outline six "neurocognitive component mechanisms" that underlie the practice of mindfulness, allowing one to modulate the self-related processing. Sparing the details, the six mechanisms are 1) intention and motivation; 2) attention and emotion regulation; 3) extinction and reconsolidation; 4) prosociality; 5) non-attachment; and 6) de-centering. They reason that this formulation of how mindfulness modulates self-related processing can explain how mindfulness produces beneficial outcomes for (some) individuals.

This account raises the question of what "biased self-processing" looks like, and the related question of why and how it would create suffering. To answer this question, they posit three "networks for self-processing" that, when dysregulated, can produce suffering in the form of varying degrees of psychopathology. The reciprocal claim is that when these self-networks are properly regulated, an individual is at a lower risk for the development of psychological problems. The group employs research in the philosophy of mind and cognitive neuroscience—some of which I have referenced above in the previous chapter (Damasio, 2010; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; W. James, 1890; Legrand, 2011; Northoff, Qin, & Feinberg, 2011). The three self-networks they propose based on neuroscientific research are the "experiential enactive self" (EES), the "experiential phenomenological self" (EPS) and the "narrative self" (NS) (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 6). In the order listed, these self-networks are thought to be subject to increasingly greater conscious control. In other words, the EES is less accessible to conscious awareness than is the EPS, with the NS being the most available. They hypothesize that

mindfulness-based meditation practices "modulate through specific mechanisms" these

three self-processing networks.

Generally speaking, the EES is the least volitional of the three self-networks.

They describe it as follows:

> Non-conscious processes related to self/identity (involving) repeated associative
> conditioning of interactions between the body, the environment, and the processes
> involving exteroception, proprioception, kinesthesia and interoception (Vago &
> Silbersweig, 2012, p. 7, referencing Damasio, 1999; Legrand, 2011).

Information within this self-specifying system concerns monitoring, deciphering

and modulating feedback from internal and external stimuli, all exclusively non-

conscious. This system involves "preparatory behavior and pre-motor aspects of goal-

directed action selection," (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 8). In this sense, the EES

corresponds well with the core or experiential self discussed above, contributing to the

sense of being a subject of experience in the present.

The second self-network in their heuristic is the Experiential Phenomenological

Self, or EPS. A "higher order of consciousness" than the EES, the EPS gives rise to self-

specifying consciousness by building on the internal and external sensory input of the

EES. They state that the EPS contributes to "volitional awareness related to

exteroceptive and interoceptive experience…(including)…the immediate motivational,

social, and affective feelings associated with experience" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p.

8). In this way, they believe that activation of the EES is the basis for phenomenological

awareness of sensory and mental activity, allowing a subject to assume a first person

perspective without evaluation or reflection. In this way, the EPS bears resemblance to

Gallagher's minimal self, William James' "I," and the core self of Damasio (Damasio,

2010; Gallagher, 2000; W. James, 1890). In sum, the authors believe that the EPS self-

network provides support for engaging the world, attending to internal or external percepts, storing and accessing saved information and executive control (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 8).

Finally, they consider the narrative self (NS), which they assert is the source of our ability to evaluate, reflect and identify ourselves. They support their claim by relying on neuroimaging research that cites certain brain networks as being implicated in the creation of narratives, arguing that these are the 'neural correlates' of the NS.[34] Taking the form of a narrative, this self has a number of abilities that require the signature feature of narrative, temporal continuity: metacognitive knowledge, knowledge people have about their cognitive abilities, cognitive strategies and task (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 9). The consistent feature of all instances of NS is the awareness of one specific "me" which is at the center of the narrative. Not unlike the kinds of narrative self discussed above (including my own), their version of the NS is diachronic, has a social dimension and is goal-directed.

Vago and Silbersweig review neuroanatomical and functional neuroimaging studies that identify regions of the brain that appear to be modulated by mindfulness. They then correlate these brain regions with their proposed self-networks. With regard to the narrative self, for example, they cite studies that associate certain brain areas with the generation of self-related narratives and correlate those regions with the areas apparently affected by mindfulness meditation. Likewise for the EES and EPS, which include areas of the brain associated with embodiment and bodily representation. Given these proposed neuroanatomically-based self-networks, they examined the neuroimaging

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[34] I should acknowledge here that very notion of 'neural correlates' is the subject of heated debate. This is discussed in greater detail below.

literature for evidence that mindfulness meditation was associated with changes in a number of brain regions that overlap with the self-networks. Altogether, they found evidence to suggest that mindfulness modulated these self-networks (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 12).

Ultimately, Vago and colleagues propose that the above six components of mindfulness practice (intention and motivation; attention regulation; emotion regulation; extinction and reconsolidation; prosociality; and non-attachment/decentering) increase self-awareness, -regulation and –transformation (S-ART). Together, these produce the beneficial effects of mindfulness by reducing "self-specific biases" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 15). Just as they did for the delineation of three self-networks, they similarly found "neurobiological substrates of each mechanism" to correlate the six mechanisms of mindfulness with transformation in S-ART (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 15).

For sake of time, let us consider how three of the six dimensions are believed to contribute to self-regulation, taking them to be (justifiably, I feel) representative of all six. They begin with the dimension of mindfulness they call "intention and motivation." First, they divide it into two types: external and internal. On the one hand, the internally-driven version promotes engagement "with experience without craving or aversion (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 16) " On the other hand, they argue that externally motivated activity is *more* conducive to craving and aversion. Mindfulness practice therefore facilitates self-regulation within the S-ART framework by driving motivation and intention inward, supposedly providing better health outcomes for practitioners (Davidson, Jackson, & Kalin, 2000; McDade, Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2006).

Next, they link the regulation of attention—a skill that studies suggest is cultivated in certain forms of mindfulness meditation—to a greater ability to self-regulate:

> Volitional shifting of conscious awareness between objects of attention in a serial and/or parallel fashion is suggested to be a critical process for effectively managing or altering one's responses to impulses…Concentration forms of practice are proposed to increase the efficiency of the attentional system…The neural substrates for these attentional processes are described through S-ART networks (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 16).

This passage exhibits their rationale for how the attentional dimension of mindfulness facilitates self-regulation. Mindfulness cultivates attention, and attention facilitates management of one's responses to impulses. Because the neural networks that undergird attention overlap with certain S-ART networks (EPS, EES), they conclude that attention—and therefore mindfulness—increases self-regulation. Additionally, the paper argues that the neural networks associated with meta-awareness ("taking awareness itself as an object of attention," as they define it) also overlap self-regulation networks, thereby increasing S-ART (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 17).

Next, they cite recent evidence that suggests that mindfulness improves emotion regulation, the third dimension of mindfulness in their model (Carmody & Baer, 2008; Carmody, 2009). Emotion regulation improves with mindfulness meditation, thereby protecting the "internal milieu from the harmful effects of a stressor" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 19), especially immunological stressors (McEwen, 2008). Again, because the regions that are associated with emotion regulation overlap with the S-ART regions, the authors argue that improved emotion regulation amounts to improved self-regulation.

The same general pattern or rationale is observed in the final three dimensions of mindfulness, amounting roughly to the following: mindfulness is divided into particular psychological constructs (the above six, for example); one of these dimensions is associated with certain positive phenotypes (decreased stress/anxiety, increased well-being, decreased physiological markers of stress); the psychological construct purportedly causing positive outcomes is found to have a 'neural correlate' (the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and so forth); finally, this region of the brain is associated with one or more of the self-networks. They therefore link the mindfulness outcomes with an aspect of self-regulation by virtue of overlapping neural correlates.

3.3.2 Criticism for Extant Models

The hypotheses for how mindfulness affects the self proposed by both groups are praiseworthy. Vago and colleagues, especially, finely combed the neuroimaging literature on both mindfulness and self, and they propose a novel mechanism by which mindfulness practices facilitate self-regulation. Parceling out six mechanisms of mindfulness as well as the three self networks and comparing their respective neural correlates could potentially be a valuable contribution to the evolving neuroimaging literature of self and mindfulness. Several outstanding questions remain, however. First, both arguments depend on certain assumptions about what mindfulness is (and is not) that seem to be incorrect. Second, the notion of neural correlates, which Vago and Silbersweig rely on, has been questioned in recent years. Third, their rationale seems to employ reverse inference, a common problem in neural correlate studies. Fourth, their hypotheses need to incorporate the humanities to a greater degree—especially Buddhist

studies and philosophy of mind. I expand on each of these criticisms in turn and offer some recommendations for improvement.

One criticism for these studies concerns their understanding of mindfulness practices. Let us recall our discussion of mindfulness above, specifically the argument against one true mindfulness, and the related distinction between Nondual and Classical practices. Reviewing the papers by Farb et al. and Vago and Silbersweig in light of the family of practices heuristic suggests that both research groups harbor assumptions about the nature of mindfulness that appear to be incorrect. For example, Farb et al. state very simply that, "[m]indfulness meditation is a form of attentional control training by which individuals develop the ability to direct and maintain attention towards the present moment" (Farb et al., 2007, p. 314). This definition is problematic because it does not provide the nuance, detail or contour that is required for an adequate description of what mindfulness is. Is mindfulness *solely* the act of "directing and maintaining one's attention towards the present moment?" We submit not. It leads one to ask why "mindfulness" was used as a construct at all. Why not simply ask if paying attention to the present reveals distinct modes of self-reference? Why does mindfulness have to be implicated? We argue that those researching mindfulness need to devote more care to defining and contextualizing, perhaps offering the disclaimer than mindfulness is difficult to operationalize within the context of a study. The thrust of this criticism is that understanding mindfulness in a deep, historically informed and accurate sense has real ramifications for empirical studies that use it as an intervention or construct.

Additionally, even in cases where mindfulness is carefully defined in studies, sometimes it is done so erroneously. Vago and Silbersweig state that mindfulness

is a 2500-year old model that is rooted in Buddhist science and a 25-year old contemporary model that is heavily influenced by Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course, an adaptation of specific Buddhist techniques intended for general stress reduction. The historical model for training the mind has similar goals to the contemporary Western medical model: both are interested in reducing suffering, enhancing positive emotions, and improving quality of life (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 1).

Unfortunately, this definition of mindfulness has significant problems. First, there is no citation for the idea that mindfulness is 2500 years old—a dubious and unsupported claim. That statement would not withstand peer review in a Buddhist studies journal, and I argue that the standards should be the same in scientific publications. Given that mindfulness is such a crucial concept to the article, it needs to be scrutinized to the same extent as the other aspects of the paper. Nor is it clear what "Buddhist science" means. Do they mean to imply that Buddhism is not a religion, but actually a "science" of the mind? Is there a "Buddhist" science that is distinct from "Western" science? Additionally, although they later acknowledge the fallacy of one "correct" mindfulness, they nevertheless fail to mention any of the qualities of Classical mindfulness practices. They state that mindfulness is "non-judgmental", "present-moment" and "non-reactive," but is that *all* that mindfulness is? What about the Classical forms of mindfulness that implicate cognition, judgment, ethics, vows, memory, and the like? By neglecting this entire category of practices, they therefore gloss over the plurality of meditative practices that can be considered mindfulness meditation. As a result, their characterization of mindfulness does not make clear which Buddhist traditions Jon Kabat-Zinn is drawing on for his understanding of mindfulness, rendering opaque the nature of the meditation that he adapted. Of course, Classical and Nondual

models are quite different in many respects, so which version of mindfulness Kabat-Zinn has adapted is critical.

At multiple points throughout their discussion of the historical underpinnings of mindfulness, they confuse and conflate the term mindfulness. Consider the following examples. By their own definition, mindfulness is non-judgmental, present-moment and non-reactive. Yet in one paragraph, they emphasize the importance of ethics, discriminating wholesome and unwholesome within the setting of mindfulness meditation, and generating universal love and compassion for all human beings. How can a practice be non-judgmental, non-reactive and present-moment if it is *also* heavily conceptual qua ethics and discrimination? Specifically, how can one judge one's thoughts or actions as "wholesome" if one is intending to be non-judgmental? Even more problematic, how can one perform *any* cognitive activity if the goal is to remain in the present moment? Because concepts require temporal extension (for reasons beyond the scope of this discussion) they are antithetical to the very idea of being "in the present." The main problem is that within the Nondual tradition of mindfulness they are attempting to describe, ethics is *intentionally* eschewed in the context of meditation: one is not instructed to judge wholesome from unwholesome in either the Nondual or contemporary traditions. Of course, ethics is profoundly important *outside* the context of mindfulness meditation in general. It is also crucial in the context of the Classical mindfulness practices, where one evaluates wholesome/unwholesome and good/bad within an ethical framework. However, the contemporary mindfulness practice they themselves describe is not based on a Classical model.

Next, the authors state the "historical model" and contemporary versions both have the end goal of reducing suffering, producing positive emotions, and improving quality of life. This claim is problematic on a number of levels. We will grant that both seek to reduce suffering, but what both traditions mean by suffering is completely different. Never mind the fact that different Buddhist traditions understanding suffering in different ways, but even assuming that they are univocal: suffering has a markedly different definition in the Buddhist context than in the contemporary setting. For example, suffering may equate to stress today, but the concept of stress in the way we understand it—anxiety, tension, elevated cortisol, increased interleukins and related stress hormones—does not exist in traditionally Buddhist cultures, nor do certain foundational aspects of suffering in the conventionally Buddhist sense (*saṃsāra, karma, kleśa*) necessarily apply today (especially in the West). To equate suffering in the two contexts is therefore naïve at best. The same goes for "increasing positive emotions" and "improving quality-of-life," both of which are terrifically modern terms that have no obvious analog in the tradition they are seeking to compare.

I will underscore the point that these two research groups are *not* alone in their problematic use of mindfulness. In fact, the vast majority of studies today (if not all) have non-trivial problems defining, providing context and operationalizing mindfulness. That is not to say that their attempts are not worthwhile, however. As mindfulness continues to grow in popularity and is occasionally proven to be efficacious in certain settings—as some studies suggest—it behooves everyone involved to continue to study how it works, why it works, for whom, when and what the possible adverse effects are. It

is not my intention to stifle mindfulness research, but only to make it better through constructive criticism.

Moving on, because their arguments hinge almost exclusively on neural correlates, the projects may leave us unsatisfied. The very notion of neural correlates has been called into question by a number of philosophers. Consider what Noë and Thompson have to say in their paper entitled *"Are there Neural Coordinates of Consciousness?"*:

> Yet the question of what it means to be a neural correlate of consciousness is actually far from straightforward, for it involves fundamental empirical, methodological, and philosophical issues about the nature of consciousness and its relationship to the brain. Even if one assumes, as we do, that states of consciousness causally depend on states of the brain, one can nevertheless wonder in what sense there is, or could be, such a thing as a neural correlate of consciousness (Noë & Thompson, 2011, p. 3).

Indeed, both Vago and Farb offer interesting neuroimaging studies, especially in the way that they may advance our understanding of self and mindfulness in the future. But to rely almost exclusively on neural correlation to defend an otherwise interesting thesis undermines very useful theoretical heuristics for understanding how mindfulness impacts self-regulation. For as Thompson and Noë state, what a neural correlate even *means* is not at all clear. Attempting to measure the effect that the (frequently) poorly operationalized concept of mindfulness has on the nebulously defined self, via the questionable technique of neuroimaging seems misguided.

One of the main reasons neural correlates are problematic is because of the problem of reverse inference, one of the most trenchant criticisms of neural correlates to date. Reverse inference refers to a kind of reasoning frequently employed in neuroimaging studies. Very simply, typical—and logically sound—inference in the

context of fMRI (the modality in question) involves measuring local brain responses in region "Z" to particular cognitive tasks, "A". Such data allow a neuroscientist to infer something about brain region "Z" during cognitive function "A." Reverse inference, however, refers to inferring particular cognitive function "A" on the basis of the activation of "Z." A good example of this form of inference is as follows:

> 1) In the present study, when task comparison A was presented, brain area Z was active.
>
> (2) In other studies, when cognitive process X was putatively engaged, then brain area Z was active.
>
> (3) Thus, the activity of area Z in the present study demonstrates engagement of cognitive process X by task comparison A (Poldrack, 2006, p. 29)

The main problem with reverse inference is when it is the central feature of a given paper. In peripheral or tangential aspects of published papers, it is not as problematic. But in the case of the Vago and Silbersweig study, unfortunately, much of their reasoning relies precisely on reverse inference. In this way, the criticism is not so much directed at the S-ART framework or their proposed model, as it is focused on the methodology of neural correlates altogether. Within the flawed heuristic of neural correlates, their study is actually quite innovative.

In conclusion, both studies are valuable contributions to the literature on how mindfulness affects self. Unfortunately, the image-heavy nature of their empirical studies nevertheless leaves us wanting because the physical basis of both mindfulness and self (whatever they may be) are in question. After all, if the field cannot come to a consensus on what the self is, this naturally serves as a barrier to finding any potential "neural correlate"—never mind the fact that neural correlates are questionable constructs in the

first place. And with respect to mindfulness, it tends to be taught and experienced in a terrifically broad spectrum of manners, rendering it difficult if not impossible to come to firm conclusions when trying to eliminate variables in the context of the study.

One way to get closer to answering how mindfulness affects self-regulation may involve greater reliance on interdisciplinary research. Most would agree that those who are interested in understanding how mindfulness affects self-regulation should continue to study, refine and revise current notions of both self and mindfulness. Self-awareness of the assumptions about mindfulness and self that one brings to the study is of crucial importance. Mitigation of these factors would be aided by philosophical discourse, historical considerations, anthropology, ethnography, religion and psychology. These fields enrich empirical studies by incorporating multiple perspectives in the way that only inter- and multi-disciplinary studies can do. The need to integrate a heavier dose of humanities into the project is especially relevant when considering the various components of the self, including the narrative context, the content of the person's storyline, as well as the first person experience of the self. Indeed, it may be dubious (if not impossible) to locate these three aspects of the narrative in the brain by virtue of a neural correlate—at least at this point in time. Because all three aspects of the narrative self play a pivotal role in the composition of the self, I naturally find the accounts of Vago and Farb suspect in this regard.

I would like to emphasize that Vago and Farb offer valuable contributions to our understanding of how mindfulness affects self-regulation—their projects are novel, far-reaching and can surely contribute to further studies. However given the above disagreements with their methodology and general approach, I offer in the following

sections my own framework for how the *thickened* narrative self is affected by mindfulness practices.

3.4 Reification and Dereification

Having devoted the first half of this chapter to explicating the plethora of meanings of mindfulness—and discarding the notion that there is a definitive version— and thereafter having considered two worthwhile proposals for how mindfulness promotes self-regulation, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to offering a new theory for how mindfulness modulates the self.

First, we discuss the psychological phenomenon of "reification," a vital construct in the argument to follow. We do so from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, vis-à-vis cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience and social psychology. Thereafter, we address the reciprocal notion of "dereification," focusing in particular on how contemplative practices can at times augment one's ability to "dereify." Altogether, this section will prepare us for the final portion of the chapter in which I propose and defend the notion that dereification is the primary mechanism by which mindfulness modulates the narrative self in the context Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

3.4.1 Reification and Dereification: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations

We begin this section with a discussion of the notion of "simulation," a term used widely in cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience literature. Cognitive scientist Larry Barsalou defines it as as "the reenactment of perceptual, motor, and introspective states acquired during experience with the world, body, and mind" (Barsalou, 2008, p. 618). According to adherents of the theory of "Grounded Cognition," simulation is a

crucial component —if not the very basis—for all cognition. These theorists oppose the group of psychologists who adhere to amodal theories of cognition—sometimes called "standard" theories of cognition (Barsalou, 1999, 2010, 2012). The latter psychologists believe that knowledge stems from a semantic memory system that is separate from the various modal systems of the brain, i.e. perceptions such as vision and taste, introspection such as mental and affective states, and actions like movement and stereoception. It is dubbed "amodal" owing to the fact that knowledge is represented independent of the various modal systems in the brain. To concisely sum up their position, Barsalou states "[a]ccording to standard theories, representations in modal systems are transduced into amodal symbols that represent knowledge about experience in semantic memory. Once this knowledge exists, it supports the spectrum of cognitive processes from perception to thought" (Barsalou, 2008, p. 618). In other words, standard theories hold that knowledge of all kinds is represented in a symbolic system that is retrieved when needed by the brain. In contrast, grounded theorists are fundamentally modal, meaning that knowledge is dependent and constituted by the various modal systems of the brain (perception, action, introspection and so forth). Grounded theorists dispute the hypothesis that the brain contains an amodal system of symbols. The difference between standard and grounded theories of cognition, therefore, amounts to the difference between knowledge being an *amodal*, *symbolic* system versus *modal* and *asymbolic*, respectively. Simulation is relevant to this debate because virtually all grounded theories focus on the role that simulation plays in cognition.

The difference between these two theories actually stretches back throughout virtually all recorded of history, with some ancient Greek philosophers such as Epicurus

espousing some version of a grounded theory. However, amodal theories would become popular in the cognitive sciences in the Cognitive Revolution of the mid-twentieth century, a movement catalyzed by analytic philosophers who studied new forms of representation in the fields of logic, linguistics, statistics and computer science (Barsalou & Hale, 1993). But in recent years, empirical support for grounded cognition has outpaced support for standard theories (Barsalou, 2008, 2010; Gibbs, 2006; Glenberg, de Vega, & Graesser, 2008; Pecher & Zwaan, 2005) As a result of these studies, there is an increasingly vast body of literature that grounding is in some way implicated in higher cognition.

In the way that there is no one Buddhism, but many Buddhisms, it would be reductive to present grounded cognition as a unified entity. But some versions of grounded cognition are particularly relevant to our discussion of reification—theories of simulated, embodied and situated action. These all assume that the conceptual system in particular, and cognition in general, are based in the brain's modality-specific systems (perception, introspection, action and the like), in the body and the environment. As a result, the cognitive system alone—i.e. mere thoughts—are not self-sufficient (Barsalou, 2012). In other words, the theory states that one cannot simply think about strawberries. Rather, previous experiences of strawberries—including taste, smell and texture—are involved in the construction of the thought of strawberries. In this sense, the thought of a strawberry depends on other modalities of knowledge (of the strawberry), such as perception and action. Crucially, the non-cognitive aspects of cognition—that is, action and perception—are not merely tangentially or peripherally related. Rather, they play a central and pivotal role (Barsalou, 1999; Pecher & Zwaan, 2005).

As a result of the profoundly intertwined nature of these various modes of knowing, conceptual representations are modal, rather than amodal. In other words, they implicate many forms of modal knowledge rather than an amodal, symbolic system of representation. For example, when a conceptual system represents the visual components of an object, it depends on representation of the visual system. When that same system represents an action, such as "running," it employs motor representations. As Barsalou reminds us, the distribution and contribution of the various modalities depends on the particular object. If one conceptualizes fruit, then vision and taste are represented as well. For a bike, vision, action and even audition, could be represented. In sum, thoughts are not *just* thoughts (Barsalou, 2012; Cree & McRae, 2003). They require various *other* ways of knowing, such as action, introspection and perception.

How does this relate to simulation? In short, all thoughts require simulations that require different modalities of knowledge. As above, *thinking* of a strawberry simulates the actual experience of *eating* a strawberry. One way we can understand this intuitively is by visualizing (i.e. thinking about) a strawberry (or some other greatly desired food) in great detail, and noticing that with enough time and vividness, the body responds physiologically by salivating. The salivation, in turn, suggests that in thinking about a strawberry, taste and the visual systems are representing the strawberry in the cognitive system as well. We know this because the body is responding as if the strawberry were physically present, rather than merely conceived, and its physiologically appropriate response is to (among other things) salivate. The salivation prepares the body for digestion because saliva consists, in part, of enzymes that help to break down the

proteins, carbohydrates and fatty acids in the strawberry. The body, in other words, acts as if the strawberry it is visualizing is actually physically present.

The example that is of particular relevance to MBSR is the stressful thought. Of course, the thought of a strawberry is connected to modal representation systems of taste and vision. But take, for instance, the thought of a stressful conversation one had with a partner the night before. This particular fight included much screaming, yelling, anxiety, muscle tension, sadness, tachycardia (elevated heart rate), agitation and the like. In short, the fight was stressful! But as grounded cognition theories suggest, the *thought* of the fight will *also* be stressful, in every sense that the actual fight was stressful—muscle tension and tachycardia as perceptual modes of representation; sadness and anxiety as affective modes; and motor agitation as action modes, etc. "Stressful" thoughts like this that occur in the setting of MBSR are abundant: "I am stupid," "I am worthless," "I am fat," the thought of being abused as a child, etc., and each have their own particular signature modal representations.

Now, let us connect the notion of simulation to reification—a cognitive process involving the interpretation of thoughts to be actual depictions of reality. One mistakes the simulation that allows the thought to take place—including all the related perceptual, action and introspective aspects of the simulation that is required for that thought to be represented in its totality—for reality. In the setting of this discussion, let us conceive of reification as *excessive* simulation. If reification and simulation are two points on a spectrum that represents the "realness," if you will, of a thought, then reification is on one extreme, and simulation is more central. In cases of psychopathology, reification amounts to an extreme form of simulation, one that happens to be stress-inducing. It is extreme

because the thought is brought on so forcefully—in either intensity or frequency, for example—that the body relives the various representation modalities of the thought to a greater extent than if one were just simulating that thought in a normal, non psycho-pathological sense.

On the *other* side of the spectrum, however, is *dereification*. Consider again the example of thinking about a stressful conversation (although the thoughts that one is dumb or stupid or overweight also applies). The thought of the stressful conversation, of course, involves simulation in the sense that one is, to some extent, reliving the conversation by bringing modality-specific representations of perception, action and introspection online. This simulation can be stress-inducing if it is excessively real, or reified. However, the simulation can also be on the other side of the spectrum—that is, extremely *unreal*, or *dereified*. Interestingly, there are psychopathological states in certain disorders—such as panic attacks or drug-induced states from hallucinogens, for example—where one becomes convinced that the totality of their experience, not just a thought, is fundamentally unreal. This phenomenon is called depersonalization, a frequent complaint in the setting of psychiatry and psychology.

However, not *all* instances of dereification are psychopathological. In fact, it is our hypothesis that dereification plays an indispensible role in the stress-reduction process, a phenomenon we turn to next. But first, let us recap. Grounded cognition theories hold that thoughts require multimodal representations in the form of perception, action and introspection, among others. In this way, thoughts do not—and cannot, in truth—occur in isolation, independent of other modes of knowledge. This process is called simulation. Cognition requires one to simulate a given thought with the help of

other non-cognitive representation modes, effectively recreating the experience of whatever thought one is having. *Excessive* simulation, herein, is called reification, whereby the simulation is made real to a sufficiently extreme degree. There are cases in which the simulation becomes so extremely reified as to be stress-inducing, especially when it comes in the context of negative thoughts. This is because when one has a thought, our grounded cognitive systems require the bringing online of the other modes of representational knowledge alongside the thought (action, perception and introspection), which results in a literal *re-living* of a given stressful experience. Dereification, on the other hand, is the other extreme, in that one apprehends a given simulation as *unreal*. Again, excessive dereification can have psychopathological consequences. But our next section is devoted to the salutary role that dereification plays in contemplative practices in general.

3.4.2 Dereification in Contemplative Practice

One way of framing dereification in contemplative practice is to return to the reciprocal process of reification discussed above. Reification is the solidifying of a dreamed, imagined or otherwise mental process such that the mind and body believe it to be reality in that moment. From the perspective of psychopathology this is relevant in a number of instances. For example, schizophrenic patients reify internally generated sounds such that these imagined voices are interpreted as actual individuals speaking to them—an example of pathological reification. Relevant for MBSR participants, a common thought that becomes reified is the thought that "I am stupid." When such a thought arises in meditation, it is taken to be real, factual and an accurate depiction of reality. Another example of potentially pathological reification occurs when one relives

stressful moments in one's life, such as intense arguments or traumatic situations. When sufficiently reified, these thoughts become so "real" that the practitioner brings online the physiological components of that experience. The body then physiologically reenacts that moment. A significantly more trivial—and not psychopathological—instance of reification occurs when one imagines a food in precise detail. Like the example of the strawberry, bringing to mind a chocolate bar—including its rich dark color, its delightful smell, the contour of the various smaller pieces that compose the entire bar, not to mention its sumptuous taste—can make one salivate. Perhaps you are salivating as you read this! This is an instance of reification in which the thought of a chocolate bar makes the body behave as if it were actually present in one's hands. In fact, there is merely the thought of the bar, not the bar itself. But in a way, the body doesn't know the difference between the two, and prepares as if one is about to consume a delicious piece of chocolate.

Dereification, unsurprisingly, is the *opposite* process: recognizing that one's thoughts are just that—thoughts alone. In other words, one understands that the thought of something may seem incredibly vivid, but it is actually just a thought. With respect to dereification in the context of meditation, Lutz and colleagues state:

> Dereification relates to the capacity that is trained in various styles of meditation, namely the capacity to 'dereify' thoughts such that they are no longer experienced as straightforward depictions of reality, but are instead experienced merely as representations or mental events…In our view, all styles of mindfulness meditation train this capacity deliberately (Lutz, Jha, Dunne, & Saron, forthcoming).

In meditation, one's phenomenal experience in the contemplation can be a more or less dereified (or reified). The higher the reification, the more 'real' one's experience in the world is taken to be; the lower the magnitude of reification (and the higher the

dereification), the less real a given intentional object appears. Within MBSR, the experience of intensely perseverating on the thought "I am stupid"–perhaps after scoring poorly on a test—would likely score high on the reification scale.

3.5 Dereification of The Thickened Narrative Self in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Building on previous sections in which I discussed the history and development of mindfulness as used in MBSR, reviewed two recent studies on how mindfulness impacts self-regulation and discussed the theoretical and empirical grounds for the phenomenon of dereification, here I defend the notion that dereification of the narrative self is a primary mechanism by which MBSR operates. The theory relies on two key concepts that were examined in the previous sections: the narrative self and dereification. Regarding the former, within Chapter Two I propose a novel definition and operationalization of the narrative self, what I term the "thickened narrative self." It is meant to be a useful construct in the way that it incorporates context and phenomenological experience into the content of the narrative. With respect to the latter, dereification is the act of recognizing a thought as just that—thinking. This section consists of putting these two concepts into conversation to propose a mechanism by which MBSR exerts its typically beneficial effects. Together, looking at the how the thickened narrative self is affected by dereification techniques taught in MBSR offers new insights into how mindfulness impacts self-regulation.

With this goal in mind, what does it mean to 'dereify' one aspect of the narrative self, be it the phenomenology, content or context of the narrative? How do mindfulness

teachers justify dereification as a tool for de-stressing? Why would one want to dereify

anything in the first place?

3.5.1 What is Being Dereified? The Role of Object Orientation

> *I don't know exactly what a prayer is.*
> *I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down*
> *into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,*
> *how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,*
> *which is what I have been doing all day.*
> *Tell me, what else should I have done?*
> *Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?*
> *Tell me, what is it you plan to do*
> *with your one wild and precious life.*
> > *—Mary Oliver, excerpt from "Summer Day*

> *The miracle of the changing seasons is within the breath;*
> *your parents and your children are within the breath; your*
> *body and your mind are within the breath. The breath is*
> *the current connecting body and mind, connecting us with*
> *our parents and our children connecting our body with the*
> *outer world's body. It is the current of life. There are*
> *nothing but golden fish in this stream. All we need to see*
> *them clearly is the lens of awareness.*
> > *—Jon Kabat-Zinn* (1994b, p. 24)

> *Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had to do it over again,*
> *I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else.*
> *Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many*
> *years ahead of each day.*
> > *—Nadine Stair (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 2)*

One way of approaching how dereification works in MBSR is by considering the

role that the object of orientation plays in self-regulation. In this first section, we

therefore consider some representative passages in mindfulness sources that illuminate

the kinds of objects one is instructed to pay attention to within mindfulness practices. I

then argue that these objects give us clues to how mindfulness facilitates dereification of the thickened narrative self.

Combing through the mindfulness literature, one will find frequent citations to passages from a wide variety of popular and academic sources that invite the reader to pay attention to certain signature intentional objects, such as sensations, perceptions and emotions. Typical sources include the contemporary poets Mary Oliver and Billy Collins, transcendentalists Thoreau and Emerson, as well as ancient mystics such as Rumi and Kabir, among many others. The above example from Mary Oliver reflects a prominent feature of the materials they typically cite, namely, a focus on embodiment and present-moment awareness. In this particular instance, we see Oliver explicitly stating what she is paying attention to: falling down in the grass, kneeling and strolling through fields. She states that although she doesn't "know exactly what a prayer is," she *does* know how to pay attention to the feeling of grass under her as she walks in and through a field. Additionally, she's been "doing it all day" because "what else should (she) have done?" These sentences evoke the idea that present-moment perceptions are valued in MBSR—not thoughts about the future or past, or (disembodied) prayer. Consider the following passage cited in *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Kabat-Zinn's volume on mindfulness meditation in everyday life:

> My foot slips on a narrow ledge: in that split second, as needles of fear pierce the heart and temples, eternity intersects with present time. Thought and action are not different, and stone, air, ice, sun, fear, and self are one. What is exhilarating is to extend this acute awareness into ordinary moments, in the moment-by-moment experience of the lammergeyer and the world, which, finding themselves at the center of things, have no need for any secret of true being. In this very breath that we take now lies the secret that all great teachers try to tell us, what one lama refers to as the precision and openness and intelligence of the present. The purpose of meditation is not enlightenment; it is to pay attention even at un-

extraordinary times, to be of the present, nothing-but-the-present, to bear this mindfulness of now into each event of ordinary life (Matthiessen, 1978).

Like Mary Oliver's poem, this passage speaks to the importance of embodiment—the feeling of a slipping foot on a ledge, the sensation of breathing. The author even describes what it feels like when thoughts and emotions transform into sensed phenomena, describing what happens when "needles of ear pierce the heart and temples." But in addition to embodiment, Matthiessen emphasizes the value of paying attention to the present-moment, stating, "the purpose of meditation…is to pay attention…to be of the present, nothing-but-the-present, to bear this mindfulness of *now*." Kabat-Zinn valued this passage enough to quote it at great length, underscoring the importance of paying attention to the present moment.

In addition to citing notable writers and thinkers, a study of Jon Kabat-Zinn's own writings provides a trove of passages about what objects one should attend to. Consider the following passage from his appropriately titled book *Coming to our Senses:*

> It is easy to eat without tasting, miss the fragrance of the moist earth after a rain, even touch others without knowing the feelings we are transmitting. In fact, we refer to all these ever-so-common instances of missing what is here to be sense, whether they involve our eyes, our ears, or our other senses, as examples of being out of touch. We use touch as a metaphor for relating through all the sense because, in fact, we are literally touched by the world through all our senses, through our eyes, ears nose, tongue, body, and also through our mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 118).

Kabat-Zinn tells of the benefits of paying attention to the bodily senses—taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing. But he also states what happens when our attention becomes excessively disembodied: you become *out of touch* in both the figurative and literal sense. Literally, "out of touch" obviously indicates an inability to feel, but figuratively speaking, an "out of touch" person is socially, emotionally and psychologically distanced from reality. The implication is that by literally being out of

touch (i.e., not paying attention to the sensations of the present moment), one risks becoming figuratively out of touch.

Passage after passage invites us to direct our attention to the sense of being embodied in the present moment, but how does this relate to regulation of the thickened narrative-self? To answer this question, consider some of the features of one its components—the narrative phenomenology. As discussed in the previous chapter, the signature characteristics of the narrative phenomenology are synchronicity and embodiedness. Let us take a closer look at how some of the above passages relate to these features of the narrative phenomenology.

For a phenomenon to be synchronic, it must take place at single moment in time. As opposed to diachronic phenomena—things extended across time—synchronic entities are characterized as having no or exceedingly minimal temporal extension. In the context of MBSR and popular culture, the de facto euphemism for synchronicity is "the present moment." Kabat-Zinn states in *Full-Catastrophe Living*,

> The present moment, whenever it is recognized and honored, reveals a very special, indeed magical power: it is the only time that any of us ever has. The present is the only time we have to know anything. It is the only time we have to perceive, to learn, to act, to change, to heal, to love. This is why we value moment-to-moment awareness so highly (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 16).

Within this passage, as well as the previous quotations, we observe the value MBSR places on paying attention to the synchronic dimension of the self. Matthiessen speaks of "moment-to-moment experience," while Oliver praises being idle and taking in the sensations of the present moment. Importantly, MBSR doesn't ask one to pay attention to the synchronic aspect of just *any* experience. Typically, instructors ask practitioners to pay attention to *embodied* or *perceived* phenomena. In MBSR language,

the present-moment is most often associated with embodiment rather than disembodied ideas about the future, past or even present. In much the same way that the narrative phenomenology demonstrates the linked features of synchronicity and embodiment, MBSR rhetoric exhibits similar rhetorical packaging.

One can get a sense of how MBSR cultivates awareness of the narrative phenomenology by considering the exercises taught in their literature and retreats. A prominent example is the "raisin exercise," a practice that will be immediately recognized by any MBSR practitioner. Herein, paying attention to the synchronic (read: present-moment) and embodied aspects of experience are the goals of the practice. Let us consider it at length:

> First we bring our attention to seeing one of the raisins, observing it carefully as if we had never seen one before. We feel its texture between our fingers and notice its colors and surfaces…We note any thoughts and feelings of liking or disliking raisins if they come up while we are looking at it. We then smell it for a while, and finally, with awareness, we bring it to our lips, being aware of the arm moving the hand to position it correctly, and of salivating as the mind and body anticipate eating. The process continues as we take it into our mouth and chew it slowly, experiencing the actual taste of the raisin. And when we feel ready to swallow, we watch the impulse to swallow as it comes up, so that even that is experienced consciously (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 15).

It is immediately evident that the embodied, perceived aspect of experience takes a prominent role in the practice, as the practitioner is instructed to pay attention to each present-moment sense in turn. Looking back to the earlier passage where Kabat-Zinn stated that the present moment was "the only time we have to perceive, to learn, to act, to change, to heal, to love," MBSR rhetoric becomes apparent: the synchronic and embodied awareness valued in the raisin exercise constitutes the path to healing.

Further, consider the instructions for breathing, noticing the emphasis on embodied and synchronic awareness:

> The easiest and most effective way to begin cultivating mindfulness as a formal meditative practice is to simply focus your attention on your breathing…the idea is to be aware of the sensations that accompany your breathing at that particular place and to hold them in the forefront of your awareness from moment to moment. Doing this we feel the air as it flows in and our past the nostrils; we feel the movement of the muscles associated with breathing; we feel the belly as it moves in and out (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 44, his emphasis).

The best known meditation within MBSR and the broader collection of contemporary mindfulness-based practices is indeed breath meditation. Although historically the breath did not always serve a prominent role as an object of meditation in concentration practice, today breath meditation is practiced more than any other (Anālayo, 2003; Braun, 2013; Gilpin, 2008). Other potential objects of orientation include sounds, smells, memories and thoughts, but the breath has become the most practiced form of meditation within contemporary mindfulness circles. Nonetheless, MBSR also teaches a variety of other practices, including walking meditation:

> It's a good idea to start with awareness of the feet and legs and practice that for a while. Then when your concentration is stronger, you can expand the field of awareness to include a sense of the entirety of your body walking and breathing. You can also include, if you care to, the air on your face and skin, the sights in front of you and the sounds around you. Remember, it is the same awareness, whatever the specific objects you are focusing on, and that awareness can hold the entire experience of walking in each and every moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 126).

These two passages, in conjunction with the raisin exercise, evoke the explicit emphasis on embodiment and present-moment awareness that is the hallmark of the narrative phenomenology. Instructors and manuals are not asking patients and practitioners to pay attention to events that take place across time—including the past and the future. Rather, the object of orientation is meant to be synchronic phenomena that are rooted in the present-moment perceptions. Consider the following passage in which Kabat-Zinn states how failing to pay attention to the present-moment and bodily aspects

of awareness can be detrimental. He uses the metaphor of 'autopilot' as a proxy for lack of awareness of the embodied nature of the present moment:

> One very important domain of our lives and experience that we tend to miss, ignore, abuse, or lose control of as a result of being in the automatic-pilot mode is our own body. We may be barely in touch with our body, unaware of how it is feeling most of the time. As a consequence we can be insensitive to how our body is being affected by the environment, by our actions, and even by our own thoughts and emotions. If we are unaware of these connections, we might easily feel that our body is our of control and we will have no idea why (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 13).

In this way, autopilot mode is diametrically opposed to present-centered awareness. Given that awareness of the present moment is one of the active components of mindfulness meditation—at least according to MBSR materials—it follows that paying attention to the diachronic and disembodied parts of lived experience causes stress. In cases where Kabat-Zinn's so-called autopilot has dominates lived experience (at the expense of moment-to-moment embodied awareness), stress is generated. The focus on temporally extended and disembodied aspects of experience (memories, thoughts about the past and future, worries, regrets, etc.) characteristic of the autopilot mode prevents one from engaging feelings, emotions and other present-moment phenomena that are healing, according to MBSR:

> If you start paying attention to where your mind is from moment to moment throughout the day, chances are you will find that considerable amounts of your time and energy are expended in clinging to memories, being absorbed in reveries, and regretting things that have already happened and are over. And you will probably find that as much or more energy is expended in anticipating, planning, worrying, and fantasizing about the future and what you want to happen or don't want to happen (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 10).

The autopilot mode, in this way, causes the stress that mindfulness meditation seeks to address.

From the perspective of thickened narrative self, valuing synchronic and embodied awareness equates to valuing the narrative phenomenology, rather than the narrative content or context. Rather than focusing on context and content of the narrative—which are both diachronic, disembodied and lacking ipseity—the language of MBSR is meant to make the practitioner connect with the phenomenological dimension of their experience. This method, so the rhetoric goes, is healing for those who suffer from stress, anxiety, depression and chronic pain, "Remember, now is the only time you have for anything. You have to accept yourself as you are before you can really change" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 28). In this instance, Kabat-Zinn's argument invokes complex philosophical concerns, such as agency and the philosophy of time. But the commonsense idea he addresses is far less complicated: pay attention to the *now* because it's the only way one can change anything that may be causing stress.

A final word on the emphasis MBSR places on attending to the synchronic, "present-moment" aspects of the narrative self: one chapter in *Coming to Our Senses* invokes Kabat-Zinn's neologism "nowscape." The idea is as follows: "Everything that unfolds, unfolds now, and so might be said to unfold in the nowscape." He is not only arguing that the present moment should be valued because it feels *nice* or grounds us in our bodies. Rather, he goes on to make the more complex argument that the only way one can effect change is by paying attention to the so-called "nowscape." He cites sources like the following Kabir poem, which comes from the MBSR canon (as it were), to emphasize the fact that everything that one needs can be found in the present moment :

> What is found now is found then.
> If you find nothing now,
> You will simply end up with an apartment in the City of
>   Death.

If you make love with the divine now, in the next life you will
    have the face of satisfied desire.

So plunge into the truth, find out who the Teacher is,
    Believe in the Great Sound!

3.5.2 How are the Targets of Dereification Identified? The Role of Reflexive Awareness

Unless we are practicing mindfulness, we rarely observe
our inner dialogue with any clarity and ponder its validity,
especially when it concerns our thoughts and beliefs about
ourselves.
-Jon Kabat-Zinn, (1990, p. 183)

According to the Phenomenal Neurocognitive Matrix model, meta-awareness is a complex dimension of mindfulness that "includes several capacities implicated in the regulation of attention and emotion. The type of meta-awareness relevant to mindfulness practices includes especially the capacity to note features of experience while simultaneously maintaining a primary focus on a given object" (Lutz et al., forthcoming). Within cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind, as a reminder, this also goes by the terms "meta-awareness" and "conscious presence" (Lutz et al., forthcoming; Seth, Suzuki, & Critchley, 2012). One way of conceptualizing meta-awareness is by considering the experience of smelling freshly baked bread. Imagine that a friend asks you, "Did the bread smell pleasant?" or "Did it remind you of your favorite bakery?" or "Do you feel good when you smell the bread?" Regardless of how you answered the questions, you would never doubt that it was *you* who was doing the smelling and you who was feeling, thinking or remembering. You may have to ask yourself whether or not the bread smelled good, or you may have to think about any memories it may have evoked, but you *would not* have to ask if it was you who smelled the bread and so on.

This aspect of conscious experience is meta-awareness, or the awareness that it is *you* who are aware; this information is phenomenologically available to you even if it is not the explicit focus of your attention. Importantly, one doesn't have to be asked to monitor these aspects of experience—they occur without effort. Lutz and colleagues elaborate further:

> Meta-awareness permits, within the experience of an object focus, access to the situated, ongoing, knowing quality other aspects of experience beyond the object without making the "inward turn" that occurs in meta-cognition when one thinks about one's mental processes. As such, increases in meta-awareness augment the ability to detect distraction, assess the stability of attention, and monitor corporeal and affective states in a manner that sustains focus on an object (Lutz et al., forthcoming).

Although meta-awareness often co-occurs with the topic of our next section—dereification—here we separate the two dimensions. This section, therefore, is devoted to considering passages that exhibit the role of meta-awareness in MBSR.

The first step for cultivating meta-awareness within MBSR requires stillness: still mind, still body and stable attention. "When you sit [i.e., meditate], you are not allowing your impulses to translate into action. For the time being, at least, you are just watching them" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a). This passage makes the importance of stillness and stable attention evident: if one is not still and attentive, how could one possibly become aware of the subtleties of experience—or importantly, the various aspects of our narrative self, such as the stories we tell ourselves, the contexts of those stories, or the feeling of being embodied in them? In the case of MBSR, meta-awareness is crucial for noticing that various feelings, thoughts and perceptions having to do with who we think we are.

A stable mind is facilitated by the still posture typically assumed by a meditator. A still body, so it goes, promotes stillness of mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). As the ability to

quiet the mind and body increases—and this can take months, years or decades (if at

all)—one becomes capable of noticing internal and external thoughts, feelings,

perceptions and events about one's narrative self that one previously did not notice were

even present. Noticing these previously unnoticed aspects of our narrative self is the

essence of meta-awareness. Kabat-Zinn uses the example of meta-awareness in

conversation:

> Becoming even a little more mindful of how our conversations and
> communications unfold, and what kind of skills might be involved in navigating
> through them with greater awareness of what is really going on, inwardly and
> outwardly, in ourselves and with others, can be extremely revealing and
> humbling…When we begin watching the unfolding of thoughts in the mind and
> sensations in the body in formal meditation practice, we rapidly discover that new
> events arise and distract our attention from what we were thinking or feeling just a
> moment before. Our experience of the moment is thereby interrupted, and often
> forgotten in the flight to the next thing that tweaks our hunger for novelty or our
> hair-trigger emotional reactivity (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

To use meta-awareness for the purposes of self-regulation, one must also learn

that one is capable of having meta-awareness of inner thoughts and feelings without

reacting to them, and the related realization that they are not an accurate depiction of

reality. Though it may be safe to assume that most people know they have this capacity, it

is equally likely that relatively fewer know they can assume such an observing, none-

reactive perspective. The various cognitive and affective components of the narrative

phenomenology (which previously had never been paid attention to) constitute the

background of one's experience—the background that meta-awareness gives us access to.

MBSR teaches that simply acknowledging these aspects of our phenomenological lives

empowers one to eventually change. Again, one does not explicitly try to alter one's

narrative content, context or phenomenology. The purpose of meta-awareness of the

narrative phenomenology is simply to become aware of our phenomenological experience as the narrative unfolds.

One way that MBSR attempts to teach the cultivation and strengthening of meta-awareness involves paying attention to one's own judging, perceiving, feeling and inner dialogue. This often includes sitting in silence and paying attention with great focus to one's internal stream of thoughts. Kabat-Zinn describes one natural tendency of the mind, judging, and how one should respond when it is noticed during meditation:

> It is important to recognize this judging quality of mind when it appears and to intentionally assume the stance of an impartial witness by reminding yourself to just observe it. Just when you find the mind judging, you don't have to stop it from doing that. All that is required is to be aware of it happening. No need to judge the judging and make matters even more complicated for yourself (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 22).

A pivotal point here is the stance one is instructed to take towards such judging—or any phenomenal state, for that matter: that of *non*-judging. To judge one's judging is to propagate more judging, a recipe for failure in MBSR. Like a so-called Chinese finger trap, the more one tries to judge the judging, the more tightly one is gripped by the tendency to judge. Noticing such judgments through meta-awareness and subsequently not reacting to them is the only way to escape.

3.5.3 Dereification of the Narrative Self

> *We can live in a dream reality of our own making without*
> *even a sense of the loss, the gulf, the unnecessary distance*
> *we place between ourselves and experience.*
> -Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994b)

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction implicitly teaches that dereification of the narratives we tell and are told about ourselves allows us to *directly contact* a reality that can actually be much less prone to suffering than the one we typically inhabit. The meta-

awareness of our thoughts and feelings discussed in the above section is the crucial

precursor to dereification, the ultimate "stress-reducer" mechanism in MBSR. Recalling

the three-fold division of the thickened narrative self, one target of dereification is the

narrative content, which dereification aims to make less "real." In other words, the

reified diachronic narrative content is a primary target of dereification. But decentering

from the narrative storyline also allows us to alter the phenomenological experience of

the narrative, and provides insight into the role of context in shaping our narratives.

Within this section, I review a number of MBSR passages that reflect the implicit

language of dereification that serves to make less real the content of the practitioner's

narrative self. While the word dereification is never used in teaching materials, it nicely

conveys the process by which our narrative of self can come to hold less sway over our

thoughts and feelings.

In MBSR pedagogy, dereification naturally follows from the meta-awareness

discussed in the above section. Meta-awareness gives us access to features of our

experience that we may not typically pay attention to. By being aware of these

previously unacknowledged thoughts, dereification can result. This process of meta-

awareness leading to dereification is a prominent feature of mindfulness meditation

within MBSR because often times those same thoughts that we failed to acknowledge

create the suffering we are seeking to reduce. One may still wonder *what* exactly MBSR

is seeking to dereify. One pivotal way in which dereification works is by reconsidering

the realness of the narrative content: MBSR rhetoric suggests that the stories we tell

ourselves may not be as real as we think. Because the narrative self is plastic, the content

can be changed. But rather than working to actively change the narrative content,

mindfulness meditation aims to dereify it—to make the practitioner realize that much of

what she thinks is unchanging, real and existent is actually story, narrative, plot—fiction.

See the following passage where Kabat-Zinn explains how dereifying the storyline rather

than explicitly changing it works. Contrary to some forms of therapy which explicitly

cultivate positive-thinking, MBSR aims to effect change in an alternative fashion:

> Our thought patterns change…but *not* because we are trying to make them change by replacing one thought with another one that we think may be more pure. Rather, it is to understand the nature of our thoughts *as thoughts* and our relationship to them, so that they can be more at our service rather than the other way around. If we decide to think positively, that may be useful, but it is not meditation. It is just more thinking (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 95, his emphasis).

Teachers of mindfulness meditation (and I am one) will relay countless stories of

students who bemoan the fact that "they have always been ugly" (or stupid, smart,

unsuccessful, stressed, depressed, the smartest or the best); it is the work of mindfulness

to *dereify* this story, to make it less real by pointing to its inherently impermanent and

constructed nature. Training a person to become aware of destructive storylines

acknowledge gives them the ability to know when a thought is just a thought, and not an

accurate depiction of reality. In fact, according to Grounded Cognition theorists like

Barsalou discussed above, *all* thought is simulation—narrative, story, fiction. Part of the

goal of mindfulness is to assume a mental state in which simulation is no longer

operating—a non-conceptual state that dereifies the thoughts we have about ourselves,

revealing them to be *just* thoughts, and not reality. This is in contrast to teaching subjects

an alternative, typically positive thought of them. Some of the narratives we seek to

dereify are conscious; some of the more insidious ones, however, are unconscious. For

mindfulness teachers will also recall students who experience "Aha!" moments after

meditation or discussion, when they come to the realization that they've been telling

themselves a story all along (I *must* be successful, I *have* to go to this university, I am dumb). In this way, mindfulness works by dereifying the narrative plot that we construct and constructed by both consciously and unconsciously. Our reflexive awareness gives us phenomenal access to features of experience—such as thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves—that the process of dereification can make *less real*.

Consider the following passage from *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. It invokes what Kabat-Zinn calls "Direct Contact," his way of articulating what results when the stories we tell about ourselves become dereified.

> We all carry around ideas and images of reality, frequently garnered from other people or from courses we have taken, books we have read, or from television, the radio, newspapers, the culture in general, which give us pictures of how things are and what is occurring. As a result, we often see our thoughts, or someone else's, instead of seeing what is right in front of us or inside of us. Often we don't even bother to look or check how we feel because we think we already know and understand. So we can be closed to the wonder and vitality of fresh encounters. If we are not careful, we can even forget that direct contact is possible (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a).

Mindfulness lifts the veil of projected *realness* we live behind: by recognizing our thoughts as merely thoughts, one is able to see their inherent unreality and subsequently dereify them. In so doing, one is able to "directly contact" experience, rather than our interpretations of experience. In Buddhist practice, this skill is called *yathābhūta-darśana*, or insight into the nature of reality, literally "seeing things as they are."

According to MBSR, part of failing to "directly contact" experience, one falls prey to negative narratives one constructs about oneself, and eventually becomes *constructed* by them. Kabat-Zinn invokes the notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy:

> If you have the habit of saying to yourself 'I could never do that' when you encounter some kind of problem or dilemma, such as learning to use a tool, or fixing a mechanical device, or speaking up for yourself in front of a group of people, one thing is pretty certain—you won't be able to do it. At that moment,

your thought fulfills or makes real its own content. Saying 'I can't…' or 'I could never…' is a self-fulfilling prophecy (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 183-4).

Another way of conceptualizing the idea of the (narrative) self-fulfilling prophecy is to consider Daniel Dennett's quote about the narrative self (referenced in Chapter 2): He states that, "like spider webs, our tales are spun but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source" (Dennett, 1991, p. 418). Leaving aside the issue of whether Dennett thinks it is possible to dereify the tales that spin us, it is certainly the case that MBSR grants individuals the ability to make our stories less real. It does so by teaching subjects to a) become aware of our conscious and unconscious thoughts and body states and b) to acknowledge them as just thoughts and feelings rather than anything more ontologically enduring. In so doing, they become less capable of "spinning" a story in the manner a spider spins a web. Rather, MBSR teaches that we have the opportunity to become the sources rather than the products of our stories.

How exactly does MBSR see dereification as being transformative? In other words, how does an individual with low self-esteem—beleaguered by its attendant suffering—dereify the feeling of worthlessness that stems from low their self-esteem? And how does such dereification to another, presumably healthier, view of oneself? Kabat-Zinn states:

> Mindful inquiry can heal low self-esteem, for the simple reason that a low self-estimation is really a wrong calculation, a mis-perception of reality. You can see this very clearly when you start to observe your own body or even just your breathing in meditation. You quickly come to see that even your body is miraculous. It performs amazing feats by the moment with no conscious effort. Our esteem problems stem in large part from our thinking, colored by past experiences. We see our shortcomings and blow them out of all proportion (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a).

MBSR argues that low self-esteem is based on mis-perception in all cases. If one can see clearly—that is, if one can directly contact reality—by way of dereifying the negative narratives one lives in and by, one can see that shortcomings have been blown out of proportion and strengths underestimated. Dereification, therefore, is a primary means to well-being. If there were a progress chart that MBSR students were meant to follow, it would lead from the dereification of negative storylines, to seeing clearly or making 'direct contact' with reality and the subsequent, inescapable revelation that life is "amazing" and "miraculous."

See another instance that demonstrates Kabat-Zinn stating how dereification of negative storylines lends itself to decreasing our suffering:

> Our doubts about our own abilities become self-fulfilling prophecies. They can come to dominate lives. In this way we effectively impose limits on ourselves via our own thought processes. Then, too often, we forget that we have created these boundaries all on our own. Consequently, we get stuck and feel we can't get beyond them (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 184).

In this way, MBSR teaches that the narrative content we consciously and unconsciously live within functions as a negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

But mindfulness also cultivates change in the way one views the narrative *universe* one inhabits. Whereas before, I used the analogy of Star Wars versus Lord of the Rings, two particular kinds of narrative universes are relevant here: that of a traditional Buddhist worldview, and that of contemporary American culture. Certain aspects of the narrative universe that frames the practitioner's experience—cosmology and technology, for example—contribute to their narrative content and phenomenology. The narrative context (and therefore phenomenology and content) varies depending on the where, when, how and why of experience. Most often, it restricts the possibilities of

one's narrative storyline. Context does not demand that any event or series of events take

place, but rather constrains what is *possible*. For example, an ethnically Tibetan Buddhist

may very well perform mindfulness meditation to be granted a beneficial rebirth in a

godly realm (or to avoid a wrathful hell realm)—their narrative universe is constrained by

a conventionally Tibetan Buddhist worldview. For an American who *converted* to

Tibetan Buddhism, this may be less likely—as they may be inclined to retain a Western

Judeo-Christian cosmology, but adopt other elements of Tibetan Buddhist practice. The

relevant point is that the narrative universe one occupies determines the possibilities of

the narrative self. For a native Tibetan, the phenomenological experience of meditating

for the purpose of avoiding rebirth in a hell realm may be rooted in fear and emotional or

cognitive aversion to culturally constructed images associated with these realms.

Conversely, even for a Western convert to Tibetan Buddhism, his narrative universe is

not identical to a native Tibetan. The Westerner's universe is informed by a very

different worldview, where visceral, unconscious responses to the very notion of the hell

realms are absent. This is a non-trivial, if subtle, point.

Likewise, it is not likely that a 45-year-old Caucasian woman, who is also a

devoted Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction practitioner and Wall Street investment

banker, meditates for a beneficial rebirth in a godly realm or even to attain Nirvana.

More likely, she practices mindfulness to become less anxious, stressed, depressed, or

even to increase her focus in an increasingly frenetic business world (Gardiner, 2012). In

fact, some Masters in Business Administration programs have started teaching

mindfulness to their students in an attempt to "increase focus." The Wall Street Journal

reports that, to business schools, "Such skills are crucial for those hoping to succeed in an

increasingly frenetic environment where distractions from an always-buzzing phone to pressure for strong quarterly profit reports constantly impinge on decisions" (Gardiner, 2012, p. 1). Indeed, certain alterations to her narrative universe can be made (the businesswoman could convert to Tibetan Buddhism, move to Nepal and begin adhering to a Tibetan cosmology with multiple rebirths and the like), but others cannot (a Tibetan Buddhist from the 16th century would *never* have been able to participate in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction or work on Wall Street). Suffice it to say, however, that the context of the narrative self constrains what is possible.

With respect to dereification, the operative point is that the narrative universe component of the narrative self can also be dereified. Like the narrative content, it is exceedingly plastic. As above, one can convert to Tibetan Buddhism and move to Tibet; a Tibetan can move to the United States; one can transition from a member of a *sangha* in a populous Western city to a solitary practitioner on three years of retreat. Relatedly, but more subtly, part of the narrative context includes the motivation for *why* one is meditating in the first place. Even if a practitioner maintains all outward appearances—lives in the same town, keeps her job, raises children as before, etc.—their motivation for practicing could shift. To alter motivation in *any* manner necessarily changes the plastic universe in which one practices. Cultivating the ability to dereify both content and context, so the argument goes, opens one to the plasticity of the entire narrative self. Furthermore, such plasticity allows one to inherit a less stressful phenomenological space where the constraints that keep us anxious, depressed or unwell can be loosened.

In sum, mindfulness meditation as seen through the mechanism of dereification can help explain how MBSR regulates the narrative self. The end goal is to dereify the

narratives we tell and are told about ourselves. The cultivation of meta-awareness and the ability to orient one's attention to certain objects (with greater or less clarity, effort, stability and effort) play a role in one's ability to dereify. What is dereified? Most proximally, mindfulness dereifies the content of the narrative. Once we are less controlled by the conscious and unconscious narratives we tell ourselves, however, the narrative universe and phenomenology of the narrative can be affected. Altogether, mindfulness acts on the thickened narrative self to make the practitioner less stressed, anxious, depressed and ultimately healthier.

Chapter Four: Self and No-Self in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

> *The denial of the self, ego, or of the individual soul*
> *(antāman) is the touchstone or perhaps rather the*
> *stumbling block of the Buddhist doctrine.*
> *-Bernard Faure (2009, p. 49)*

There are two primary objectives for this chapter: first, to explore how some versions of the Buddhist self/no-self dynamic undergird and inform MBSR; second, to explain how the MBSR articulation of the self/no-self dyad is informed by not only Buddhism, but also modernity. To accomplish the first, we consider Buddhist perspectives on the self/no-self dynamic from both early and Nondual traditions; then we note how some Buddhist formulations are relevant to understanding a new self/no-self dynamic that appears within MBSR literature. We address the second objective by concluding with a discussion of how two particular features of modernity guide and shape the presentation of self and non-self in MBSR.

As the central topic of this chapter, I should elaborate on what I mean by "self/no-self dynamic." In short, and generally speaking, the rejection of the existence of one kind of self—hence, the no-self doctrine—is central to Buddhist teachings. That is not to say, however, that no self of any kind is thought to exist—a common misconception, especially in the West. Rather, the various Buddhist traditions reject a certain *kind* of self because it is not the way "things actually are," and belief in it is therefore conducive to suffering. Owing to the rejection of a particular kind of self, the fundamental Buddhist position becomes formalized by the appropriately named doctrine of "no-self," or "*anattā*." That said, Buddhist thinkers affirm various other kinds of selves—rather than

rejecting all forms of self *tout court*—which then becomes conceptualized and articulated in different ways.

The outline of the chapter is as follows. Addressing the general features of the self/no-self dialectic first requires brief historical consideration of a few prominent versions of the self/no-self dyad within Buddhism.[35] This task is complicated by a number of factors. Most obviously, and as already noted in previous chapters, Buddhism is far from monolithic—it is more accurate to speak of *Buddhisms*. It naturally follows that there is no single articulation of the self/no-self dynamic. However, most if not all Buddhists tend to share a certain approach to the no-self doctrine in which some kind of self is to be rejected, but another kind of self is to be affirmed. The first section is therefore devoted to elaborating on the general features of this self/no-self dynamic, using the particular instance that can be found in early Buddhist thought as an exemplar. Understanding early Buddhist formulations of the dynamic helps us conceptualize more modern iterations, such as the ones we can observe in contemporary Buddhist styles of practice.

We continue by investigating formulations of self and non-self that developed subsequent to early Buddhist thought, the group of Buddhist traditions that could be called "Nondual ." Recall from chapter three, this particular heuristic for conceptualizing the various Buddhist traditions was developed to facilitate analysis and comparison of mindfulness practices. The category of Nondual practices is useful to this study for at least three reasons. To begin, Jon Kabat-Zinn explicitly cites thinkers from Nondual traditions on many occasions. In particular, he focuses on Zen, Mahāmudrā and

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[35] I use dyad, dialectic and dynamic interchangeably.

Dzogchen thought and practice. Second, the seven key components of mindfulness

practice that Kabat-Zinn articulates within *Full Catastrophe Living* (which I review in

Chapter Three) bear a striking resemblance to certain trademark features of Zen,

Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen. In fact, some of Kabat-Zinn's components are found

exclusively in Nondual traditions; for example, "beginner's mind" is a signature Zen

concept. Given such obvious parallels, we focus our examination of self and non-self on

certain Nondual Buddhist traditions. Third, just as Nondual traditions informed the

version of mindfulness that Jon Kabat-Zinn drew on to create MBSR, those same

traditions present articulations of the self/no-self dynamic that help us to understand the

same dialectic in MBSR. By considering certain instances of the Nondual self/no-self

dynamic, we can gain insight into the presentation of self and no-self in MBSR that

consideration of *only* early Buddhist sources cannot provide. For these three reasons, we

consider self and no-self from the perspective of Zen, Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen.

Concerning the specific Nondual sources I rely on, the focus is on twentieth-

century Nondual Buddhist thinkers such as Shunryu Suzuki and Chögyam Trungpa.

However, I will also occasionally quote the traditional sources *they* cite, such as Milarepa

Dōgen from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, respectively. So although I draw on

formative Nondual Buddhist thinkers such as the latter two, I do so because the

modernists find them to be important. This is noteworthy because it underscores a

methodological nuance. My intention is not to sift through the immense corpus of

Nondual Buddhist thought to cherry-pick concepts that appear to undergird MBSR.

Rather I start with Kabat-Zinn, and trace his sources upstream from the present day to the

mid-twentieth century thinkers he cites, and from there to a number of prominent

Nondual figures that preceded them.

The reader may wonder why modern Burmese *Vipassanā* sources will not be used

as inspiration for understanding self and non-self in MBSR, as the contemporary

Vipassanā meditation tradition is commonly associated with MBSR. Indeed, MBSR and

modern *Vipassanā* teachings share certain similarities. But confusion stems from the fact

that contemporary American *Vipassanā* and Burmese *Vipassanā* differ significantly on a

number of fronts. While MBSR shares many similarities with the former, it has

substantially less in common with the latter. It may be the case that the American

Vipassanā movement has formidable Nondual sentiments, but the traditional Burmese

Vipassanā account is not committed to Nondual concepts in any clear way (Harrington &

Dunne, forthcoming). In fact, there are fundamentally irreconcilable incompatibilities

between Burmese *Vipassanā* and Nondual Buddhist traditions. A complete account of

the differences between contemporary *Vipassanā* and its late-nineteenth century

antecedent are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it suffices to say that the gap is

significant enough to preclude the drawing of facile parallels between MBSR and the

latter. In short, we do not look to Burmese *Vipassanā* because it is, strictly speaking, *not*

a Nondual Buddhist tradition.

Having examined certain Buddhist accounts of the self/no-self dyad, we conduct a

close reading of MBSR primary sources through the lens of the self and non-self. It

should be noted at the outset that, unlike the Buddhist historical sources in which self and

non-self are explicitly discussed, MBSR literature does not overtly address or delineate a

true sense of self from a false self. Rather, MBSR sources *tacitly* invoke elements of the

Buddhist self/no-self dyad, and it is the goal of this section to make those implicit features explicit. We therefore comb the MBSR literature for passages that echo the self/no-self dialectic stated outright in Buddhist thought. We conclude the chapter by discussing how certain signature features of modernity impact what, why and how various elements of the Buddhist self/no-self dynamic are appropriated and articulated by MBSR. We focus in particular on *detraditionalization* and *psychologization,* and their respective roles in shaping the presentation of self and non-self.

One may sensibly wonder why it is useful or interesting to ask if or how the self/no-self dyad within Buddhism informs MBSR. It is sensible because MBSR has explicitly stated roots in Buddhist thought and practice, a relatively obvious point if one casually sifts through any piece of MBSR literature. Kabat-Zinn regularly quotes from popular and scholarly Buddhist sources, whether Zen, Tibetan, Theravāda or otherwise. Perhaps unsurprisingly, but also worth noting, Kabat-Zinn has a long personal history of Buddhist meditation practice that informed the development of MBSR. For the simple reason that MBSR draws many of its main features from Buddhism, therefore, it is makes good sense to examine his writings from the perspective of a Buddhist framework.

But why is it a *fruitful* exercise to look for elements of the self/no-self dynamic in MBSR? Surely, Buddhism has other core doctrines that one could search for—why focus on self and no-self? To begin, it is my thesis that the dereification of the narrative self is the central mechanism by which MBSR produces salutary effects in practitioners—this was detailed in the third chapter. The present chapter represents an attempt to more deeply engage Buddhist notions of self and no-self to consider the related, but different question, of how mindfulness practices appropriate certain elements of the Buddhist

self/no-self dynamic. Scholars who study mindfulness and who also happen to be interested in the philosophy of mind, self, identity, consciousness and narrative may therefore find this chapter interesting. But I also seek to appeal to broader audiences within the academic study of Buddhism. This chapter could be conceived of as a case study for how contemporary Buddhist practices are adopting, transforming, being altered by and filtering certain historically Buddhist doctrines—in this case, no-self. In this way, by studying one particular instance of a modern Buddhist (or Buddhism-based) practice, we can (very carefully) extrapolate to draw conclusions about how Buddhist modernism at large relates to some of its Buddhist historical forebears.

It should also be stressed that this chapter does not present an exhaustive account of the no-self doctrine in Buddhist thought and practice. Such an endeavor would be the subject of many volumes and is, in any case, well beyond my capability. This treatment of no-self, rather, serves the ultimate goal of highlighting aspects of the self/no-self dynamic that tend to recur in MBSR. So rather than painting a comprehensive picture, I select various relevant aspects of self and non-self discourse to discuss. In this respect, I may neglect some of the nuances of the traditions I address, and omit entire no-self perspectives from one Buddhist lineage or another. Nor do I present the historical development of the various no-self positions. Indeed, there is an entire history of Buddhist positions on no-self waiting to be written, but this chapter will not fulfill that lacuna in Buddhist scholarship. Rather, in the lengthy history of the no-self doctrine within Buddhism, various accounts become prominent, while others receive less attention—like the alternation of beads and thread on a rosary. Unfortunately, I will not have the time, space or expertise to explain the full context of when the various no-self

positions emerge, who conceived of them, who their interlocutors were, how they were shaped by their cultures or context, and so forth. Rather, I emphasize, I bring them to your attention for the purposes of highlighting certain key features of the self and no-self dynamic exhibited by the Buddhist perspectives that relate to the MBSR self/no-self dynamic.

4.1 General Features of the Self/No-Self Dynamic

> *Buddhists have all, in one way or another, considered it to be a fundamental principle of their religion that people are somehow without selves, i.e., they somehow ultimately lack an I, a real entity to which their mental and physical states can be ascribed.*
>
> *To be more precise, we think we have a self, are deeply attached to the idea of having a self, seek to protect it and so on and so forth, but actually we are wrong, and being wrong on that score our effort at self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and indeed most of our emotional life, is actually very misguided, a painful laboring under an illusion.*
> *-Tom Tillemans (1995, p. 4)*

The following section outlines a widely applicable rubric for the self/no-self dynamic, followed by one version of this no-self position, that of early Buddhism. As already mentioned above, it is important to remember that Buddhism is not a monolith. Just as Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists (and many others) all fall under the umbrella of Christianity, a panoply of diverse traditions are all considered to be "Buddhist." Each unique version of Buddhist practice, moreover, incorporates elements of its geographical, historical and cultural contexts. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the doctrine of no-self could have varied manifestations, depending on the above mentioned factors. For example, twelfth-

century Zen philosophical writings may espouse an understanding of no-self that appears to deviate from Indian sources from before the Common Era, both of which may differ in important respects from Tibetan versions. Indeed, Buddhist scholars through the ages have developed ways of accounting for these differences, most notably through the notion of *upāyakauśalya*, or "skill in means."[36] Interpretation and articulation of no-self, in fact, has been the subject of fierce debate among various Buddhist traditions (Dunne, 2004a, p. 1208; Ganeri, 2012). Within this section is a description of some *generalities* of the no-self doctrine that apply widely in most Buddhist contexts, followed by the particular case of early Buddhism.

4.1.1 General Structure of the Self/No-Self Dynamic

Scholars tend to agree that despite the diversity of no-self views in Buddhism, there is something in common that all share (Dunne, 2004a). Tillemans' description above of a Buddhist no-self position has two central features that are relevant here, one ontological and the other soteriological. All persons somehow lack an I, or self, in whatever sense they may define it; and by thinking and acting as if we have a self, we are deeply misguided and suffer by virtue of that misunderstanding.

With respect to soteriological concerns, the import of the no-self doctrine does not stem solely from the revelation or teaching that self, construed in a particular way, does not exist. This is because the fact that we operate with a mistaken sense of self has

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[36] Ganeri states: "...the Buddha's teachings about the self are ineliminably pragmatic or 'skillful'. To any given audience, he will teach such a doctrine about self as is calculated best to divest that particular audience of its false sense of self. Indeed, to an audience made up of moral skeptics and hedonists, the Buddha is willing to declare that there *is* indeed a permanent self, because this will instill in that audience a sense of moral commitment and responsibility. Fostering a sense of self in those who do not have it may well be the best way to encourage a concern for their own future pain, and a concern for one's own pain could well be the necessary precondition for a concern about the pain of others" (Ganeri, 2007)

soteriological consequences. To put it differently, Ganeri says, "…in denying self the Buddhist aim is not merely to reject some given historical theory of self…but also to diagnose what they take to be a very deep but correctable error in our primitive conceptual scheme and in the phenomenology of self-awareness" (Ganeri, 2007). Our mistaken sense of self, which stems from this 'error in our primitive conceptual scheme' becomes of soteriological concern in light of the fact that ignorance (*avidyā*) about the true nature of self is one of the fundamental sources of suffering within Buddhism (Gombrich, 1979, p. 270). Because a mistaken view about the true nature of self is one of the hallmark sources of ignorance, it prevents us from 'seeing things as they truly are,' or *yathābhūta-darśana* (Emmanuel, 2013, p. 50; P. Williams & Tribe, 2000, p. 36). Failing to see things as they are, as it turns out, is what keeps one from achieving *nirvāṇa*, and it naturally follows that a false sense of self is of great importance to Buddhist doctrine and practice, where the goal is to attain *nirvāṇa*. To understand self as non-existent (in the particular way that each tradition defines it) is to avoid the obviously deleterious consequences of *avidyā*, including countless rebirths in *saṃsāra*.

Regarding ontology and metaphysics, one way of construing the no-self doctrine is to say that Buddhists deny the existence of some kind of self, let us call it X. Each tradition nevertheless acknowledges on some level the existence of a certain *alternative* kind of self, let us call it Y. With respect to early Buddhist texts, for example, it was only denied that the self is an "empirical element," not that "there is such a thing as the self" (Siderits, 2012, p. 298). The admission or concession that some kind of self exists may be logically *obligatory,* in fact, because one has to concede the existence of *some* kind of self on *some* level given that there is someone denying the existence of a certain kind of

self.[37] Look only to the second chapter for evidence that philosophers have proposed a multiplicity of selves. My discussion focused on the narrative self in particular, but self as narrative is obviously distinct from embodied, minimal, core, autobiographical, extended and fictional selves (just to name a few). In this way, it is perfectly sensible (and even necessary) to affirm the existence of self Y while denying the existence of self X, even in the context of Buddhism, despite the fact that Western understandings of the tradition would suggest that there is absolutely "no-self" (Albahari, 2006).[38]

Crucially, as Buddhism inhabits new cultures, develops over time and encounters new ways of conceptualizing self, the no-self doctrine evolves as well. In short, the notion of no-self is not static—it builds upon and in response to previous articulations and definitions of the self. It is a living, breathing doctrine. Just as philosophers of self today do not all hold the same position on what the self truly is and what is mere fabrication, fantasy or delusion, the form that self as X takes varies depending on the Buddhist tradition. In other words, what counts as a "true" kind of self differs based on the time, place and lineage. The "no-self doctrine" can therefore be misleading to some, for it is not the case that no self of any kind exists. It's just that self defined as X does not exist in the manner we believe it to be, whereas self defined as Y does, both of which are dependent on a host of related factors.

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[37] The need to assert some kind of self is actually more complicated than I present here. For example, there were "Annihilationists" that served as interlocutors in early Buddhist debates about the self who were thought to evince a veritable no-self view. See (Edelglass & Garfield, 2009; Ganeri, 2012; Harvey, 2009) for a more comprehensive treatment of this subject.

[38] The distinction between self as X and self as Y is similar to Collins' separation of self and person in the appropriately titled *Selfless Persons.* See Collins (1982) for more.

4.1.2 The Self Refuted in Early Buddhism

> *The debate between advocates of self and no-self accounts*
> *is complicated by the fact that there is rather little*
> *consensus about what precisely a self amounts to, just as*
> *there is little agreement on what a no-self doctrine entails.*
> *-Dan Zahavi (2011, p. 64)*

Given the nearly infinite ways in which the self can be defined, it makes good sense to consider the kind of self that early Buddhist doctrine refuted. The concept of no-self evolved out of a particular time and place in which the question of the true nature of self was of interest to not only Buddhists. As Siderits says,

> The Buddha claimed to have discovered a path to liberation from suffering. In this he was not alone. A number of such paths were developed in early classical India. All share the belief that sentient beings suffer because of ignorance about their true identity: we are trapped on the wheel of saṃsāra because we identify with things that are not the true self. What set the Buddha's teachings apart from those of other Indian doctrines of liberation is that the Buddha denied there is a self (Siderits, 2012, p. 299).

At the center of these debates is the Sanskrit term *ātman,* frequently translated as "self," a word that has its etymological origins in the word for "breath." Within the group of philosophical texts known as the Upaniṣads, *ātman* was conceived of as unchanging, eternal, and "a mysterious, ungraspable entity…the inner controller," the things that "is immortal in us" (Gethin, 1998, p. 134). Also notable about the Upaniṣadic self was that it came to be identified with the equation of *ātman* and *brahman,* the underlying ground of the universe. In this way, the Upaniṣads associated an immortal self with the universe itself. Consider the following passage from Ganeri, in which he cites the *Kathā Upaniṣad.*

> The Upaniṣad—the 'hidden connection' or 'secret teaching'—is that the self that gazes out from within my body is the same as the self that gazes out from within

yours. The principle (brahman) behind thinking is the same for each and every thinking self (ātman) (Ganeri, 2007)**.**

Such is the understanding of self as espoused in the *Kathā Upaniṣad*, but as Ganeri assiduously documents in *Concealed Art of the Soul*, the Upaniṣadic view of self was not static. Like the later Buddhist approach to self, it took a plurality of forms as well (Ganeri, 2007)**.** That said, the equation of *ātman* with the eternal and absolute *Brahman* was generally characteristic of Upaniṣadic notions of self.

We will not dwell long on arguments against the reality of self—there are a number of studies that review this material in great detail (see especially Collins, 1982). But it may be useful to touch on just *one* of the ways in which the self was refuted, to get a sense of the logic of the denial of the self. This particular argument is, according to Collins, the argument from 'lack of control.' It is said in one sūtra:

> Body is not a self. If body were a self then it might be that it would not lead to sickness; then it might be possible to say, 'Let my body be like this, let me body not be like this.' But since body is not a self, so it leads to sickness, and it is not possible to say, 'Let my body be like this, let my body not be like this' (Samyutta Nikāya, iii, 66-7, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 341–2).

In turn, the same argument against control is used against the other four aggregates of feeling, recognition, volition and consciousness. According to this rhetorical strategy, something deserves the label "self" by virtue of having control over its various constituents. Using the metaphor of the rider in a chariot, the Upaniṣads did in fact argue that the self has the ability to control its component parts, as it is stated in the *Kathā Upaniṣad:*

> Know the self as a rider in a chariot,
> and the body, as simply the chariot.
> Know the intellect as the charioteer,

and the mind, as simply the reins.[39]

But when considering whether or not *ātman* has control over any of the five

aggregates like a charioteer controls its chariot, the early Buddhist thinkers concluded

that it does not. After all, one cannot simply wish to be physically well when sick; nor

can one control what one perceives or feels at all times. Because a human being cannot

control its various constituent parts in the way that a charioteer controls a chariot, they

argue that a human cannot be said to have or be a self, so construed. Such a line of

argumentation was common in the commentaries according to Collins:

> In the commentaries, things are regularly said to be not-self because there is 'no
> exercising of mastery' over them. The five constituents of phenomenal
> personality, the khandhā, are not-self because they have no 'leader', no 'guide',
> no 'inner controller' as the Upaniṣads had put it (Collins, 1982, p. 97).

In other words, because critics of the *Upaniṣads* refuted the notion that the self

has control over its parts, they necessarily doubted the existence of self.

4.1.3 The Self Affirmed in Early Buddhism

Having considered the kind of self that is viewed refuted—that is, unchanging,

immutable and eternal—the next question to be addressed concerns what *does* exist if the

self does not? As evinced by Bodhi below, the notion of the five aggregates plays a

central role in early Buddhist formulations of self and non-self:

> While it is true that the "no-self" doctrine excludes Upaniṣadic ideas about the
> self, the purpose for which the Buddha expounded it was not to negate any
> specific theory of the self but to correct the universal human proclivity to seek a
> substantial basis of personal identity amidst the five aggregates (Bodhi, 2010, p.
> 164).

Therefore, although early Buddhist thinkers denied the existence of a self, they

did not deny that there were ultimately existing constituents of reality, termed *skandhas*

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[39] *Kathā Upaniṣad*, 3.3, obtained from Ganeri (2007, p. 31)

(Siderits, 2007, p. 85). The *skandhas* are a way of organizing the various constituents of

mind and body. Variously translated as bundle, category, aggregate or constituent,

skandhas are the things that we misperceive or misconceive as self (Collins, 1982, p. 319;

Siderits, 2007, p. 35). They include *rūpa* (body or form), *vedanā* (feeling of pleasure,

pain or indifference)*, samjñā* (perception), *samskāra* (conditioning, or motivating forces

of activity and mentation) *and vijñāna* (consciousness).

Importantly, while the self is ultimately *not real* in that it can be broken down into

further constituent parts (or particulars) from the perspective of early Buddhist thinkers,

skandhas—or more precisely, the "elements" *(dharmas)* that constitute the categories

known as *skandhas*—do ultimately exist. They are the truly existing building blocks of

all mental and physical phenomena in the framework of early Buddhist metaphysics. As

a result, a search for an ultimately existing self yields only the five aggregates, at least in

this particular early Buddhist heuristic for understanding the self. In this way, while the

reality of the self is denied, the ultimately existing thing that *does* exist in lieu of the self

is the aggregates. In other words, whereas self defined as *ātman* (X) is denied as truly

existing, self defined a psychophysical complex of aggregates (Y) is affirmed. One will

observe this pattern of affirmation and denial throughout Buddhist intellectual

scholarship on the self.

If one concedes that the kind of unchanging and eternal self critiqued by early

Buddhist thinkers is spurious, and only the aggregates really exist, one may still wonder

how they account for the fact that selves are nonetheless useful. The simple answer is

that, by all accounts, the idea of a self is profoundly useful and indeed necessary in our

daily lives. The language of the self (**I** live in New York; **I** am worried **I** won't finish **my**

chapter in time; help **me** finish **my** dissertation) is veritably ubiquitous and, unsurprisingly, present in all Buddhist literature. As Gethin states, such terms are perfectly normal in Buddhist discourse—they do not need to be removed just because the self does not exist on a metaphysical level. And such discourse would not make sense without reference to I, me, mine, you, yours and theirs (Gethin, 1998, p. 145). But nevertheless, Buddhist thought claims that a self is not to be found. How is this the case?

Some versions of Buddhist discourse propose a distinction between conventional (*saṃvṛti*/*sammuti*) and ultimate truth (*paramātha*/*paramattha*) when it comes to the reality of the self. Within this formulation, it is acknowledged that the self is *not* an absolute non-referent, nor is it devoid of utility. Rather, as above, the argument refuting the self within early Buddhism only denies the reality of a very specific enduring substance—*ātman*. It does not deny, however, that the self is useful on a number of levels. Consider the following passage:

> Thus, there are two senses to the term 'self': a self conceived in terms of an intrinsic nature that exists by means of intrinsic being, and a self in the sense of the object of our simple, natural thought 'I am.' Of these two, the first is the object of negation by reasoning, while the second is not negated, for it is accepted as conventionally real (Jinpa, 2002, p. 71).

For example, words that refer to selves—person, human, human being, John, David, he and she—are of great utility. But as for their ontological status within the conventional versus ultimate dichotomy, they are merely 'conventional' labels for things that are in reality unenduring and constantly changing—mere causally connected series of physical and mental phenomena (Ganeri, 2012; Siderits, 2003). The claim of these Buddhist thinkers is therefore not that the notion of a self is never useful. To restate this

in terms of the self affirmed versus self rejected heuristic: the self as ultimately existing is rejected, but the existence of the conventional self is affirmed.

4.2 Self and No-Self in Nondual Traditions

Having considered general features of the self/no-self dynamic as well as the particular case of early Buddhism, we now consider self and no-self in the Nondual Buddhist traditions. In doing so, we are both chronologically and thematically closer to the self/no-self dynamic as evinced in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. Although certain understandings of nonduality were present early in Indian Buddhism (as early as the first century (C.E.), they nevertheless first appeared well *after* the *Abhidharmic* notions of self and non-self discussed above (Dunne, 2011b, p. 73). Furthermore, the Nondual approaches to self and no-self are conceptually linked to MBSR for the reasons discussed in Chapter Three. Therefore, as we build from the broad and inclusive self/no-self dichotomy introduced in the previous section to the present discussion of Nondual selfhood, we inch closer to our objective of understanding how Buddhist notions of self and no-self inform MBSR. Within this section, we consider a number of different Nondual traditions, including Zen, Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen. To reiterate, these variations of Buddhist practice are themselves tremendously diverse, so I will necessarily be omitting compelling nuances between and within each tradition. That said, certain features of the self/no-self dynamic appear consistent within these particular traditions— some of which appear to inform MBSR. In contrast to the section above, we focus largely on the kind of self *affirmed*, rather than the self denied, in the Nondual traditions.

4.2.1 Tathāgatagarbha

Just as we began our Chapter Three discussion of Nondual traditions with

Tathāgatagarbha, we start with the same topic here, a central feature of Nondual

conceptions of self and non-self.[40] As Ruegg has pointed out, the ontology of

Tathāgatagarbha was a subject of fierce debate at various points in Buddhist history.

Some asserted that the notion of Buddha Nature was merely a "crypto-Brahmanical soul

theory," that was actually indistinguishable from the *ātman*-doctrine. These Buddhist

critics argued that to affirm the existence of Buddha nature was contrary to the teaching

of non-self, and therefore inauthentic (Ruegg, 1989, p. 7). The metaphysics of

Tathāgatagarbha are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but can be reviewed in

Ruegg's excellent volume on Buddha Nature referenced above. Here we briefly consider

general features of the doctrine of Buddha Nature that are relevant to the kind of self that

is affirmed in Nondual Buddhist traditions, as well as MBSR.

Thought to have developed around the fifth century C.E.—several centuries after

Abhidharma texts—the *Tathāgatagarbha* traditions hold that, in any number of ways,

Buddhahood, or Buddha-Nature, is in all sentient beings (King, 1991; Ruegg, 1989).[41] In

the third century (C.E.) *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, the Buddha is said to have stated that all

living beings "are endowed with virtues, always pure, and hence are not different from

me" (Takasaki, 1958, p. 51). It is said in the seminal Zen text *Shōbōgenzō*, composed by

Dōgen in the thirteenth century, that, "The Dharma is not to be found externally; it is

inseparable from oneself, and the self is inseparable from the Dharma. If you seek it

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[40] Here I will review only key features of Buddha Nature that are relevant to our discussion. For a more thorough treatment, please see Chapter Three's discussion of *Tathāgatagarbha.*

[41] Some thinkers (such as Dōgen) insisted, in fact, that all beings and things quite literally *are* Buddha-Nature, rather than *have* Buddha-Nature (Dōgen, 2002; P. Williams, 2009). This is briefly discussed below.

elsewhere, you fall into illusion" (Dōgen, 2002). And in the sixteenth century

Mahāmudrā text, *Ocean of True Meaning*, it is stated that:

> Buddhahood is in one's own body. Nowhere else does buddhahood exist. Those
> wrapped in the darkness of ignorance, believe buddhahood to be somewhere
> outside the body. And: Nowhere in the outer world will you ever find Buddha-
> hood. The mind is the perfect Buddha (Dorje, 2009, p. 210).

These various passages, composed over the span of more than a millennium in a

number of different Buddhist traditions, all reinforce the notion that to search *outside* of

oneself for the *tathāgata* is destined to be fruitless. One does not need to look outside

one's own body and mind for the qualities of a Buddha—it is *impossible*, in fact—for

Buddhahood is within (King, 1991).

This, of course, is a hearkening to the nondualism that is the namesake of these

traditions. To search outside oneself for Buddha-nature—and therefore, enlightenment—

is to reinforce the false distinction between subject and object. Knowing and acting as if

an awakened mind is *not* one's truest identity, or self, is mistaken because in reality, there

is no basis to the external and internal divide inherent to subject-object duality (Williams,

2009, pp. 105–114). One justification for the notion that Buddha nature is our true self,

therefore, is that the distinction of externality from internality is false. As described

previously, the subject-object division is spurious, according to Nondual traditions, and a

fundamental source of suffering (Dunne, 2011b; Higgins, 2008). Gampopa, a seminal

figure in the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism and eminent practitioner of Mahāmudrā,

emphasizes this point by asserting that, in seeking enlightenment "we are simply looking

for the nature of our own mind, which is right there in our own mind" (Thrangu, 2004, p.

176). In other words, we need not go anywhere, or do anything, to experience Buddha-

nature.

Seeking to emphasize the immanence of Buddha-nature, some Nondual adherents argued that we do not *have* Buddha-nature, but rather we *are* Buddha-nature. This position was not merely semantic, but rather intended to underscore the nonduality of Buddha-nature. To Dōgen, after all:

> It is not that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature (or indeed contain a Tathāgata). Rather, the expression 'sentient being' refers to everyone and everything is the Buddha-nature, or the Tathāgata. It is dualistic to think of beings possessing the Buddha-nature (P. Williams, 2009, p. 120).

Another Zen master, Mumon, laconically echoes Dōgen in a famous kōan:

> The dog, the buddha nature,
> The pronouncement, perfect, and final.
> Before you say it has or has not,
> You are a dead man on the spot (Mumon, 1977, p. 44).

To say that a sentient being has or does not have Buddha-nature is a categorical mistake that reinforces subject-object duality. All beings, without exception *are* Buddha-nature according to these thinkers. This semantic detail underscores the relationship between nonduality and Buddha-nature: the enlightened mind of a *tathāgata* is literally the true self of all sentient beings.

Altogether, the notion of *Tathāgatagarbha* is germane to the self/no-self dialectic in that relevant Nondual traditions *affirm* its existence. Buddha nature is inborn, all sentient beings possess or are the *tathāgata*, and dualistic notions of self and non-self (as well as other dualities) serve as barriers to its attainment. The question of *how tathāgatagarbha* is found or experienced leads us to the next section.

4.2.2 Effortlessness, Non-Striving and Self

Within these Nondual traditions, Buddha-nature is not only intrinsic to all sentient beings, but also effortless to find or attain. It is effortless in the sense that one does not

need to cultivate any particular mind state or new way of being, but rather one can allow

one's inherent Buddha-nature to come forth uninhibited. Our very nature is that of a

Buddha, for as Shunryu Suzuki says, "There is no need to obtain some special state of

mind" (S. Suzuki, 1970, p. 25). Indeed, it may require a certain kind of effort to avoid

interfering with one's intrinsic nature. But nevertheless, the overall message is that

Buddha-nature does not require the effort associated with cultivation of anything *new*, or

anything that one does not possess or have already. If there is any effort at all, it is the

exertion required to strip oneself of the impediments to one's Buddha-nature. It is said

that "right effort is to get rid of something extra" (S. Suzuki, 1970, p. 59).

Closely related to the dimension of effortlessness, furthermore, is the notion of

non-striving. Effortlessness and non-striving go hand in hand to reinforce the notion that

tathāgata is at the core of who we are as sentient beings, a tenet of the Nondual

traditions. Both effortlessness and non-striving suggest that one does not need to do or be

anything other than what already is—one is not asked to cultivate a *new* sense of self or

seek Buddha-nature *externally*. An external Buddha nature would seem to imply that

effort and striving are decidedly necessary. As Dōgen says, "The moment you begin

seeking the Dharma, you move far from its environs. The moment the Dharma has been

rightly transmitted to you, you become the Person of your original part" (Dōgen, 2002).

Seeking or striving is an obstacle for the additional reason that it reifies at least

two critical dualistic structures—subject/object and *samsāra*/*nirvāna*—both of which

serve as impediments to our enlightened Buddha-nature. Subject/object dualism becomes

reified the moment one thinks that there is a "me" or "I" that needs to find and become

some external Buddha nature; and the notion that there is an enlightened mode of being

to attain (that one does not already possess) also reinforces the specious *samsāra*/*nirvāna*

divide. Consider the following passage regarding Chan practice:

> Chan does not acknowledge a dichotomy between 'enlightenment' and non-enlightenment. Instead of speaking of enlightenment, Chan practitioners seek understanding. Because our nature is believed to be buddha-nature, seeing into one's own nature is realizing buddhahood (Green, 2013, p. 123).

Altogether, effortless and non-striving represent crucial components of the

Nondual path in that they allude to the kind of self *affirmed* by these traditions, namely,

an enlightened Buddha-nature. Dōgen, the founder of the Soto lineage of Zen, sums up

the importance of effortlessness and non-striving to ascertaining our true selves with the

pithy verse:

> Though I now put forth no effort at all,
> Buddha-nature is right under my nose.
> It is not received from my teacher,
> Nor is it something I gained either (Dōgen, 2002, p. 96).

4.2.3 Self As Non-Conceptual/Non-Discursive

> *At the time I'm meditating on Mahāmudrā,*
> *I rest without struggle in actual real being.*
> *I rest relaxed in a free-from-wandering space.*
> *I rest in a clarity-cradled-in-emptiness space.*
> *I rest in awareness and this is blissful space.*
> *I rest unruffled in nonconceptual space.*
> *In variety's space I rest in equipoise.*
> *And resting like this is native mind itself.*
> *A wealth of certainty manifests endlessly.*
> *Without even trying self-luminous mind is at work.*
> *Not stuck in expecting results, I'm doing okay.*
> *No dualism, no hopes and fears, Ho Hey!*
> *Delusion as wisdom, now that's being cheerful and bright!*
> *Delusion transformed into wisdom, now that's all right!*
> -Milarepa (2003, p. 12)

This passage captures all of the features discussed to this point—effortlessness ("I rest without struggle in actual being"), non-striving ("Not stuck in expecting results"), non-duality ("No dualism, no hopes and fears"), and *tathāgatagarbha* ("self-luminous mind"). But it also evokes another prominent aspect of the kind of self affirmed in Nondual practices: non-conceptuality. In the above *Song of Mahāmudrā*, composed by the Tibetan yogi Milarepa, this is made clear in the statement "I rest unruffled in nonconceptual space…And resting like this is the native mind itself." Letting conceptual thinking itself fade, allowing the pure and enlightened non-conceptual mind to come forth, *is* itself the *tathāgata* (P. Williams & Tribe, 2000, p. 265). There is no need to get anywhere or do anything—for all sentient beings are already enlightened.

Given the emphasis on non-conceptuality, conceptual thinking is naturally an impediment to Buddha-nature. You will recall from the previous chapter some of the abstruse philosophical underpinnings for how this is the case. Given that nonduality is perhaps the central feature of Buddha-nature in these traditions, it follows that conceptuality is antithetical to its attainment because such thinking requires subject-object structure—a self and non-self dichotomy. In his excellent study of Buddha-nature in Tibetan Nondual practices, David Ruegg says: "This is because the Middle Way consists, as has been seen, precisely in the cessation of all dichotomous conceptual constructions (*vikalpa*) concerning a self as opposed to a non-self, etc." (Ruegg, 1989, p. 44). Thus, conceptuality becomes an obstacle to Buddha-nature qua the subject-object duality it implicates. The inverse of this argument is that *non*-conceptuality is conducive to *tathāgatagarbha*. As such, it is cultivated in contemplative practices in these Nondual traditions.

Part and parcel of cultivating non-conceptual awareness is that one is instructed to neither accept nor reject whatever phenomena happen to arise in meditation—one is instructed simply to let all thoughts manifest naturally, rather than pushing them away:

> All the meditators want to be without thoughts. But the thoughts keep coming, they cannot be stopped. So the meditators grow weary. However, the more wood, the bigger the fire. The more thoughts there are, the more the nondual primordial awareness increases. Therefore it is all right to just let the five poisons and the thoughts arise. This uncontrived state, where there is nothing to prevent or produce, is the primordial awareness, the very heart of all the buddhas of the three times (Dorje, Mahāmudrā, 176).

In the previous chapter we considered the fact that certain Nondual traditions teach practitioners to let all thoughts arise without judgment—a lesson evoked in this passage. It is taught here and elsewhere that the five poisons of desire, anger, delusion/ignorance, pride jealousy should be allowed to arise, and thoughts as well. In fact, they all serve as fodder for the burning fire of nondual primordial awareness. In this way, one should not rejoice if thoughts do not arise, or "grow weary" if they do. The goal is to rest naturally in (nondual) non-conceptuality, rather than cultivating one thought or another, even if the thought involves any of the so-called five poisons. If conceptual thinking of any kind—virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral—takes place, the objective is to avoid adding any more discursive thoughts:

> Thoughts are just illusions. When you clearly realize that being as well as not being does not go beyond discriminative thinking, thought is not cut off, and there is no more rebirth. Simply do not add discriminative thinking, and you will see clearly (Riggs, 2006, p. 266).

One reason that non-conceptual mind states are pursued in Nondual traditions, therefore, is because conceptuality of any kind is deleterious to the cause of the elimination of subject-object duality—the essence of our true self, the "the native mind," described by Milarepa above.

4.2.4 Self as World

Natural phenomena are also a recurring motif in some Nondual traditions—

especially in the sense that self and world are interdependent. This is certainly the case in

Zen, where one will frequently see, for example, the equation of Buddha nature and

nature at large. To Dōgen the natural world really and quite literally is the Buddha nature

(P. Williams, 2009, p. 120). One will see a similar thread in MBSR—perhaps

unsurprising given Kabat-Zinn's Zen proclivities—where the splendor that nature has to

offer is commonly alluded to or explicitly discussed. Several passages from the writings

of Dōgen and D.T. Suzuki are representative of this element of the Nondual self. In the

Busshō, (Japanese for "Buddha Nature") fascicle of his seminal Shōbōgenzō, Dōgen

states:

> Grass and tree…are mind; because they are mind, they are sentient being.
> Because they are sentient being, they are being Buddha-nature. Sun, moon, stars
> and planets are mind. Because they are mind, they are sentient being. Because
> they are sentient being, they are Buddha-nature. Sun, moon, and stars are mind;
> thus they are sentient beings; thus they are Buddha-nature (Dōgen, 2002, p. 85)

> Within the same fascicle, he states,

> Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are all the Buddha-nature Sea. The forming
> of mountains, rivers, the great earth itself, is totally dependent means that the very
> time they are being formed is mountains, rivers, and the great earth. As for the
> forming, it is totally dependent on the Buddha-nature, you should know that the
> mode of the Buddha-nature Sea is like this. It is not concerned with inner or outer
> or in-between. As the Buddha-nature Sea is like this, seeing mountains and rivers
> is seeing the Buddha-nature. Seeing the Buddha-nature is seeing a donkey's jowls
> or a horse's mouth (Dōgen, 2002, p. 67).

Here Dōgen goes beyond simply using mountains and rivers, moon and stars as

metaphors to describe mind and Buddha-nature. Rather, natural phenomena are veritable

sentient beings, and therefore Buddha-nature itself; mountain, river and moon are simply

other names for Buddha nature. As the modern Zen master D.T. Suzuki adds, "the Self,

far from being an empty notion of the nothingness, is here right before us in full

revelation." But in addition to *being* Buddha-nature itself, the natural world also reflects

our own Buddha nature back to us:

> The great earth with its mountains and rivers, plants and animals, rains and
> winds—are they not all revealing themselves in front of us, for us to see, and to
> hear, what they are? They are just waiting to make us become conscious of 'the
> sense of non-discrimination' which is dormant within us just this moment" (D. T.
> Suzuki, 1970, p. 7).

The world around us reveals our true self back to us. In other portions of this

particular passage, Suzuki expands on how our environs bring out the dormant Buddha-

nature within by cutting through conceptual thinking, to "make us become conscious 'of

the sense of non-discrimination.'" The upshot is that these natural features of the world

promote nondual awareness, rather than intellection, leading us to our "Self in its just-so-

ness." In contrast to conceptual thinking and its attendant dichotomizing,

intellectualizing dissecting, and finally "killing objects which it attempts to understand,"

the nondual awareness evinced by nature is said to suffuse sentient beings, allowing their

own nonduality to blossom.

4.2.5 Self Refuted

To this point, we have been concerned primarily with illuminating the sense of

self that is to be affirmed, but now I wish to very briefly make explicit the elements of

self that are to be refuted in Nondual traditions. Indeed, these can be inferred from the

above, as the inverse of the qualities that are thought to be true. Dualistic and heavily

conceptual senses of self are mistaken; great effort and striving of a certain kind are to be

avoided in seeking to find one's truest self; and false notions of self are utterly

independent and isolated from the world around them. But let us consider a few brief

passages that state unambiguously the kind of self that is misguided. The following

quote about Chan practice emphasizes the relationship between engaging with the world

and limiting discursivity:

> Chan meditation is not aimed at cutting off the empirical world…On the contrary, it seeks to engage deeply in experience by minimizing mental analysis and evaluation. Because such internal chatter is identified typically as the "self," Chan seeks to destroy this self as a false construction of what we really are, to end the tyranny of self-reflection. Such thoughts, it is believed, remove us from a more direct experience of reality by imposing endless dualisms, to which we cling, therefore resulting in suffering (Green, 2013, p. 124).

In the way presented above, there is an inverse relationship between conceptual

thinking and engagement with the world around us—also a prominent theme in MBSR.

As discursive thought increases, one can get lost in an endless web of conceptuality—a

'tyranny of self-reflection'—such that one loses touch with one's surroundings. The

main mechanism by which this is said to occur is by virtue of the endless dualisms that

are reinforced by discursive thought. Such concept formation produces suffering because

of clinging to dualistic notions self/other and *samsāra*/*nirvāna*, among many false

dichotomies. The more we experience the world with these dualistic categories, the

further away from nondual being—and our authentic nondual self—we become. To

counter this tendency, the stated goal of Chan meditation in this passage is to engage in

and with the world by cutting off conceptual thinking. Rather than avoiding the world

and limiting exposure to external stimuli, one is asked to interact with one's surroundings

to a greater degree—but with non-conceptual awareness instead of conceptual thinking.

By breaking through our habitual patterns of cognition, including the false stories we tell

about our environment, and ourselves we are free to be with the world on a deeper

nondual level. With specific regard to self, meditation is meant to cut through our false

sense of self, allowing our true, nondual identity to emerge unimpeded by discursive thoughts. Chan meditation practices such as these therefore intend to teach practitioners to minimize analytic tendencies for the purposes of revealing the nondual awareness within all sentient beings.

4.3 Self and No-Self in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that one goal of mindfulness in MBSR is to dereify the narrative content dimension of the narrative self and direct one's attention to embodiment. I hypothesized that the objective of MBSR is to halt the simulated narratives we tell and are told about ourselves and so that we can become more aware of the synchronic, embodied *experience* of the narrative, rather than the narrative proper. In a sense, I proposed that MBSR teaches practitioners that a false sense of self is at the core of their problems. Here, I put that claim into conversation with the above section on self and no-self in MBSR, considering how MBSR's teaching on the hegemony of the narrative self is related to the Buddhist teaching of no-self. In other words, how do the Nondual approaches to the self/no-self dynamic inform the same dialectic in MBSR? I consider several important questions about the relationship between MBSR and Buddhist practice: what kind of self is affirmed and rejected in MBSR? How does the MBSR dynamic relate to Nondual Buddhist articulations? Why does any potential similarity between Buddhist and MBSR versions of the self/no-self dynamic matter? These questions and more are addressed within this section by analyzing MBSR primary sources through the lens of Nondual Buddhist notions of self and no-self.

But first a word on methodology. While research into the clinical effects, Buddhist underpinnings and neuroscience of mindfulness has surged in recent decades—

and in particular, the last fifteen years—there has been relatively little scholarship on mindfulness and the self. Rarely, for instance, has anyone asked how mindfulness affects subjectivity or the experience of selfhood. Two studies that have addressed the matter were discussed in Chapter Three. Both usefully investigate some of the neuroscientific changes observed in mindfulness practice. They started with theoretical neurological "correlates" of the self—including particular brain regions for unique modes or kinds of self—and examined how mindfulness practices affected the networks they believe to be implicated in the self. They found that certain networks were associated with (their understanding of) the narrative self, while other networks correlated with the minimal or experiential self. By examining neurological changes within self-implicated networks before and after mindfulness practice, they are able to postulate how mindfulness affects the self. I voiced criticism for this methodology—partially on the basis of the methodological flaw known as reverse inference—a critique that can be seen in the previous chapter as well.

I share the same endpoint as these researchers, but I bring a different methodological approach. My tack is to investigate what kind of self/no-self dynamic can be evinced *from MBSR literature*. Rather than taking *a priori* assumptions about what the self is (and is not) and attempting to identify its "neural correlates," I look to the MBSR texts themselves to see what kind of self is affirmed and refuted. Though I am asking a question similar to that asked by the above neuroscientists, there are important differences. Both neuroscientific studies attempt to measure changes in so-called self networks "before" and "after" mindfulness meditation. In contrast, I analyze primary MBSR materials to investigate the senses of self that MBSR intends to inculcate in its

practitioners. And secondly, I explicitly implicate Buddhist discourse to ask how the self/no-self dynamic informs MBSR rhetoric. I intentionally avoid neuroscientific references at this point because neuroscientists do not know exactly how a self manifests in the brain—much less *no*-self. These empirical studies can be complimentary to ethnography, religious studies and philosophy—and ideally they will eventually work hand in hand. But for now, I set neuroscientific questions aside and look solely at MBSR literature and its relation to Buddhist sources.

4.3.1 Features of Self Affirmed in MBSR

In Chapter Three, we studied passages from MBSR materials that aimed to counter the deleterious role that the narrative self can play in our lives. Through mindfulness meditation, the narrative self can be dereified, rendering one less susceptible to the negative consequences of believing such stories (whether they reflect reality or not). In contrast, focus on the synchronic, embodied self that serves as the locus of our *ipseity*, a relatively less "stressed" experience can result. In this way, MBSR seeks to dereify our narratives and cultivate embodiment—its own kind of self–affirmed/self-rejected dialectic. We will not rehash those arguments here. Below we ask how such arguments relate to the self/no-self dynamic in Nondual Buddhist traditions.

Before doing so, however, I should offer the following disclaimer. While comparing the kinds of self affirmed and rejected in Nondual traditions and MBSR, I do not intend to equate the *contexts* out of which each self/no-self dynamic emerged. In other words, I compare the two because we can learn something interesting about how one informs the other, not to assert that they are identical. More specifically, the narrative universe and broader frameworks out of which the two self/no-self dynamics

emerged preclude facile equation with each other. For one, there is a difference in the degree to which teachings on the self are explicit in the two contexts. The emphasis on the metaphysics and ontology of no-self is far too prominent in Buddhism to be equated with a kind of self that is refuted only on phenomenological and implicit levels. Nowhere in MBSR pedagogy is there a discussion of the fundamental unreality of the self, as in many Buddhist texts. An additional fundamental difference between the two is the *telos* of the respective traditions. Even if there are similarities between the kinds of self affirmed and refuted between the two systems, a problem arises in light of teleology. Whereas MBSR emphasizes a certain embodied self to *reduce stress*, Buddhist sources emphasize a certain kind of self as more ontologically accurate and therefore conducive to *attaining enlightenment*. The divergent cultural and teleological contexts of MBSR and Buddhism prohibit reductive equation of the two self and non-self dyads.

It is more interesting to inquire how the Nondual Buddhist self/no-self dynamic informs the way that stressful and unstressed states of being—or kinds of self—are articulated in MBSR. Perhaps the best way to put Nondual Buddhist and MBSR approaches to self and no-self into conversation is to look for common *features* that can be observed (or not observed) in both paradigms. So although it is easy to argue that MBSR does not teach no-self in the sense that Buddhism does—with its explicit discussions of true and false senses of self—one can still argue that certain kinds of Buddhist practice undergird MBSR based on the features of the self that are affirmed and rejected. We therefore focus specifically on certain features of the kinds of self that are valorized or rejected in the two contexts of Nondual Buddhist traditions and MBSR.

4.3.1.1 Non-conceptuality, Embodiment and the Present Moment

> *The simple act of recognizing your thoughts as thoughts*
> *can free you from the distorted reality they often create and*
> *allow for more clear-sightedness…"*
> > -Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990, p. 68)

As in our consideration of the Nondual Buddhist traditions, non-conceptual modes of experience are frequently seen as doors to our truest selves. Free from the thought-riddled, discursive nature of our quotidian lives, one is able to access a truer form of self. In abandoning conceptual modes of thinking—which, you will recall, necessarily implicate a number of dualities that the Nondual traditions take to be conducive to suffering—one is free to enter into a non-discursive awareness that both MBSR and Nondual Buddhist traditions appear to hold as salutary. One potential way to inhabit such a nondual mode of being involves recognizing thoughts as thoughts. In directing one's awareness to the simulated and dreamlike nature of thoughts, so the instruction goes, one is able to step away from conceptuality, the manner of existence that is said to be the cause of so much delusion and suffering. While Nondual Buddhist traditions employ various techniques to invite practitioners to halt conceptuality—the Rinzai tradition in Zen, for example, uses *koans*—MBSR has its own, related, methods as well. Two ways that MBSR tries to accomplish the cessation of conceptual thinking is by asking the meditator to focus on the two particular phenomena: the "present moment" and the body. Each, in turn, serves as a conduit for cultivating nondual frames of mind, leaving concept formation—and its attendant memories, expectations, judgments and the like—behind.

We discussed in the previous chapter that concept formation requires memory, and memory implies temporal extension; by extension, concept formation requires temporal extension qua memory. One way to access non-conceptual modes of being, therefore, is to direct one's attention to the temporally *unextended* present moment. One main objective of MBSR is to teach subjects to pay more attention to the present, avoiding the time-traveling that is required for concept formation, simulation and narrative selfhood. To Kabat-Zinn, the aim is for mindfulness meditation to generate "an awareness grounded in the present moment, and therefore outside of time" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 455). This technique represents an attempt to get the meditator to embrace the present moment, what Kabat-Zinn sees as one key antidote to concept formation. He states:

> Our subjective experience of time passing seems linked to the activity of thought in some way. We think about the past, we think about the future…As we practice mindfully watching our thoughts come and go, we are cultivating an ability to dwell in the silence and stillness beyond the stream of thought itself, in a timeless present (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 456).

This passage suggests that training mindfulness allows one to abandon hyper-conceptuality, bringing forth a kind of subjectivity that is *outside* of time. One's *true* self is timeless, still, silent, without thought. The conduit to the attainment of this kind of awareness is the present moment. Because thoughts are antithetical to and preclude abiding in the present moment, they need to be discarded: "Thinking itself exerts a strong pull on our awareness. Much of the time our thoughts overwhelm our perception of the present moment. They cause us to lose our connection to the present" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 23). As presented in MBSR, there is an inverse relationship between conceptuality and the present moment. One cannot inhabit both at the same time. It would not be a stretch,

therefore, to say that the "present moment" functions as a *de facto* proxy for non-conceptuality within MBSR pedagogy.

It is not so easy to simply abide in the present moment, however. Kabat-Zinn is the first to state that it is the mind's tendency to return to discursivity. One of his preferred techniques for accessing the present is by directing one's awareness to the body. All embodied states such as perception, sensation and emotion—whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral—serve as a window to the present moment, making us more familiar with our truest self. As he states, "Uncomfortable as they may be, these bodily sensations are now potential teachers and allies in learning about yourself" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 62). The teaching is that if we can only pay attention to our various feeling states, they will guide us to greater understanding about our true self. In addition to helping us learn about our true selves, paying attention to feelings—which can only be felt in the present—also prevents us from being led astray to the *false*, heavily conceptual self that our thoughts construct. If the present moment is a conduit to non-conceptuality, then the body is a conduit to the present moment.

Much of mindfulness training, as a result, is intended to cultivate "bare" attention—i.e. non discursive awareness—directed toward the present moment qua embodiment. Whereas concepts lead to the development of a certain labile and unstable sense of self, indeed a false narrative self, focusing on the body and the present moment allows one to access our true selves.

> With regular practice, you learn to get in touch with and draw upon your own deep capacity for physiological relaxation and calmness, even at times when there are problems that have to be face and resolved. In doing so, you also learn that it is possible to trust a stable inner core within yourself that is reliable, dependable, unwavering (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 450, my emphasis).

Again, we see that the *physiological* dimension of experience, rather than the simulated mental dimension, leads to our "inner core." It is this innermost self—stable, non-conceptual, timeless and embodied—that Kabat-Zinn appears to affirm as our *truest* sense of self. In contrast, the temporally extended, heavily conceptual self that implicates various time-dependent features of cognition (such as memory and anticipation) is the sense of self we wish to leave behind.

To emphasize embodiment, Kabat-Zinn later references a poem by the great Indian mystic Kabir:

> Be strong then, and enter into your own body;
> there you have a solid place for your feet.
>
> Think about it carefully!
> Don't go off somewhere else!
> Kabir says this: just throw away all thoughts of
>   imaginary things
> and stand firm in that which you are (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a).

This passage makes evident the importance of embodiment. Declaring that one must 'enter into your own body,' Kabir paints the body as a refuge—it is 'solid' and 'firm.' The passage also castigates thinking and imagination, asking the audience to "throw away all thoughts of imaginary things." This of course hints at the problem of simulation, and its attendant reliance on concept formation when it comes to construction and experience of the self. Reified simulations of narrative cause stress according to the MBSR perspective because they draw us away from our true selves as embodied beings. Embodiment counters the hegemony of the temporally extended, heavily conceptual self by dispelling the simulated narratives of the self. He encourages one to not "go off somewhere else!" By this he means to ask the reader to stay embodied and avoid the allure of the imagined narrative.

4.3.1.2 Self as Interdependent, Self as World

Muck like Zen, however, it is not only the case this true nondual sense of self is exclusively *inside,* solely embodied. To assert as much would reify the inner-outer dualism that both traditions are so keen to avoid. Recall that Dōgen contentiously held that all natural phenomena are themselves Buddha nature. One Kabat-Zinn passage in particular, in which he introduces the notion of the 'mindscape,' seems to hearken toward such a position. The essence of the Kabat-Zinn's mindscape is that all forms of perception (including mental formations) are interdependent with mental phenomena. Because all sensation involves mind and all mind involves sensation, therefore, the distinction between inside and outside is a false one.

> Landscape, lightscape, soundscape, touchscape, smellscape, tastescape, ultimately it all comes down to what we would call, by extension, mindscape. Without the discerning capacity of our minds, there would be no knowing of any landscape, inner or outer. When we become aware, when we rest in the knowing, we are resting in the deep essence of the mindscape, in the vast empty spaciousness that is awareness itself. It is its own sense. Perhaps the ultimate sense (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 234).

In becoming aware of the interdependence of all phenomena, Kabat-Zinn holds that we can enter into a mode of existence that is 'spacious,' 'empty,' and even 'awareness itself.' The implication is that knowledge that the perceiver and the perceived are interdependent allows one to access a kind of nondual being where notions of inner and outer are dissolved into pure awareness. Time and again, he references poets, contemplatives and philosophers who expound on the wholeness of humankind and its surroundings. Walt Whitman says, "I am large; I contain multitudes" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a); Kabir says:

> Peace comes within the soul of men
> When they realize their oneness with the universe (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a)

Kabat-Zinn even explicitly connects interdependence with no-self—one of the only times no-self is mentioned in all of his writings: "No-self does not mean being a nobody. What it means is that everything is interdependent and that there is no isolated, independent core 'you'" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a). This suggests that to Kabat-Zinn, no-self amounts to interdependence, that the independently existing self is the true self to be rejected. It is not the case that no thing that can be called a self exists, but rather that the kind of self that is fixed and independently existing is a delusion.

4.3.1.3 Effortlessness and Non-Striving

Until now, we have focused largely on what the true self is *not:* it's non-conceptual, non-dual, non-discursive, not independent and not temporally extended. But a review of Kabat-Zinn's MBSR materials suggests that one's true self is much more than just the *absence* of things. In this way, we see similarities to the descriptions of Buddha nature described in the Nondual traditions. Much like the descriptions of Buddha nature above, Kabat-Zinn describes a true self that is innate, always present, within every sentient being and effortless to achieve to the extent that we do not need to cultivate any qualities to attain it. Really all that is needed to access this inner self is the trust that it exists. The wonderful qualities of our truest self need only to:

> ...be nurtured to unfold and be discovered. If this is true, then you don't need to get anywhere…You only need to really be where you already are and realize it (make it real). In fact in this way of looking at things *there is no place else to go*, so efforts to get anywhere are ill conceived (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 94, his emphasis).

It is largely a passive process to find one's true self—it simply needs to be 'nurtured' rather than constructed; it needs to be 'discovered' rather than built; it should be left to unfold naturally from within rather than laboriously assembled.

Left to blossom naturally, the true self at the core of our identity is often painted as a refuge in times of sorrow and stress. Participants are instructed to trust in their innermost goodness as a means of alleviating stress. When we feel at our worst, we need to become *more* human, and therefore reveal our truest self:

> Times of great emotional upheaval and turmoil, times of sadness, anger, fear, and grief, moments when we feel hurt, lost, humiliated, thwarted, or defeated, are times when we most need to know that *the core of our being is stable and resilient* and that we can weather these moments and become more human in the process (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 429, my emphasis).

A favorite metaphor for the mind within the mindfulness community is that of a deep lake or ocean. The stillness and peace of the water at its greatest depths represents our true mind, while the ripples, waves and turbulence at the surface amounts to our labile and transient thoughts, feelings and emotions. The allure of the comparison for practitioners is that regardless of what's happening on the surface, the deepest part of the body of water is always still. And if left to dissipate, the perturbations on the surface will eventually recede. The essence of one's goodness, so the analogy goes, is always there—one needs only to quiet one's thoughts for access. The self that MBSR seeks to affirm is at the bottom of the ocean, while the self rejected lies on the surface.

But to underscore the *immanence* of one's true identity, Kabat-Zinn references the following the poems by Kabir. For the self that MBSR seeks to affirm has roots not just in the depths of the ocean:

> My inside, listen to me, the greatest spirit,
> the teacher, is near,
> wake up, wake up!
> Run to his feet—
> He is standing closer to your head right now.
> You have slept for millions and millions of years.
> Why not wake up this morning (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 50).

In this way, one's true self is taken to be present at all times—to be revealed, not erected. Here the metaphor of *awakening* is invoked, much like Buddhism. After all, the Sanskrit root *budh* is frequently translated as "awake" or "to know" (Williams, 2014). Kabir implores the reader to recognize the teacher within oneself rather than searching afar. The implication in MBSR, of course, is that one already has all the qualities one needs to be happy—the tools are already in the toolbox. If we can just realize that it is there, the true but dormant self can and will awaken, as long as we let it.

Kabat-Zinn reassures readers that "things already are perfect, perfectly what they are" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a). One's true self is not the heavily conceptual, diachronic narrative we tell ourselves, but rather the present moment, embodied self that lies within. It will bloom if only we recognize that it is there and simply…get out of the way. The point that we are already perfect is important in light of his emphasis on non-striving and effortlessness. Much like a number of Nondual Buddhist thinkers referenced above, Kabat-Zinn foregrounds the need to avoid expectations, goals and timelines. He states, "Almost everything we do we do for a purpose, to get something or somewhere. But in meditation this attitude can be a real obstacle (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 26). Not only is effort generally unhelpful, but also a veritable impediment. One reason this is so is the aforementioned importance of non-judgment in the course of meditation. Of course, a certain kind of effort is needed to practice meditation—the effort to be non-judgmental, for example, or the effort required to sit for meditation every day. But expending effort to achieve a certain state of mind or attain enlightenment or reduce stress or manage pain will ultimately fail in the contexts of MBSR and the Nondual Buddhist traditions. While

some may find it paradoxical, the need to exert effort to practice meditation while also

maintaining a sense of effortlessness is not a problem in MBSR:

> Non-doing can arise within action as well as in stillness. The inward stillness of
> the doer merges with the outward activity to such an extent that the action does
> itself. Effortless activity. Nothing is forced. There is no exertion of the will, no
> small-minded "I," "me," or "mine" to lay claim to a result, yet nothing is left
> undone (Kabat-Zinn, 1994a).

The idea of effortlessness and intrinsic goodness go hand in hand; he scarcely

mentions non-striving without also underscoring the fact that we are already perfect the

way we are. Our truest identities do not require hard work of a certain kind—we do not

need to be anything we aren't already, just become more of who we are. In so far as we

are not instructed to build or create anything new, Kabat-Zinn paints it as effortless. One

of the recurrent themes of MBSR teaching is this dialectic between effortlessness and

inner goodness. One must always keep both in mind: if one does not trust that we are

perfect just the way we are, then effort to create something new will be required. And in

exerting effort to become someone different, one will never satisfy the goal of MBSR, to

become more in tune with whom one *really* is. Kabat-Zinn asserts that eventually,

meditation will not even seem like work:

> It's just an effortless relaxing into the stillness of being, accepting each moment
> as it unfolds. These are true moments of wholeness, accessible to all of us.
> Where do they come from? Nowhere. They are here all the time (Kabat-Zinn,
> 1990, p. 70).

Indeed effortless and Buddha nature are tremendously interconnected in MBSR

pedagogy. But in truth, all four features of the self/no-self dynamic just discussed are

virtually indispensible. Trusting in one's *inner goodness* requires that a practitioner *not*

strive to become anyone else; the best way to access this true sense of self is by adopting

a *non-conceptual mode* in which one *avoids discursive thinking*, reflection on the past or

projection into the future. The *embodied* self and our experience of its various sensations in the *present moment,* furthermore, are conducive to non-conceptuality because they draw one away from diachronicity and into synchronicity.

The kind of self affirmed in MBSR is therefore "not a nobody" (as Kabat-Zinn says). Rather, one's truest identity is an embodied, present moment, innate, co-dependent self that can be revealed with effortlessness and non-striving. By contrast, the self refuted is heavily conceptual, diachronic, disembodied and drawn into the past and future. Indeed this self/no-self dynamic looks somewhat like the one evinced in Nondual Buddhist traditions, an observation that is supported by Jon Kabat-Zinn's eclectic affiliations with and affections for a number of Buddhist lineages. However, there exist interesting differences between Buddhist and MBSR presentations of self and non-self. In the final section of this chapter, I consider the role that certain features of modernity play in shaping how self and non-self are articulated in MBSR.

4.4 Modernity, Self and No-Self

The above study of the self/no-self dynamic observed in a number of Buddhist settings—early Buddhism, Nondual traditions, and contemporary Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction—raises interesting questions about what could constitute an essential view on self and non-self within "Buddhism" or "Buddhisms." For a number of reasons, that is not a question I seek to address. First, the very premise of the question—namely the notion of an unchanging, essential and transcendent Buddhist doctrine—is flawed. Second, even if that was a valid proposition, it is a more intriguing line of inquiry to investigate how various seismic currents within modernity and contemporary America have shaped (and are shaped by) the relatively recent Buddhist engagement with the

Western world. Of course, my particular interest is the case of the self and non-self dynamic, and how Buddhist approaches to self have been transformed and altered by the self of modernity. This question serves two purposes. First, by studying how one pivotal Buddhist doctrine manifests in the modern world, it can serve as a proxy for how Buddhism and modernity at large are mutually affected by their evolving dialogue. Second, such a line of inquiry can provide at least some answers to how and why the same doctrine Buddhist doctrine can appear differently depending on the unique cultural tendencies and proclivities of a given era.

To address these questions, I return to the notion of the narrative context, or narrative universe, introduced in Chapter Two. You will recall that the narrative self can be understood to have three dimensions: the narrative experience or phenomenology, the narrative content or storyline, and the narrative context. In Chapter Three I argued that the main goal of mindfulness meditation was to dereify the narrative content (the simulation of the self into the past and future) with the goal of directing one's attention to the relatively less conceptual phenomenological space of the narrative *experience*. Within *this* section, however, we focus on the narrative universe that frames self and non-self—Buddhist modernism. This frame determines how self and non-self are articulated and delimits what is even *possible* when it comes to selfhood. For example, the notion of multiple lives is central to virtually all traditionally Buddhist cultures, but is profoundly foreign to Abrahamic cosmology and science, two features inextricably linked to modern Western discourse. That is not to say, however, that a large swath of Westerners do not or cannot believe in multiple lives. Rather, the gravitational pull of the dominant Abrahamic and scientific paradigms makes discourse that implicates multiple lives

difficult. In this sense, the narrative context of the self determines what is possible when it comes to discussing the self. In what follows, we focus on two prominent threads that have played a role in shaping the self/no-self dialectic as the conversation between Buddhism and modernity continues to evolve: psychologization and detraditionalization. A number of superb historical studies of Buddhism in modernity that delve into the particulars of how, why, who and when various Buddhist traditions 'came' to the West were particularly helpful: a study of Victorian culture and Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Tweed, 1992); a much needed consideration of the lay Burmese meditation movement during the same time period (Braun, 2013); a review of the seminal 1893 World's Parliament of Religions that took place during the Chicago World's Fair (Seager, 1999); several insightful studies of metaphysical religions and spirituality in America (Albanese, 2008; Bender, 2010; Harrington, 2008; Schmidt, 2005); and finally David McMahan's outstanding works on Buddhism and modernity (D. L. McMahan, 2008, 2012a, 2012b). These do not exhaust the list of excellent recent works on Buddhism and modernity, but they serve as the raw historical data upon which I draw my conclusions and are therefore deserving of explicit mention.

4.4.1 Detraditionalization and The Eclectic Self

Even a cursory look at Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction materials will suggest that there is no one *single* religious or spiritual tradition that Kabat-Zinn draws from. Of course, Buddhism is indeed the intellectual and experiential centerpiece of his protocol for reducing stress. But one can find almost a dozen different traditions referenced or cited in Kabat-Zinn's literary corpus. From the writings of the Indian mystic poet Kabir to the exhultant poems of the Sufi mystic Rumi; puzzling Zen kōans

from Mumon alongside some expansive writings from Tibetan scholar-practitioners; the

contemporary Nobel poet laureate Mary Oliver and the transcendentalists Emerson and

Thoreau; from the turn-of-the-nineteenth century poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke to sound-

bites from congressman Tim Ryan that are equally likely to be heard on CNN or

MSNBC. If there is anything consistent about Kabat-Zinn's presentation of self and non-

self—it is inconsistency. Less pejoratively, his use of tradition is eclectic, worldly,

heterogeneous, variegated, expansive, inclusive, and pluralistic. In a word—modern.

Clearly, the diversity takes place on a number of levels. First, although Buddhism

is indeed the central informant for Kabat-Zinn, there is no stated allegiance to any one

particular Buddhist tradition. Early Buddhist, contemporary vipassanā, Tibetan and Zen

(Korean, Chines and Japanese) teachings are referenced. In discussing modern Buddhist

practitioners like Kabat-Zinn, Garfield notes, "We see practitioners picking up not a

single tradition or a single lineage, but a long list of practices and ideas and texts from

different lineages" (Garfield, 2015, p. 6). In this case, Garfield is referring to multiples

Buddhisms, but the diversity of lineages is especially important when one considers the

lineages of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism among many secular

philosophies. It is not only that MBSR imbues Buddhist teachings, therefore, but a trans-

tradition or pan-religious message that evinces the perennialist philosophy of Aldous

Huxley (Albanese, 2007, p. 194), the One Dharma of Joseph Goldstein (Goldstein, 2002),

the cosmopolitan spirituality of Ralph Waldo Trine's *In Tune With The Infinite* or

Quaker-Vedantist Gerald Heard (Schmidt, 2005, pp. 156–7). In other words, one sequelae

of spiritual eclecticism is perennialism. Because one can make the case (and many did)

that if a wide variety of spiritual traditions have wisdom to offer, then perhaps they are

touching on a transcendent message or doctrine. In this way, eclecticism is a Janus-faced phenomenon in which perennialist philosophies come along with eclectic spiritualities. The detraditionalization that is endemic to modern spirituality, therefore, can lead quite naturally to the dual threads of eclecticism and perennialist tendencies. Although the various above thinkers will rarely (if ever) state explicitly that their spirituality is *detraditionalized,* we can intuit this core feature of modernity by observing the eclecticism and perennialism so frequently seen in contemporary spiritualities.

Various cultural observers have argued that detraditionalization has, in part, stemmed from the shifting of morality, meaning and identity from large external institutions to *within* each individual. No longer do these core aspects of human identity reside externally—their locus is the self (D. L. McMahan, 2008; Taylor, 1991, 2007). As McMahan argues, there has been a shift "from an authoritative realm which exists over and above the individual or whatever the individual might aspire to, to the authority of the first hand spiritually-informed experience of the self" (D. L. McMahan, 2008, p. 43). In this context, the self or subjectivity or inner experience becomes the predominant locus of authority, control and agency. This seismic shift reflects other features of modernization aside from detraditionalization, for example the modern values of freedom, an emphasis on inner-experience and suspicion of external authority.

But what bearing do these hallmark features of detraditionalization have when it comes to notions of self and no-self? First, if what Taylor, McMahan and others argue is correct—that internal rather than external sources have become the dominant source of authority—then a profound transformation from *transcendence* to *immanence* has taken place when it comes to the self. As discussed in the previous section, one's Buddha

nature, inner-goodness, "perfection" and the like are within and can be revealed if only we let it. The Kabat-Zinn rhetoric (and others in his eclecticist/perennialist "lineage") implores adherents to avoid striving to attain human perfection by looking outside oneself. In contrast, one needs to abandon the desire to achieve a non-intrinsic state and simply settle into a dormant but omnipresent internal self. In one way, no-self means that external features of the self should eschewed—a sort of no-external-self. The true self to be accepted is *immanent*, while the false self to be rejected is *transcendent* qua its externality.

Altogether, the features of detraditionalization, eclecticism and perennialism within MBSR (and contemporary spirituality at large, one could argue) entreat followers to seek meaning, identity, authority—indeed *selfhood*—within. A signature feature of modern Buddhist notions of self and no-self, therefore, is an emphasis on immanence at the expense of transcendence. That is not to say, of course, that transcendent phenomena are not implicated. One only need to consider the emphasize placed on "Interbeing" (Hanh, 1975), co-dependence on others and nature for evidence to that effect. But the MBSR literature presents a system for meaning making that starts with looking within rather than seeking without. The importance of immanence in identity leads naturally into the next feature of the modern self/no-self dynamic: psychologization.

4.4.2 Psychologization of the Self

One of the most prominent interfaces between Buddhism and the modernity is in the field of psychology. No more is psychology more manifest than in MBSR itself. In the last thirty years, more than 5000 studies have been conducted on MBSR as a psychological intervention for a tremendously diverse number of disorders (Black, 2014)

But there is a much longer history to the evolving dialogue than just MBSR. Today, many of the most popular meditation teachers and Buddhist thinkers are themselves trained as clinical psychologists or psychiatrists, including co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society Jack Kornfield, Mark Epstein and Daniel Goleman, to name a few. Furthermore, a number of popular scholars and practitioners from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries explicitly defend the notion that Buddhism and psychology were compatible, including T. W. Rhys Davids, Carl Jung, D.T. Suzuki (see *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism),* and the beat writer Alan Watts (including his popular *Psychotherapy East and West)* (D. L. McMahan, 2008, pp. 52–54). Still other volumes, such as Chögyam Trungpa's *The Myth of Freedom and the Way of Meditation,* read conventionally Buddhist teachings through a psychological lens, evoking an implicit association between Buddhism and psychology. As McMahan describes, Chögyam Trungpa's uses the well-known Tibetan wheel of rebirth—notorious for its graphic depiction of hell realms and stark portrayals of bliss and suffering—as metaphor for various psychological states rather than actual, physical locations:

> The realms are predominantly emotional attitudes towards ourselves and our surroundings—reinforced by conceptualizations and rationalizations. As human beings we may, during the course of a day, experience the emotions of all the realms, from the pride of the god realm to the hatred and paranoia of the hell realm. Nonetheless, a person's psychology is usually firmly rooted in one realm. This realm provides us with a style of confusion, a way of entertaining and occupying ourselves so as not to have to face our fundamental uncertainty, our ultimate fear that we may not exist (Trungpa, 1976, p. 23).

In this passage, we see Godly, ghostly, animal, human and hell realms—traditionally believed by many to be literal and not figurative—presented through the lens of a psychological framework. This passage does not suggest whether or not Trungpa actually believes in the physical locations portrayed in the wheel of samsāra—but that's

beside the point. The key is that the cosmology is presented in a way that the physical is replaced with the psychological. That is not to say, however, that psychology has never played a role in Buddhist thought. Quite the contrary, in fact, as a number of works rooted in a various Buddhist traditions have demonstrated elegant and incredibly sophisticated understandings of the mind and consciousness. But rather, the point I intend to make is that the presentation of Buddhism in the West is overwhelmingly—if not exclusively—psychological.

Returning to the subject of the self, we must ask how the psychologization inherent to modernity influences the articulation and presentation of the self/no-self dynamic in MBSR today. We are reminded of the *immanence* of the self that is affirmed in modernity, as psychological perspectives on the self reflect the "inward turn" endemic to modern times (Taylor, 1991). That said, a turn inward to psychological states does not preclude the importance of embodiment in the construction and experience of self—inwardness involves both mind and body, intimately interwoven. It is not the case therefore, that contemporary Buddhism exudes a version of mind-body dualism in which the mind is affirmed as self and body is not-self; this would be tremendously misguided. Rather, the psychologization that produces focus on the immanent self—both bodily and mental—precludes, to some extent, discussion of what happens to the same body and mind after this life. In this way, the description of the wheel of saṃsāra by Trungpa not only evokes internalization and psychologization of one traditional Buddhist psychology, but also evinces a focus on the here and now, rather than life after death.

The psychologization of the self in Buddhist modernity is perhaps most vividly demonstrated in the therapeutic—specifically, psychotherapeutic—discourse

characteristic of MBSR. According to Trungpa's presentation, for example, the various

Buddhist-based meditation exercises employed in MBSR are not done with the *telos* of

beneficial rebirth in a Godly realm (or another human rebirth) but rather to attain the

mental states of someone abiding in a hypothetical God realm. The reciprocal of

attaining blissful mental states is that one wants to avoid distressing or stressful mind

states, not actual hungry ghost or hell realms. Selves are anxious and depressed, not

confined to countless rebirths in hell; our true self is not a Buddha or Bodhisattva as in

some traditional Mahayana contexts, but rather happy and content *today*. It should be

noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive. The attainment of Buddhahood

may very well produce a happy and content mental state of some sort (although, whether

or not Buddhas and Bodhisattvas experience the world conceptually in the way that

unenlightened beings do is a subject of debate)[42], and living in hell would be anxiety

provoking. Rather, the presentation of the self is in distinctly psychological terms rather

than cosmological. Nowhere in any MBSR pedagogy is a future life or past life

mentioned—these are aspects of the self that are simply not palatable to large portions of

Western audiences. Sure, discussion of past and future lives is not precluded in the

contemporary setting, but it is certainly not widespread. In this way, the narrative context

of the self has shifted from cosmology to psychology. Gone are hell and heaven realms,

and in come eudemonia and anxiety.

4.5 Conclusion

The first essential thesis of this chapter is that a self/no-self dynamic exists in

MBSR. While there is virtually no explicit language about "true" and "false" senses of

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[42] (Makransky, 1997).

self within MBSR literature, the rhetoric nonetheless suggests that a certain kind of self is stressful, depressogenic, anxiogenic and generally unpleasant, while another self is the opposite: unstressed, conducive to happiness, eudemonia and mental well-being. The second core argument is that the self/no-self dynamic observed in certain Nondual Buddhist traditions bears a resemblance to the one that can be gleaned from MBSR materials. I focused specifically on modern teachers such as Shunryu Suzuki and Chögyum Trungpa, as well as the thinkers and practitioners they cite, such as Dōgen and Milarepa. The goal was to trace some semblance of a connection between representations of self and non-self in MBSR and certain Nondual Buddhist forebears.

To support this assertion, I described several features of the self/no-self dynamic in both Nondual Buddhist traditions and MBSR that suggest similarity between the two, focusing specifically on the type of self *affirmed*. They find common ground in a kind of self that is non-conceptual and temporally unextended; requires no effort to attain because it is one's innermost nature; therefore one does not need to try to become anything or anyone else; and it is interdependent with other beings and one's non-sentient environment. These features are returned to time and again within Nondual Buddhist traditions and MBSR. However, my third central argument within the chapter is that modernity has shaped the way that the MBSR approach to self and non-self is articulated. In particular, the self affirmed in MBSR became detraditionalized and psychologized by the modern context out of which it emerged. Certain aspects of Buddhist cosmology, for example, were transformed from physical places to psychological spaces in Buddhist modernity; articulations of self and non-self were also subject to this process. By looking

at MBSR accounts of the self/no-self dynamic we can see the psychologization process in
full effect.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

> *Mindfulness has the potential to ignite a universal or global renaissance on this planet that would put even the European and Italian Renaissance into the shade in ways that I think are not just uplifting from the point of view of art, [or] in the sense of deep well-being of individuals, but that may actually be the only promise the species and the planet have for making it through the next couple hundred years.*
>
> *–Jon Kabat-Zinn (Simon, 2014)*

One should expect Kabat-Zinn to tout the revolutionary effects of mindfulness. Given his seminal role in the development of mindfulness in the West, such a declaration is not altogether surprising. But does everyone see mindfulness as the panacea that Kabat-Zinn seems to suggest it is? How has the mindfulness movement been critiqued? Below I review the key points from the previous three chapters and then conclude by discussing such questions. Thereafter, I address the limitations of this study before considering future directions, looking ahead to consider how this project could contribute to the study of mindfulness and selfhood in the coming years.

5.1 Summary

We began the dissertation by defending the formulation of a new account of the narrative self, the *thickened* narrative self. This was driven by the shortcomings of present accounts of the narrative self, most notably in the way they fail to address phenomenology and the context of the narrative out of which the self is constructed. To this end, we first delineated key features of the various versions of the narrative self. Virtually all accounts are diachronic, social, constructed and a balance of actor and

author, so to speak. As examples, we reviewed accounts from Schectman, Ricoeur, Damasio and Dennett. Thereafter, we took a look at notable features of the embodied, or core self: synchronicity, ipseity and embodiment. After presenting the inadequacies of these various embodied and narrative self accounts—especially in the way that embodiment and narrativity have been isolated from one another—I offered the three dimensional formulation of a thickened narrative self which consists of narrative content (plot), narrative phenomenology (ipseity) and narrative context. The advantage of this formulation is that it reflects the way that the narrative storyline of a self is co-dependent on the context of the narrative, and ineluctably experiential. A second advantage of the thickening of the narrative self is that it provides a useful heuristic for articulating how mindfulness modulates the self to produce its ostensible salutary effects.

In the next chapter, we turned to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and the ways in which mindfulness modulates the thickened narrative self. First we worked toward a precise definition of mindfulness as used in the context of MBSR—a non-trivial enterprise given the opacity of the term. Specifically, we highlighted the role that Nondual Buddhist traditions have played in the presentation of mindfulness in the contemporary American setting. The Nondual influence on modern mindfulness is most apparent in light of the seven features of mindfulness that Jon Kabat-Zinn highlights in *Full-Catastrophe Living:* non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go. Zen, Mahāmudrā, Dzogchen and modern Burmese Vipassanā traditions, in particular, influenced the development of contemporary mindfulness, some of which explicitly valorize specific dimensions of Kabat-Zinn's version of mindfulness. Having clarified our account of mindfulness, I presented and subsequently critiqued two

recent neuroscientific proposals for how mindfulness modulates the self. My objections stemmed from deficiencies inherent to some neuroscience methodology—especially neuroimaging—as well as a misinformed Buddhist historical understanding of mindfulness. This was followed by a discussion of the notion of simulation in cognitive psychology, a neuropsychological capacity that, among other things, allows human beings to form concepts. But crucially for this project, simulation also allows humans to time-travel, i.e. imagine oneself in the future and reflect on the past. I elaborated on simulation because it was crucial to my proposed mechanism of mindfulness: dereification of the simulated, diachronic, disembodied narratives we tell and are told about ourselves. After the narrative self is dereified, MBSR aims to bring the practitioner to a present moment (synchronic), non-conceptual and non-judgmental state. I defended this argument by citing passages from primary MBSR literature, including teaching materials and popular Jon Kabat-Zinn texts, many of which cite thinkers and practitioners from Nondual Buddhist traditions.

Chapter Four also focuses on the role of Nondual Buddhist practices. While in Chapter Three I argued that various Nondual Buddhist lineages played a central role in the development of mindfulness in the West, the fourth chapter considered the ways in which the self/no-self dynamic of Nondual traditions informs that same dynamic within MBSR. To establish that a self/no-self dynamic in fact exists in Buddhism, we used early Buddhist formulations as a case study. We then turned to alternative Buddhist presentations, highlighting Nondual traditions in particular. Broadly speaking, the latter reject the notion of an unchanging core self—the basis for the "no-self" doctrine—but affirm the existence of another kind of self that has different features from the self

affirmed in early Buddhism. Among the features are Buddha nature, non-conceptuality and non-judgment. These qualities of selfhood, I argued, are also present in MBSR materials. The similarity between the self/no-self dynamics in MBSR and certain Nondual traditions reinforced the notion that contemporary mindfulness and Nondual Buddhism bear a striking resemblance. I concluded the chapter by discussing how modernity has shaped the articulation of the self/no-self dynamic within MBSR, highlighting psychologization and detraditionalization as particularly important forces in reshaping the Nondual Buddhist dynamic.

5.2 Clinical Considerations

To this point, I have neglected to address the considerable clinical aspects of mindfulness. Such issues were not the focus of the dissertation, but as a medical doctor, I feel obligated to briefly discuss mindfulness as a clinical phenomenon, and I will do so here. Presently, it is difficult to deny that mindfulness has helped a lot of people. A 2014 meta-analysis published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)—one of the top medical journals in the world—concluded that mindfulness has beneficial outcomes in specific contexts (Goyal et al., 2014). Their review indicates that meditation programs can reduce negative certain dimensions of psychological stress. Reviewing 18,753 citations, they found that mindfulness meditation programs have moderate evidence of decreased anxiety, depression and pain after eight weeks of practice.

But enthusiasm for mindfulness may at times outpace its efficacy, as the researchers also concluded that mindfulness had little to no effect on positive mood, attention, substance abuse, eating habits, sleep and weight. They found no evidence to suggest that mindfulness was better than any active treatment such as drugs, exercise or

other behavioral therapies. In the end, it seems that mindfulness may be a promising psychological intervention in some contexts, but that more rigorous clinical trials and sophisticated and informed research is needed to evaluate the tepid outcomes of mindfulness meditation as a clinical intervention to date.

How are we to interpret these conclusions? More specifically, how should I—an MD/PhD who specializes in the practice and study of mindfulness—understand these findings? Clearly mindfulness is no silver bullet, despite what Kabat-Zinn has asserted. First of all, the fact that only moderate evidence supports mindfulness as an intervention for depression, anxiety and pain should temper some of the eagerness for mindfulness. That said the evidence *does* show that there are some benefits to practicing mindfulness. As a teacher of mindfulness and future psychiatrist who intends to teach mindfulness to my patients, it may come as no surprise that I find it to be beneficial in certain circumstances. But then again, I am no mindfulness apologist—I do not seek to defend it at all costs. Fervent, if uninformed, supporters of mindfulness interventions that have no proven efficacy are actually damaging to the cause of teaching patients to use mindfulness for the betterment of physical and mental wellness. Scientific review articles such as the above 2014 JAMA meta-analysis serve as a call for more rigorous and sophisticated studies. Should a clinical trial show that mindfulness is efficacious in a particular setting, it should be implemented in exactly the same fashion. But to the extent that a study fails to demonstrate efficacy, those findings need to be published and new approaches need to be adopted. This dissertation represents one attempt to address the shortcomings in mindfulness research methodology. By taking a multi-disciplinary approach, one is able to ask questions that would otherwise not be considered. By

invoking the notions of the narrative self, dereification and Nondual Buddhist conceptions of no-self, I hope to stimulate further discussion and research.

While individuals such as myself with graduate degrees in medicine and the humanities are rare, MD/PhDs in the basic sciences are actually quite common. In fact, American taxpayers support the training of science-based MD/PhDs through the National Institutes of Health's "Medical Scientist Training Program" or (MSTP). Their mantra "from bench to bedside" underscores the fundamental premise that basic science research (e.g. chemistry, biology and physics) can and should translate into clinical discoveries that would otherwise not occur if medicine and science continued to operate in silos. The MSTP is founded on the assumption that physicians-scientists have translational capabilities that physicians or scientists alone do not have. In the same way, my humanities-based MD/PhD training could be framed as a translational project. In other words, one goal of the dissertation was to use my experience in mindfulness scholarship to help shepherd more informed and sophisticated incorporation of mindfulness into the clinical setting. That is not to say, of course, that mindfulness scholarship is not useful in and of itself (just as biology, chemistry and the like are not superfluous outside of clinical application), but rather that clinical needs may be best served if some individuals can speak the languages of both mindfulness and medicine.

One concrete way that the present study could assist future patients is in the generation of novel research hypotheses. This dissertation could help the field address a number of outstanding issues in mindfulness research: elucidating the so-called "mechanism(s) of mindfulness;" making sense of the labyrinth of neural networks implicated in meditation; understanding the neurobiological underpinnings of the self and

how it is modulated by mindfulness; and developing novel interventions for the treatment of various mental and physical illnesses. If religious studies scholars, philosophers, scientists and clinicians continue to work together, we may one day be able to develop more refined understandings of what it means to be a self (narrative of otherwise), how mindfulness is instantiated in the body and brain, what mindfulness can or cannot do for mental illness, and so forth. Of course, there is no way of telling where this research may lead; suffice it to say however, that it is my *hope* that the dissertation will pay clinical dividends in the future.

5.3 Limitations

Despite such aspirations, this study has considerable limitations. First, a skeptic could easily object on empirical grounds, that the study is *merely* theoretical. A critic could ask, for instance, where is the evidence for a thickened narrative self? Many will want me to point to the regions of the brain that correspond to this so-called self. With regard to mindfulness, they may want empirical justification for the claim that dereification is involved in mindfulness on anything more than a theoretical level. Anyone can formulate a new conception of the self, they may argue, or a novel "mindfulness mechanism" for that matter. On this front, I concede, for it is undeniable that I have little empirical evidence to support my claims. That said, even the most accomplished neuroscientists will concede that the more we study the brain, the murkier the methodological waters get. In other words, the boundary between what counts as empirical and what counts as hypothetical or experiential becomes increasingly blurred. This is because the study of self and mindfulness hearkens towards some of the fundamental mysteries of what it means to be human: What is a self? What is the

quantitative and empirical basis for mindfulness and related concepts—awareness, perception and cognition? What is consciousness? How did the self evolve and how can we prove that it exists? In other words, my response to empiricist criticism is that science can become decidedly philosophical if you push far enough.

In particular, the problem of finding a self in the brain continues to bewilder philosophers and scientists alike. In a previous chapter, I challenged the idea of neural correlates of the self and cited thinkers who similarly find the concept wonting—this issue bears repeating here. The validity of a homunculus in the brain has come and gone—no serious thinker believes that we will ever find a single region in the brain that we can point to as "the self." That said many believe that there could be several networks in the brain that together form the neural bases of the self. Consider, for example, Vago and colleagues, or Antonio Damasio's work (Damasio, 1995, 2010). Their ideas are predicated on the notion that the self can be found in a system of various networks that implicate a number of regions, the interaction of which produce the experience of being a self. As promising as their research projects are—and there are a number of laudable proposals—certain questions remain.

The most important limitation of the study, therefore, may be defining and finding the self—a limitation I share with all others who study the self. If we cannot define a self, how can we find it in the brain? Is self a physical thing? Is it a process? Is it a useful fiction, as Dennett would have it? Or is it a fiction that, when misunderstood, is the fundamental cause of our suffering, as Buddhists would have it? Perhaps the self is actually a physical thing, but it does not reside within our bodies? Some of these hypotheses may seem fanciful. But the truth is that we do not know what a self is—no

one does. In this respect, therefore, our inability to define or find a self is an inescapable

limitation of the present study.

An additional methodological limitation concerns a lack of anthropological and

ethnographic data. While relying on primary source materials such as *Full-Catastrophe*

Living provided insight into the *intent* of MBSR teachings, it will be important for future

researchers to study how mindfulness transforms self and subjectivity from the first

person perspective. To this end, an effort should be made to collect data on the

anthropology and ethnography of mindfulness-based interventions. In particular, the

field of phenomenological anthropology would be an appropriate methodological

approach for such a study (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011). A method that has become

increasingly important in the last 25 years, phenomenological anthropology investigates

the nature of lived experience, illness, healing, suffering, embodiment, perception,

subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, among other topics. By employing a

phenomenological approach, a researcher suspends the notion of an objective truth and

enters the first-person experience of his or her subjects. In contrast to conventional

approaches in which subjects are observed from an "objective" standpoint,

phenomenological anthropology allows the researcher to inhabit their subjective worlds.

This is critical in the context of mindfulness research because it helps bridge the divide

between what is *prescribed* in meditation instruction and what is actually *experienced*.

Both are necessary as the field advances, but the number of researchers employing the

latter approach lags behind the former.

A final limitation concerns the "father" of the mindfulness movement, Jon Kabat-

Zinn. While much of the dissertation relies on his writings, it would have been helpful

and tremendously informative to interview Kabat-Zinn at length. By relying solely on his books and teachings, my data was limited to the cross-sections of time in which he composed his various books and articles. In other words, my method assumes that his teachings are static and remain the same as the moment he wrote them. If I had interviewed him, however, he could have fleshed out the particular quotes I cited, providing context, elaboration and nuance. I could have shared with him my reflections on his work, and he could have responded to those interpretations from his own perspective. An interview would also have allowed me to ask specific questions relevant to my dissertation in particular. For example, I could have asked him how he thinks no-self manifests in MBSR, how he believes mindfulness affects the self and how Nondual Buddhist traditions informed his personal development. My wish to interview him for this particular study touches on a broader subject: the need for a well-researched biography of Kabat-Zinn. In *Mindful America*, a lucid cultural study of the mindfulness movement, Jeff Wilson calls for a biographical sketch, and I share that sentiment. To understand MBSR it would be beneficial to get a sense of his family life, childhood, mentors, teachers, and motivation for creating MBSR.

5.4 Future Directions

The *Time* Magazine cover story profiling the so-called "Mindful Revolution" claims that mindfulness can help us "find peace" in this "stressed out, digitally-dependent culture" by simply "thinking differently" (Pickert, 2014). Such a statement raises a number of intriguing questions about what people think mindfulness does, how it works and who should practice it. With respect to the former, the author appears to imply that the objective of mindfulness practice is to find peace. But is that really the goal of

mindfulness? And if so, what does that that peace look like? Is it a quality of mind, like mental stability, cognitive flexibility or meta-cognition? Or perhaps it is a clinical outcome, such as the absence of mental illness. Or maybe finding peace implicates community, national and worldly interests, such as peaceful neighborhoods or fewer international confrontations.

Furthermore, when it comes to how mindfulness works, is it really just "thinking differently?" It would seem that there other critical factors at play besides simply changing how one thinks. For example, *why*, *when*, *how* and *with whom* one meditates have little to do with merely "thinking differently," but play important roles in the cultivation of mindfulness. Not everyone practices alone, in seated meditation, for the purpose of becoming less stressed or finding peace. Many practitioners are part of mindfulness communities, focus heavily on daily "moments of mindfulness" at the expense of formal practice, or do not have aspirations for self-improvement. Comparing and contrasting the nuances of mindfulness practice as a solitary activity versus a communal exercise; studying the import of seated practice in comparison to informal moments of mindfulness; and evaluating the role of motivation in the cultivation of mindfulness would all be valuable lines of inquiry. The last of these implicates the *teleology* of mindfulness meditation, a topic yet to be adequately addressed in contemplative studies scholarship. Is mindfulness *telos*-independent or does *why* we meditate matter as much (or more) as how we do so? In other words, we need to consider the possibility that why one meditates is as important as simply how one meditates. The article also suggests that *everyone* should be practicing mindfulness, but is there anyone who is not suitable? Does allegiance to one religious or secular tradition matter? Should

it be practiced in secular contexts such as schools and Wall Street? Future studies should look specifically at *who* is practicing mindfulness and in what contexts.

The author also appears to imply that technology is inherently antithetical to a peaceful life, and that mindfulness is the cure for the havoc technology has inflicted on American culture. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram; smart phones, smart watches and smart cars: the claim is that as technology metastasizes, it becomes more toxic of to our well being. She may or may not be right. But her argument is laced with assumptions that need to be considered in the future. What if technology can *enhance* mindfulness? Or what if technology is completely irrelevant? I concede that a popular news magazine is not necessarily the most appropriate venue for such theoretical questions. But nonetheless, reflection on how central features of modernity like technology can provide insight into how mindfulness is reshaping contemporary American life. For example, democracy: Congressman Tim Ryan, Democrat from Ohio, thinks that mindfulness should play a bigger role in politics, as he argues in *Mindful Nation* that mindfulness can help us recapture the "American spirit" (Ryan, 2012). Should mindfulness play a bigger role in politics? What would a more mindful nation look like? How would bible-thumping Americans react to the incursion of mindfulness into congress?

But technology and democracy are not the only dimensions of contemporary American life that intersect with mindfulness: education, pop culture and technology do as well. How does mindfulness relate to these central aspects of American life? What features of mindfulness meditation are appropriated or neglected by virtue of its adoption by the wider American populace? And how are democracy, technology and education themselves transformed by mindfulness? A comprehensive study of the relationship

between mindfulness and core features of life in America in the twenty-first century
would be a welcomed development.

The relationship between mindfulness and capitalism is especially intriguing.
Consider the example of businessmen and women practicing mindfulness. In recent
years, a number of Wall Street firms have begun offering dedicated periods of time
during the workday for the practice of mindfulness. Of course, some skeptics find
business practices and mindfulness to be inherently contradictory, leading to critical
commentary of the mindfulness movement. Such critics worry that mindfulness
meditation is being usurped for the singular purpose of making money—in some cases,
incredible sums of money—at the expense of the well being of others.[43] Is the
accumulation of wealth a viable goal of mindfulness practice? Or is mindfulness merely
an opiate that allows stressed-out businessmen and women to continue predatory
financial practices? On this point, cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek is worth
quoting at length. He argues that,

> 'Western Buddhism'…is establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of global
> capitalism. Therein resides the highest speculative identity of the opposites in
> today's global civilization: although "Western Buddhism" presents itself as the
> remedy against the stressful tension of the capitalist dynamics, allowing us to
> uncouple and retain inner peace and Gelassenheit, it actually functions as its
> perfect ideological supplement (Zizek, 2001).

Taking mindfulness to be part and parcel of the Western Buddhism described by
Zizek, the claim is that mindfulness masquerades as a remedy to the "stressful tensions"
of a capitalist world, but actually propagates an inherently oppressive economic regime.
Critiques of the mindfulness movement along these lines have recently appeared in the

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[43] This is not to say, however, that the financial industry as a whole is unethical or has the sole
purpose of making awesome amounts of money. Rather, I intend to highlight one of the criticisms
put forth by some cultural commentaries.

New York Times, Salon, Tricycle and Truth Out (North, 2014; Purser & Cooper, 2014;

Rubin, 2014; Wilson, 2014b). Such criticism raises questions about the relationship

between capitalism and mindfulness. Is mindfulness an antidote for the various

afflictions of contemporary American life or merely an accomplice in the pursuit of

nefarious ends? As the critics suggest, does mindfulness actually propagate pre-existing

social ills such as economic inequality? It would behoove the field of contemplative

studies to study in greater detail the relationship between capitalism and mindfulness.

Altogether, these issues raise the further question—the one with which we began

the dissertation: is there any *one* mindfulness? Can you separate it from the context in

which the practice is taking place? Mindfulness is practiced by people who are

embedded in a particular time and place—not in a vacuum. It would be wise to

acknowledge that the broader cultural context in which mindfulness is embedded plays a

bigger role in the cultivation mindfulness than previously thought.

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